

living with running

LIFE IS FULL OF TRIUMPH AND ANGUISH, BUT FOR THESE THREE *RW* READERS ONE THING HAS STAYED CONSTANT IN THEIR LIVES - RUNNING. BY HARRIET MORLEY

ANDI GRANT, 36

"It was the moment when I realised running would help me take control of this illness."

"I WAS 13 THE FIRST TIME I FELT REALLY DOWN. I'D JUST moved to live with my father in the country – quite a change from the city living I was used to. Who's to say whether the move was the trigger for my depression or not? Teenage hormones were well and truly kicking around at that time too.

I excelled in school, both in my sporting and academic life, and worked hard to gain my entry to Cambridge University. While I thrived on the challenges uni-brought, it was the stress of study that proved the catalyst for my first serious bout of depression. At the time I remember feeling as if my mind and body simply shut down. There were moments where I felt suicidal, while at other times I would experience incredible highs – spending hours working on school papers that weren't even needed for my assessment.

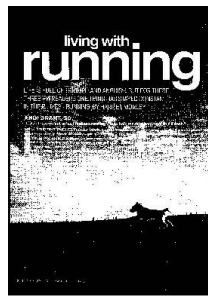
Managing my depression while studying was challenging, but stepping into the workplace it proved impossible. I had just turned 26 when I landed my first full-time position with a pharmaceutical research and development company. After only two months the

depression took hold to the point where I was unable to get out of bed. I had lost the ability to communicate with colleagues, even with my friends and family. That's when I knew I needed professional help.

A psychiatrist diagnosed me with type I bipolar disorder, a diagnosis I wasn't ready to accept. Acceptance would take a number of years.

I began a course of anti-depressants and other prescription medication, which made me question: 'Who is the real me?' Was I Andi who takes anti-depressants or Andi who doesn't? There were occasions when I took myself off the medication, but each time I ended up unable to function. Returning to work after my diagnosis was difficult. I didn't want to be seen as a 'nutter' so rather than admit I was suffering from depression I lied and said that I had glandular fever.

Running entered my life in 2003 when my partner at the time registered me for the London Marathon. While this was five years after my initial diagnosis the race would become the turning point in my life. I ran a sub-four-hour and remember feeling great pride



as I crossed the finishline. It was the moment when I realised running would help me take control of this illness.

I resigned from my job, bought a mountain bike and travelled the world for 12 months. When I touched down in Auckland in early 2006 I knew this was a place I could call home. I took a full-time job, continued running and started playing squash. Life was great, for a time. Five months to be exact. Then one day on the squash court I ruptured my anterior cruciate ligament. With forced time off the court, and longer hours at work, I experienced another bout of depression. While I felt shattered, one thing was different this time: I told my employer about my condition.

After three months of struggling to get out of bed, I started setting small goals such as getting up in the morning. The next day I stood outside for 10 minutes, and the day after that I went for a 15 minute walk.

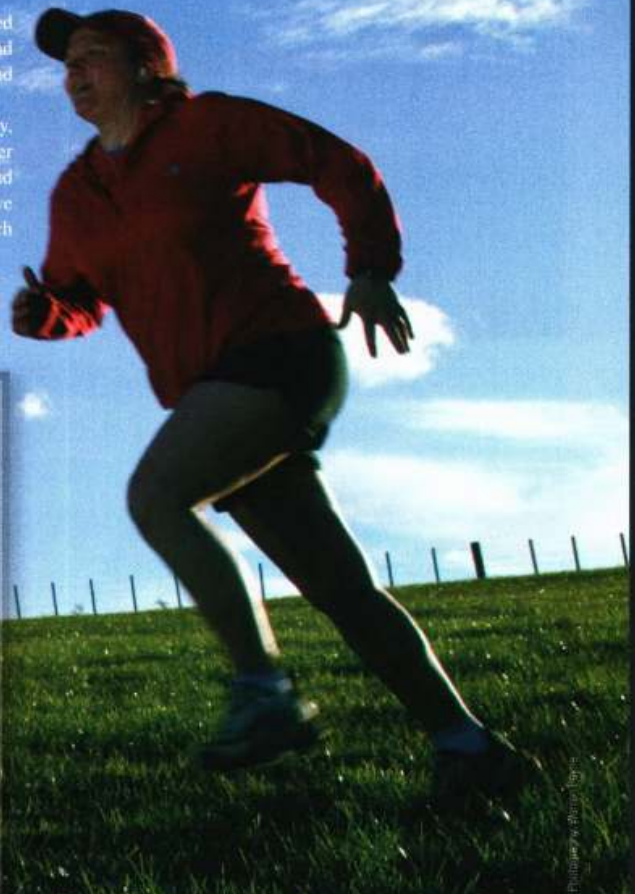
Later that year, after slowly coming back from the "darkness", I enrolled in a part-time diploma of personal training and fitness at Auckland University, and now have my own business in personal training and business consulting, *Ilife*.

