

Running BEYOND

**FIVE RUNNERS WHO'VE BEEN GIVEN DEVASTATING
HEALTH PROGNOSSES SHARE INSPIRING
STORIES OF THE MILES THEY'VE RUN IN
THE TIME THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD**

Words: Lisa Jackson



'I want to live with purpose and inspire others'



'I'm no stranger to pain,' says **Kevin Webber**, 60, from Epsom, Surrey. 'Over the past 10 years, I've battled through countless endurance challenges – navigating sand dunes, snowstorms, volcanoes and jungles across the globe, all while living with terminal prostate cancer, after having been told I had two years to live. I was an occasional runner before my diagnosis, having completed a handful of marathons. The day after chemo started, I realised I had a choice: be a victim and give up on everything or dare to dream and go for a run. I chose the latter and went for a slow, body-shattering three miles. When I got home, I realised that even though so much of my life had changed forever, I could still run, and that got me not just dreaming, but dreaming big! The

1/ Cancer treatment didn't stop Kevin from running
2/ Kevin receives his British Empire Medal from the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey in 2020
3/ Surrounded by prayer flags while running a GlobalLimits race in Bhutan in 2023
4/ Training on Dartmoor in 2024 with his friend Ian Tetsill, who also had prostate cancer

dream I'd kept locked away since I was 20 was the Marathon des Sables (MDS), a seven-day, 250km slog across the Sahara, often billed as "the toughest foot race on earth". I was overjoyed to finish my first four MDS's, but in 2021 I got food poisoning and was helicoptered out on the first day. I received 15 bags of IV fluid and was buried in ice twice in the medical tent, as my temperature was dangerously high. All I could think about was coming back another year to achieve my fifth finish. That's the plan for 2026!

'Running gave me a sense of purpose as my efforts raised sizeable sums for cancer charities, so after my first MDS I began entering ultras all over the world, with the support of my employer, NatWest, which allows me to work flexibly while training for up to 10 hours a week, delivering presentations about prostate cancer and writing a weekly newspaper column and book called *Dead Man Running*.

'Since December 2014, I've been taking drugs to remove all testosterone from my body and this has resulted in joint and muscle aches, extreme fatigue, frequent nausea and menopause-like symptoms. Radiotherapy was particularly unkind and left me with bleeding from the place where the sun don't shine. Now 10 years on, the continual treatment has had a massive impact on my runs, as I struggle to maintain muscle despite running or doing gym work every day. Although I'm no superhuman and, like many other runners, feel totally shattered and nauseous during every ultra I enter, having cancer has altered my mindset. In some bizarre way, my cancer helps me get through races as I know that every race may be my last; there's never the thought of, "If I don't make it, I'll come back next year." Failure simply isn't an option.

'Two races that tested my resilience to the max were the 6633 Arctic Ultra – held in the frozen wastes of Canada, it involved dragging a sled for 120 miles, risking frostbite and hypothermia – and the 230km Beyond the Ultimate Ice Ultra in Swedish Lapland. I completed the latter in February this year as a way to celebrate my 60th birthday, which fell on day four. It was a tough challenge over five days that involved running certain sections in snowshoes, climbing mountains at -20°C in high winds and often finishing a stage in the dark and then trying to sleep on a bunk in the freezing cold with others snoring around me. Not everyone finished, but my determination kept me going: left foot, right foot, repeat!

'In November 2024, to celebrate my 10-year "cancerversary" (10 years since my diagnosis), I ran/walked 10 times to and from my home and The Royal Marsden hospital in Sutton. Totalling 130km, it was the furthest I'd ever run in a single day. Each lap was dedicated to a group of Marsden staff – not just the doctors and nurses, but the cleaners, porters and receptionists, to acknowledge that they were just as important in keeping me alive. This fundraising challenge won me the Best Charity Initiative Award at the 2025 National Running Show, and contributed to the over £1m I've raised for cancer charities so far.

