

**Before I showed any signs of psoriatic arthritis, I ran regularly, and I participated in races ranging from 5k to marathon. I raced at least once a month and more frequently in summer and have completed 7 marathons and numerous half-marathons. I also ran a keep-fit class for 15 years. In February 2005 I was running as well as I had done at any time in my life setting a lifetime personal best for the half-marathon of 1 hour 36 minutes. I was pleased as I was due to run the London Marathon in early April and hoped another personal best was possible. With four weeks to go, I was taken ill on a running holiday in Portugal. I went from being as fit as I have ever been, to being only able to walk with the aid of crutches, and had to wait until I came home to find out what was really wrong with me.**

I spent 10 days in hospital and was off work for 6 months. I returned to work initially on a part-time basis, then eventually full-time. If you are ill or injured, you can carry your place forward for 12 months as long as the race organisers are informed before the marathon starts. I told everyone I was going to do the London Marathon in 2006 so I carried my 2005 place forward for the London Marathon and walked round in 6 hours 37 minutes. I did what I set out to do – to finish.

I'd struggled at work with fatigue and have now returned to part-time working. I try to keep fit but have struggled as some days, due to the way I feel, it's not possible to do anything.

My journey towards the London Marathon 2009 started in November 2006 when I found out that I had not got into the 2007 marathon through the ballot. When I re-applied in the summer of 2007, it had never been my intention to run in 2008. As I had unsuccessfully applied the year before, I thought I might as well continue to apply as after five consecutive refusals, a guaranteed place is awarded in the sixth year. I thought I might be in better shape by then. In November 2007, I found out I was in. It was not going to happen, as I had an operation in October 2007 and was told not to exercise for a minimum of 3 months. I carried my place forward again, and therefore I knew I had 17 months to train for London 2009.

I started jogging again in late January 2008, aiming at the 'Chester Spring 5' in April. The race is 5 miles. I was very happy with the run and my time, given all that's happened to me over the past 3 years. I was also managing to get back to running with my club, Spectrum Striders Running Club.

Over the next few weeks, I carried on jogging without any problems. However, in June, I went along to a race to support my husband, John, and friends from Spectrum Striders. As the route is 2 laps in a park, I was going to jog across the park to see them at different points. On a flat path, I got a shooting pain in my ankle, and then struggled to walk. This has happened in the past, as I broke my ankle as a child, and the psoriatic arthritis has affected it.

I rested it but this didn't help. I went back to the doctor, who sent me back to the consultant, as I'd had treatment on my ankle in 2006. After a scan, there was nothing new wrong with my ankle and I was told to rest and take up a different sport. At 13, I'd been told to forget sport completely, given the damage my ankle had suffered. As you might gather, that

didn't put me off. I didn't try to run for a while and was happy being able to walk our Dalmatian, Tasha.

In July 2008, I sent off my deferred place for London, with John asking me if it was a wise thing to do. I was optimistic about doing it by running and walking. I was hoping to do some of the training with Tasha, but she was taken ill and died suddenly in August. My incentive to go for a walk had gone. We both wanted

to get another dog and found a puppy that would be ready to collect in late November.

With friends from Spectrum Striders, we usually go for a long weekend in the autumn and take in a race. In 2008, it was a big birthday for John and the trip was to Lake Garda to do the half-marathon. I decided to have another go at running. I would only attempt the London Marathon if I got round the Lake Garda Half without any problems. Much to my surprise, the training went well, as did the race. Apart from being very tired after the run, I was OK. On our return, we collected our new Dalmatian puppy, Pika. Three weeks later, I did a 10K race and was ok.

I then planned my training for London. The plan was very flexible as I knew there would be some days when I would try to do something. For example train, given the way I was feeling, would not have been a good idea. During the week, I was managing to go for a run and then add on a walk for Pika. At the weekend, I would do my longer run/walks, getting up to 16 or 17 miles. The only race I planned to do was Wrexham Half Marathon in mid February. This again went well.

In recent years, we've gone on a trip where three Cheshire running clubs get together for a training trip to the Algarve in March. We went again this year and although training mainly on my own, I did a 20 mile run/walk (with John's help) without any reaction. Now all I had to do was stay fit until the big day.

