

How a long distance race inspired a dress of silage wrap...

Giving life a go – get involved in the Cultural Competition or Art Gallery!

As I child I was hopeless at sport. Oddly enough I was great in physical things on the farm; I was strong and agile and had boundless energy. But sport floored me. Where, on the farm, I was graceful and nimble, in team sports I was clumsy and awkward. On the farm, I was a gazelle; with my peers I plodded.

Thirty years later I understand that much of that awkwardness was due to shyness and a fear of making a mistake which would expose me to the derision of my peers; nothing like a good self-fulfilling prophecy!

So I plodded through school sports days and town team sports UNTIL I was forced, in highschool to enter inter-regional, long distance running competitions. I wasn't entered by my teachers because they thought I had a snowflakes' chance in hell. Quite simply, it was a very small school and they needed live bodies to make up the numbers. You didn't volunteer, and you weren't asked; you were told to turn up and that was it.

I turned up, took my mark, and dutifully plunged off with, and was soon outdistanced by, the mass of earnest, leggy teenage girls who seemed to take the whole event very seriously indeed. Me - I did what I always did in situations where I had not the least desire to be - I put my body on automatic pilot and slipped deep inside my own head, oblivious to all the world about me; human, vegetable or mineral.

It was a 6 mile cross country run through rough ranges, but I had regularly run just so, in the mornings on the hill farm. I would slip into my thoughts and my body would carry me without effort for as long and as far as I needed. So it was today.

I 'woke up' with no idea of how many miles or minutes had passed to find that there was no one in sight before me, and only a very few girls (walking) a long, long way behind me. Naturally I decided, I must be at the tail end, with the slow dregs, and that all the faster girls had outpaced us and were, no doubt, near the finishing line if not actually finished. So I kept my long lope going, not in any hope of catching up - but wanting to finish with some dignity.

I came to the top of a hill with a low gradient that seemed to go on forever, and in the distance, perhaps, a quarter mile away, I could see the finish line, the show ground buildings, school buses, and multi-coloured dots of people lining race barriers. As I felt myself to be among the last, I didn't push the pace, but maintained my easy lope.

Strangely, as I passed the last trees and came into 'the final stretch', the crowd lining the barriers was screaming in my direction and a teacher was waving wildly, - almost *leaping* about! I could hear a sustained roar; but nothing intelligible. They sounded cross!!!

I thought "Oh horrors, I've done something wrong; they must be angry with me for taking so long. Perhaps I've broken some racing protocol for inter-school comps, and they're all furious". But there was little I could do about it, so I just kept up that long, relaxed, easy pace developed through years of chasing cattle, and childish games on the hills of home.

As I drew the nearer, the teacher appeared to be on the verge of apoplexy! *Finally* I was close enough to make out her words. "You're WINNING, you FOOL! You're FIRST! RUUUUNNNN!"

I almost stopped dead from shock, but had just enough wits left to turn a lope into a sprint and flashed down the last 100m in fine style, until.... the mess of flags and lines at the finishing line. The final farce in a string; I dithered between lanes, totally confused, until the race officials signalled me firmly into place and it was done. I'd won.

Not only had I won - I'd won by a *huge* margin. The next runner wasn't seen for another 20minutes.

I never received a trophy or a sash, and I wasn't carried about in triumph on the shoulders of my peers. I wasn't inundated with cheering crowds or feted for weeks to come. I wasn't selected for state sports or invited to special coaching. I was a little sad not to have a memento of the event, but the rest was a huge relief as I really had no desire to feature as a sports fiend.

It's all ancient history now. It happened to a girl of 14, and I am now 44. A lot of miles have passed since then.

So why do I share this story with you NOW ... well, if you choose to see a message or a moral it's this; have a go!

Some people have said they are fearful of the Cultural Competitions or the Gallery because "they might not be good enough". But I went to a school so small that you didn't have to be good enough - you just had to be breathing. And as a result, I found out things about myself that I never would have if I had gone to a larger school, and never taken part in anything. I found out that I was a good runner, and a good debater; a good artist and a good writer. I was never, and never will be brilliant; but I'm good enough. QRWN is a safe environment; we're all friends here. You may not be brilliant - but you might be good enough, and you just may find that out, if you have a go.

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