'It's easy to drop into the pit of despair when receiving a rubbish cancer diagnosis, but I wanted to live my life with purpose and help to inspire others. Some studies

suggest that regular exercise may be associated with a lower risk of tumour growth and may enhance the effects of chemotherapy. No definite conclusions have yet been reached, but there's no doubt exercise has many other benefits for men with prostate cancer and can help them better tolerate the side effects of chemo. You can't change yesterday, and tomorrow may not come, so today is all that matters and running most days is the best medicine.'

Dead Man Running is available on Amazon. To sponsor Kevin, visit justgiving.com/page/kevin-webber-next-decade



'Terminal illness makes you focus on what's important'

'I was first diagnosed with primary breast cancer in 2014, aged 36, after discovering a lump,' says **Caroline Frith**, 47, from South Woodford in London. 'I underwent surgery and chemotherapy, then hormone treatment for eight years until I found an enlarged lymph node near my collarbone in 2022. After the cancerous lymph node had been removed, a PET scan revealed the cancer had spread to my bones. I was just 44 and had been handed a death sentence.

'All my friends and family were extremely upset, of course, so one of the main things I wanted to get across was that if anyone tried to treat me with kid gloves or tell me I should stop running, they'd get short shrift! I've been a runner since my early twenties and was quite fast, regularly winning age-group prizes and occasionally coming in the top three in races, so I was determined to handle my diagnosis my way. That meant trying to live my life as normally as possible, and running is a huge part of that.

'I've had a wide variety of treatment with many different side effects – nausea, lack of appetite and tiredness. My current treatment damages my hands and feet, so I'm much more prone to blisters (a big problem as a runner) and have many extremely painful open sores on my hands. This makes day-to-day life hard and is one of the reasons I've had to give up my job as a veterinary surgeon.

'After my secondary diagnosis, I decided to run the 2023 London Marathon – which I'd completed twice before – one more time. I got a charity place through the

cancer-support charity Maggie's and at that time was on treatment with minimal side effects, so the training went well. I'd always thought I was capable of sub-3:30, but to get a PB of 3:27 was incredible. That was good enough to qualify for the 2024 Boston Marathon, so 'one more marathon' turned into two more. I entered Boston having no idea if I'd be well enough to run it and only booked my flights the week before. I finished in 4:08, a week after having had a liver biopsy. I was with friends from the east London running scene and had a fabulous weekend.

'Having a terminal illness makes you focus on what's important and getting as much out of life as possible. For me, this means doing things I always thought I'd do 'one day', so I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro last year. Another thing I thought I'd do one day was an ultramarathon, so in October 2024 I ran the Camino Ultra 50K in Epping Forest in just under six hours. I then needed new goals, so this year I entered five races, including the London Marathon (again!), which was my hardest to date. I walked a bit and struggled with the heat, but managed 4:23, a PW (personal worst) but still respectable. I also completed the Hackney Half, which I ran with my 17-year-old daughter, Matilda, in just under two hours (it was her first half). The pièce de résistance was the Warsaw Ironman 70.3, which I completed in June. I was aiming to finish the race in under eight hours, but managed a time of 6:38:54, so I smashed that target! I'm a real advocate for taking risks, and that you should feel the fear and do it anyway. It's better to try and fail than never try.

'Continuing to enter races and fundraising for Maggie's keeps me going and gives purpose to my life. In 2023, I raised £33,000 and this year I'm aiming for £17,000, to bring the total to £50,000. I want to live life and enjoy what time I have left, for the sake of my husband, Ian, and our two children. We've been on more nice holidays together recently because I'm aiming to create as many happy memories as I can for my family. I'm spending the money I'd put aside for my retirement because the reality is I'm not going to need it. I'm trying to cram everything in before my body says, "No". To that end, I've already entered the 2026 Paris Marathon with a large group of friends. I need to believe I'll be on that start line next April because the alternative is too difficult to contemplate.'

