

Running and the Effects that it had on my Life

Finalist

By Stephanie Murran

I have never been a runner in fact I thought running was a senseless exercise. How could someone enjoy running anywhere for no reason? It seemed hard and unnecessary. That is until my world collapsed. From seemingly nowhere I had an intense desire to go outside and start to run. I know now where that desire came from. It was my internal drive to feel good and to stave off the depression that pushed me out the door. It was my intuition. Running has restored my happiness, calmness, sanity, and self.

Beginning in November of 2019 my life as I knew it began to crumble. For the previous 20 years I had spent my life as a mother, wife, and entrepreneur. After my partner and I unexpectedly decided to part ways, the ground fell from below me. I was lost. Suddenly, I was a single mother, but a mother only half of the time, prior to this I was with my children every day. I needed to figure out so much; where was my life headed, what do I do when my kids are with their father. What about meeting new people and dating? And then there was all day-to-day things. The places where my ex fit in, now I had to figure out how to do the things that he did. Which admittedly wasn't that much but it was still something. I was overwhelmed, depressed, confused and just broken. For the first year and almost a half I cried a lot. Probably more than I have ever cried in my life. The pain that I felt every single time that I had to hand my kids over to my ex was unbearable.

I tried many vices to help me get through the devastating implosion of my family and my dreams. Many of which did help, including therapy, yoga, massage, acupuncture, and a lot of other self-care. And some which seemed to help but did not, like spending way too much time out with my friends drinking. I called it the year of Stephanie. And fortunately, I was able to indulge. But with all of that, I still felt broken. I was suffering, and, even worse, my kids were suffering, which made my suffering infinitely more. I absolutely needed to get through this for them and for me. Although I

did the best to hide it, sometimes it was impossible. I couldn't continue to show them the broken me. I had to rise up, be strong and be an inspiration for them.

Through the years I had a gym membership. Mostly as a place to go and walk on the treadmill, binge watch something and zone out. One day in March 2021— yes very recently—I decided to step it up and run a bit. It was a struggle, but I knew that it was what I needed to do. The first run that I have recorded on my phone was March 22 with a pace of 16.34, a cadence of 130 and 2.72 miles. I can't really explain it, but I was hooked. It felt good I felt powerful. On March 25 I went to Ragged Mountain Running Shop, Charlottesville's oldest running shop and invested in my first pair of running sneakers! I walked in the store, explained that I have never run before but have started running to feel good. She asked me what I run in, I said "these" and pointed down to my adidas (not running sneakers by any means) she laughed. She fitted me with the perfect pair of running sneakers and I have not turned back since that day.

I have run through the breakup of my family. As the saying goes, "you can't go under it, you can't go over it, you must go through it." I am happy to say that I am on the other side. I attribute it to many things but mostly to my running. I never know what is going to happen emotionally during each run. I almost get excited when it's time for my runs to see what will happen that day. I have had days where I write complete stories in my head, and days where I get so incredibly angry at my ex and about my situation that I run with my middle fingers out the whole time. I've had days where I have just broken down and cried, sometimes so hard that I had to stop my run. Whatever emotion needs to come through comes through, and sometimes with a vengeance. It is an incredible feeling, to know that I have control over my emotions in a healthy and effective way. It's not always easy in fact it's mostly never easy. A lot of my runs I question why am I doing this, I can't do this, I am not a runner, what are you doing? But 100% without fail my after run feelings answer all of the questions wholeheartedly.

In July I ran 100 miles to raise funds for St. Jude's, I ran my first 5k race in September and am running a 10 miler in October. My 5k time was 9.47 minutes per mile. Considering that just 6 months ago I was at 16.34, I would say I am proud of myself. I am super excited to research this topic and to discover the mechanisms behind

how and why running has been such a blessing for me. Running is my new best friend; it is always there for me when I need it and it always makes me feel good. If I begin to feel like I am not fast enough or run long enough, I remember why I began this journey and run!