

Marathon Finish

V.S. Wilson

“What do you do for exercise?”

That was my therapist twenty years ago. I told him I took long walks and did yoga. He said nothing, but I realised that he did not think much of that. He mentioned that some of his clients had found strenuous exercise had helped their depression, and I went home and did some thinking.

Being basically a layabout, I wanted something that I could do easily, quickly, and without too much fuss. I wanted something that would not interfere with my busy day. My busy day entailed sitting around trying to think of some way to justify my existence: it seemed a big job at the time. Shortly after that I found an \$8 pair of sneakers at Sears. This seemed to be a portent: I would run.

I have to say that I hated running. I loathed and detested it, but hey, I had invested a whole \$8(US) and I would be damned if that was going to waste. So I plodded around the local track, gritting my teeth in the Baltimore heat, and then with time, I found myself making fewer excuses not to do it. I found myself resenting anything that prevented my running, and jealously guarding the time at the track; I bought books about running, and a new pair of shoes. Boredom drove me onto the streets, my mileage increased, I was hooked.

Now I am training for a marathon. I have Runners Knee, two pairs of shoes,

and I worry about electrolytes. I have strong feelings about dehydration, and out of common courtesy, no longer wear open-toed sandals. Watch out for me on October 14th in Toronto. I'll be the one with the CMHA logo on my shirt. I would like to show that it is possible to have a mental illness, be on medication, and still complete a marathon. I hope with all my heart that that is true.

Marathon Finish.

The clock said "4:15". What did that mean? Four fifteen PM? I hadn't thought I was that bad. "You can stop running now," someone said, "I need to take your chip."

I was sitting on a wooden bench, and a strange woman was wrestling with my shoe, trying to remove the plastic disc I had laced into my shoe that morning a lifetime ago. It contained a chip to tell the race computer when I passed the start, and when (if) I passed the finish. Wondrously, amazingly I had passed the finish. I had finished a marathon.

Next there was a pale cream rose in one hand, and a medallion dangling from the other. "You're supposed to wear that," someone said, "you've earned it." Then my husband's voice, "Ginnie! Ginnie, over here! She doesn't see us."

Too right I didn't. I was too busy trying to figure out how to put one foot in front of the other. There was a two-inch curb before me and it looked like Everest. My hands did not work, my legs did not work, and I had seldom been so cold in all my life. True, I was wearing only shorts and a T in

October, true I had been out in the rain and wind for more than four hours, but I had just completed my first marathon. Where was the huge tear-jerking sense of achievement they told me I would have? Where the exhilaration?

There was nothing - someone had lopped off my frontal lobes.

My husband drove me home, undressed me and shoved me into a hot shower. Then my blood started to trudge around my veins again, and my muscles started to consider a response when my brain asked them to move. Friends arrived at the house, bringing food and hugs, congratulations. I entertained them by having to crawl downstairs backwards. "Why do you do that?" one of them asked. "Because it doesn't hurt," I said, "as much."

Even then the sense of achievement was lacking. There was only a sense of utter amazement that such a thing was possible for me, little me, a suburban housewife who has been on one antidepressant or another since 1981. But that was the whole point of all this: I wanted to see if someone of my age and medical background could complete a marathon. I found out it was possible. Amazing.

During the marathon I wore a shirt which said "Mental illness can be managed ... I'm doing it." Three runners spoke to me during the race to say how much they liked the shirt, and one said she was going to go back to Quebec and have one printed just like it. Now that did give me a sense of achievement - maybe we have started something here.