To sponsor Caroline, visit bit.ly/3EYKUbH



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5/ Caroline at the Colworth Marathon Challenge in June 2023
6/ Caroline reached new heights at Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania
7/ Making memories with her two children, Matilda, 17, and Eric, 13

'The first question I asked my oncologist was, "Will I be able to run?"'



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'I swore "Never again" after my first marathon in Amsterdam at the age of 50,' says **Tony Collier**, 68, from Thelwall in Cheshire. 'I made the same pledge another 18 times – including after all six of the World Marathon Majors – before I was diagnosed with prostate cancer aged 60 in 2017. I was training for my third 56-mile Comrades Marathon in South Africa when I felt a searing pain in my groin. By using painkillers, I managed to finish the Manchester and Paris Marathons two months before Comrades, but could barely walk afterwards. Bizarrely, I saw a sports injuries doctor and after a battery of tests he called to say he was almost certain I had prostate cancer. I drove home in tears to tell Tracey, my wife of 36 years. Being told you've got cancer is devastating, but when the urologist said it was incurable 10 days later, the shock was indescribable.

'Treatment for advanced prostate cancer involves removing testosterone – in my case, this was done through daily pills, plus injections into my stomach. I was fortunate enough to avoid chemo and instead take a new drug called abiraterone. The combination has worked like a dream; I was given a worst-case prognosis of two years and here I am, eight years on and still stable.

'The first question I asked my oncologist wasn't, "How long have I got to live?" but, "Will I still be able to run?"' He told me that once the stress fractures in my pelvis (the groin strain) had healed, I should definitely run as it would help to stave off my treatment's side effects. For the first 18 months, I thought so much about dying that I lost the joy of living and ended up needing counselling. Since then, I've lived every day to its fullest and my four grandchildren have been a great motivation to stay well.

'When I was diagnosed, I desperately wanted to talk to another runner with stage 4 prostate cancer, so Prostate Cancer UK (PCUK) put me in touch with Kevin Webber [see p40] and he inspired me to take on daft challenges. As I had a Good For Age place, the first distance race I completed after my diagnosis was the 2018 London Marathon. It was the hottest on record, which isn't great when you're having hot flushes. Training was plagued by treatment fatigue that often left me in tears, but I still got out there, finished in a massive personal worst of 5:07 and raised £13,000 for PCUK. It was my 20th and final marathon and the one I'm proudest of.

'My next running challenge was the 2021 Race to the Castle 100km in Northumberland National Park. Day one was wet, cold and windy, but I completed the 36 miles. Then I spent a miserable night in a tiny, freezing one-man tent. Day two was cracking-the-pavements hot and I power-walked 28 miles and ran the last 100m to Bamburgh Castle. I loved it, but I'm never going near a tent again!

'In 2022, I completed the feat of running at least 5K every day for a year to raise money for the Move Against Cancer charity, which is behind 5K Your Way (5KYW), an exercise-based, peer-to-peer support group. The challenge got huge publicity and I raised over £21,000. I founded the Wilmslow 5KYW in 2019 and have been involved in setting up new 5KYWs across the north-west. I also became a patient expert on exercise, particularly



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8/ Tony shows up, despite the harsh side effects of treatment
9/ Every day for a year, Tony ran 5K for the Move Against Cancer charity
10/ Tony endured both extreme cold and heat in the 2021 Race to the Castle 100K

prehabilitation, an exercise programme aimed at getting newly diagnosed cancer patients fitter before surgery and treatment. I find time to do all this – and become a trustee for three charities – because I'm now semi-retired from my accounting practice.

'Running is still a massive part of my life, but it's so much tougher, particularly as one of the side effects of having no testosterone is awful fatigue. I haven't let cancer stop me running, but I am a lot slower. A partial knee replacement last year has caused me way more problems than the cancer. Post-knee surgery, I run two to three times a week, but not more than 5K. I do get out on my bike and go to the gym, though, as I see exercise as part of my treatment pathway: it's my way of controlling the cancer, rather than being controlled by it.