## The London Marathon weekend starts on Friday morning, 24 April 2009

- 9am – John takes our seven month old Dalmatian, Pika, for a walk while I check that I've packed everything I need for the marathon: shorts, vest, socks etc. Then I organise the food I want to take with me; bananas, jelly babies (a must!), dried apricots, homemade fruit cake, drinks ... and the kitchen sink, at least that what it seems like.
- 10.30am – John's back with Pika. A quick cup of tea, then off to the kennels with Pika, to get back in time for two friends from Spectrum Striders, who are both doing the marathon, arriving to pack the car.



# London Marathon

- 12 noon – We're off
- 5pm – Eventually arrive at ExCel conference centre, London, where race registration and the marathon Expo are sited. Collected my number and chip. I'll have to do it now! We wandered round the expo, collecting race information for future races (not marathons) and looking at all of the running gear that is available. We also bumped into some other Spectrum Striders who had made their way down. We'll see them later as we're all staying in the same hotel.
- 7pm – Leave the ExCel to head across London to our hotel in Westminster.
- 8pm – Arrive at the hotel after being sat in traffic queues. Dump the bags and go out for a meal, and guess what? After a bit of a wait in the restaurant, it's pasta again.
- 11pm – Back at the hotel, unpack, then a cup of tea and off to bed.

## Saturday 25 April 2009

- 8.30am – Breakfast, then back to the room. Pin my number on my vest, put the chip on my shoe and check that I've got everything with me.
- 10am – After breakfast, the Spectrum Striders group go for a slow walk up to the finish area, passing Buckingham Palace and onto The Mall. Group picture taken of the runners present. There are always a couple of debut marathon runners in the group and we show them where the seasoned marathon runners always meet at the end of the race. The instructions are "walk down past Horse Guards Parade, to Clive of India's statue, then turn right, walk into the park and meet by the duck!!" This year, three little yellow ducks were there!
- 12 noon – Lunch with the gang.
- 1pm - Wander back to the hotel to put my feet up, and write up diary.
- 5pm – Go out to watch Manchester United v Tottenham Hotspur. Spurs fan. They lost!
- 8.30pm – Off to an Italian restaurant again for some more pasta. Then back to hotel and off to bed.

## Sunday 26 April 2009

- 6.30am – The alarm goes off. I get up, get dressed ready to run, say good-bye to John, pick up my bag and go to breakfast. For me, it's coffee and toast. I also wrap up some toast to take with me as the marathon does not start until 9.45am.
- After breakfast, the taxis arrive to take all the runners in our group to Charing Cross Station, where we get on the train to Blackheath (race number is your ticket on the train). The train is full of excited and nervous runners, of all ages, shapes and sizes, but all with the same goal, to finish the marathon.
- 8.15am – Arrive at the start and enter the runners' enclosure. We then find a spot to use as a base for the group and then people can wander off to the toilet

queues and pick up free cups of tea and/or water. The waiting at the start of any race is always the worst time as nerves kick in. However, today I am not nervous. Instead, I am looking forward to the day.

- 9.15am – Queue up for the last time at the toilets, then go to my holding pen at the start. Then just wait for the start gun.
- 9.45am – The gun goes, but we don't move as it takes a few minutes for the crowds to move. It takes me 6 minutes to get over the start-line, and then we're off. My plan works well, running at my own pace for as far as I can, without getting carried away with the crowds. I reach halfway in 2 hours 20 mins which I am pleased with but knew I would have to walk at some point. Just after the 15 mile marker I decided to walk to the 16 mile marker, with the hope of walking a mile then jogging a mile to the finish. This worked up to 23 miles and then I decide the best thing to do was to walk to the end, apart from jogging down The Mall. I finish in 5 hours and 31 minutes. Very pleased.
- Meet John and a few others from the club in the park by the finish area and can sit down at last. All very pleased apart from one who pulled out at 20 miles having twisted his knee. We then walk the mile back to the hotel.
- A great day, enjoyed by all.
- My web page at [Justgiving.com](http://Justgiving.com) is still open and will remain open until 26 July 2009 if you would like to sponsor me. Just put my name in 'Find a friend' and follow the instructions.



*Thank you in advance for your support.*

**Linda Owen.**

Direct link to Linda's fundraising page:  
<http://www.justgiving.com/lindaowen-papaa>  
or you can send a donation by post to the PAPAA office.

### **Editorial comment:**

**Well done Linda for completing the London Marathon. A great achievement! Congratulations from everyone at PAPAA, we think you have shown great determination. We are also extremely grateful for the funds you raised on behalf of PAPAA.**