My life is much more balanced these days. I run 30 minutes a day, five days a week with my dog Finn, and with the support of my partner Maree I am able to look out for the early warning signs of my ups and downs. While I know it is inevitable that I will have another depressive episode, I don't feel anxious about it now. If I manage the triggers such as lack of sleep, stress and no exercise I can keep on top of this."

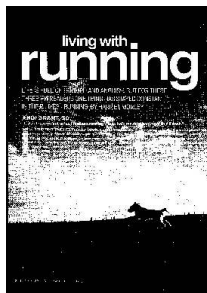
For more information visit beyondblue.org.au or mentalhealth.org.nz.

ANDI'S TIPS

- 1 Spend time outdoors everyday.** "Go for a run or walk, because the air and the light are crucial in helping you feel alive."
- 2 Don't put pressure on yourself.** "If you do nothing else for that day other than get up, and put on your clothes, that's okay."
- 3 Get a dog.** "When you have a pet relying on you to take him for a walk, you have to get out and do it."



OUTDOOR ACTION: Running with her dog Finn helps Andi Grant survive the day.



living with **running**

TRACEY GROZDANIS, 30

"Runners in my training group say when they're struggling they look over at me and think: 'Well if Tracey can do it with half a lung, we can'."

"WHEN I SAW MY CHEST X-RAY, IT LOOKED LIKE MY lungs had been used for target practice; they were riddled with bullet-like holes. I couldn't believe it was my x-ray. I was a 21-year-old runner, who had a state level sprint background and two years of distance training under my belt. But they were my lungs in tatters. I could see it in black and white.

It was early 1999 when I started experiencing shortness of breath during my runs. My GP sent me off for a cat scan and three days later I was lying on an operating table prepped for surgery. It all happened so fast, but as I would later learn, it had to. I had a condition called Cryptococcal Pneumonia, a disease which literally eats away at your lungs. Doctors needed to remove the dead tissue from both of my lungs to enable me to breathe. At the time they warned me that the surgery would not necessarily be a cure; instead I should brace myself for the fact that I may not see out the year.

Perhaps at 21 I was a little naïve, but I kept telling myself: 'I'm not going to die from this'. After the surgery I spent an intense six weeks undergoing treatment. Each day I would travel to hospital where I would sit for nine hours taking a course of medications. The chemical reactions in my body made it a confusing time for me. I was so frail, yet I was determined to keep fighting. I thought: 'if I make today, I can make tomorrow'.

Finally, the day came when I was to meet with my surgeon for a final consult. Among my list of questions I asked him if I could ever run again. He laughed and suggested I try yoga or Pilates. Unfortunately, I listened to him, which meant it would take three years and a move interstate before I would contemplate running again. My partner Dean and I moved to a house around the corner

from an athletics track where I found a coach who was happy to train me. But after two months of running again I fell pregnant with my son, Alexander.

It was such a thrill to be having a baby. Doctors had said it would be impossible, but like a lot of things I proved them wrong. A year after Alexander was born, I fell pregnant with my second son, Phillip.

It was in 2007 when I decided to join the running club Can Too. I missed running and was determined to find a way to return to it. Having worked closely with the coaches during this past year has helped me build up my strength and fitness again. As a result of my limited lung capacity my breathing does become laboured after strenuous training sessions, but when this happens I simply spend the next session with the coach just concentrating on my breathing and it helps to rebuild my confidence.

It's funny when I look back at how far my training has come. I used to believe running six kilometres on Saturdays was a long way, but for the past three months I've built up to 20-30K every weekend.

Runners in my training group say when they're struggling they look over at me and think: 'Well if Tracey can do it with half a lung, we can'. People always have physical and emotional challenges in life and I've learned you should do whatever makes you happy, just get out there and do it for as long as you can.

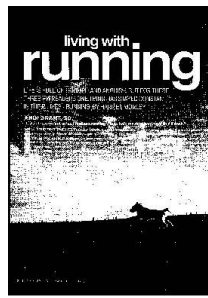
I'm about to run my first marathon and people continue to tell me to take it easy and ask me what I'm trying to prove. But I'm not trying to prove anything, I always thought running long distances was the most unachievable thing in my life and now I'm doing it. So, I'm not stopping now."



BREATHE EASY: Tracey Grozdanis prepares for her first marathon after surviving lung disease.

TRACEY'S TIPS

- 1** Surround yourself with people who are going to help you. "To think positively you need positive people around you."
- 2** Believe in yourself. "If told you're too old or too sick to run, stay determined, set your goals and believe that you can one day achieve them."
- 3** Don't give up. "If you get injured, lying in bed for a week is not an option, do what's necessary to get back out there."



ANDREW SPALDING, 43

"Running means everything to me, it's helped me lose almost 60kg."

"I ALWAYS HAD A PROBLEM WITH MY WEIGHT. IN PUBLIC I put on a brave face, but in private I hated the way I looked. In 1997, when I was 18, I landed a job as a load controller with Qantas which involved a move from Melbourne to Coffs Harbour. At the time I weighed about 116kg. Shiftwork made it difficult to embark on a regular exercise routine and my diet wasn't in the best shape it could have been - far too many take-away foods. For the next three years I tried a number of diets and exercise programs to lose the weight. Weight Watchers, medications, gym memberships, exercise programs, you name it, I tried it. The diets always started well, but after a few months I would lose motivation and return to my old habits. There were times when I would walk on the treadmill for 15 minutes and then try to run for 10 minutes, but I just couldn't run. I would get angry with myself and think: 'You could have done an extra few minutes if you really pushed yourself'.

By late 2001, I was only 22 and tipping the scales at just over 155kg. Fed up with my life, I moved back to Melbourne and went on a holiday to Europe. I remember it was difficult for me to look at my holiday snaps. It was like I'd woken up from this dream and could barely recognise myself.

I decided it was time to get professional help. My cousin, Amy, had undergone lap band surgery three months earlier and had already lost 15kg. Initially I felt surgery was too extreme, but after attending an information session and finding out a little more about the procedure I decided to go ahead with it. The real clincher for me was being told the procedure was reversible. I needed that 'get out of jail' card up my sleeve.

In March 2005, I had the surgery at Melbourne's Peninsula Private Hospital.

I had five laparoscopic incisions to show for the three hour operation and was limited to a liquid diet for three weeks. I progressed to mashed foods and was back on solids six weeks post surgery. Even though I thought it would be difficult not eating much for two months, I was determined to make this work.

One week after the surgery I also started going for short walks, and after three weeks I returned to the gym. I lost 16kg in six weeks, which motivated me to keep going. But the most rewarding moment was when I got up the courage to run the seven kilometres from my home to my partner, Olivia's, work. It was the longest I'd ever run, and I did it in 45 minutes.

Soon after that breakthrough run, I read about the Samsung Melbourne Marathon and organised a team of runners who had also had lap band surgery. We ran a seven kilometre leg each, and when I reached the final straight, I couldn't believe how many people had lined the streets to cheer us on. That alone, was enough to keep me running forever.

For a long time I'd thought about how I could help others to lose weight, and after dropping almost 30kg, I was eager to share my story with others.

I left my job with Qantas in late 2005 to study at the Australian Institute of Fitness before opening my own personal training business, *Active Boxing*. I now see 80 clients a week and hold a *Band Camp* on weekends to help people who have had the surgery get fit.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing though. Normally before a race

I have the band loosened by removing the saline from the tubing, so that I can carbo load and drink plenty of fluids before the run. But before my first ultramarathon, the 55K Percy Cerity run from Frankston to Portsea, I forgot to have the procedure.

It wasn't until I reached the 40K mark that I could actually digest any carbs, at that stage I was hitting the wall. I was thrilled when I reached the marathon distance, but there was still 13K to go. Thoughts of my grandfather who was battling cancer got me through the final stage of the race. I told myself: 'If he can keep fighting, so can I'.

Running means everything to me, it's helped me lose almost 60kg. I'm happy and healthy and looking towards running the Boston Marathon in 2009."

DON'T WEIGHT: Andrew Spalding is now running after having lap band surgery three years ago.



ANDREW'S TIPS

- 1 Anything's possible.** "Before lap band surgery I hated running, but now I love the feeling you get after a good run."
- 2 Seek help.** "We all know the problems Australia has with obesity, so you're not alone."
- 3 Start slow.** "Build up your exercise routine by setting short-term goals for yourself."