'Although I've raised nearly £100,000 for charity since 2017, what's brought me the most pleasure is coaching beginners' running courses at my club. Watching novices grow and develop as runners and then go on to do even greater things, including marathons, is immensely satisfying. My advice to people diagnosed with cancer is that if they can still run, they must. And on the days when it's too hard, they should walk, as it'll prolong their life.'

To sponsor Tony, visit justgiving.com/page/tackle5ktonysway. 5K Your Way groups, which help people with cancer reap the mental and physical benefits of remaining active, take place on the last Saturday of every month at over 100 parkrun events across the UK and Ireland. moveagaincancer.org

‘Never underestimate what you can achieve’



‘I started running in 2012 to fit into my wedding gown,’ says **Kelly Harrop**, 49, from Glossop, Derbyshire. ‘At my fitting, the dressmaker wrote down my size and I panicked, thinking I’d never fit into it, so I took up running. At first, I could barely run 1km, but before long I was addicted. When the dress was finished, it was far too big for me!’

‘Before I was diagnosed with lung cancer in December 2015, I was running five or six times a week and doing 5Ks, 10Ks and half marathons, plus obstacle races. Although I was getting PBs, I was by no means a fast runner, but it kept me sane and I loved it. My diagnosis came after I complained of stomach acid and was given an ultrasound. The doctor said they’d found a large cyst on my liver. When I had a CT scan to check that out, it showed I had lung cancer. The doctor thought they’d caught it early as I’d had no symptoms, but when they opened me up, they realised it was stage three and had spread to my lymph nodes. As a result, a third of my right lung and some lymph nodes were removed, after which I had 12 weeks of chemotherapy. Everyone, including me, was in complete shock as I’d had no symptoms, didn’t smoke or drink and was very fit.’

‘While I recovered quite well from my surgery, chemo made me really ill. The first round totally floored me and I ended up in A&E but, over time, it got a little easier. However, I was extremely tired all the time and unable to work or see anyone in case I caught an infection. The hardest thing was not being able to do my job; I work with horses and felt so tired and unwell that I just couldn’t continue.’

‘While having treatment, all I ever talked to my oncologist about was getting back to running. The day she gave me the green light, I was off. At first, I was frustrated as I couldn’t run as fast or as far as before, but I ran my first Race for Life 10K six weeks after finishing chemo in July 2016 and went on to do the Manchester Half Marathon in October. I also entered two 10-mile Tough Mudders to raise money for cancer research – climbing 8ft walls, wading through gloopy mud and being dunked in a pit full of freezing water. They were enormous fun and helped me prove to myself that I could still do these things.’

‘In April 2023, I ran the London Marathon in 5:11. It was my first marathon and the training was really hard, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. The crowds were amazing – everyone kept shouting my name and telling me to keep going – plus I saw my family halfway through, which inspired me as I had a bit of a wobble at mile 14.’

‘After an eight-year remission, I was given a devastating second cancer diagnosis in December 2023. The cancer had spread to the pleural lining of my lung and my bronchial tube. My oncologist told me that although the cancer was now incurable, she’d put me on targeted therapy to try to slow it down. Sadly, the therapy made me feel so ill that I decided to stop all treatment after six



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months and enjoy whatever time I have left. I try to stay positive by having things to look forward to, keeping active and busy, working with the horses and trying to run when I can. Having lost a third of my lung makes running a little more tricky as I struggle with my breathing and fatigue.

‘Last year I did the Pretty Muddy with friends to raise money for Cancer Research UK. It was my way of giving something back for the treatment I’ve received. You have to climb, crawl and slide your way around, scramble under cargo nets, go through a human carwash and dodge giant moving inflatable balls. We all felt like kids again and laughed all the way round. I’m hoping to run the London Marathon again next year, and if I get in, I’ll have to up my training game. My message to anyone with cancer is to never underestimate what you can achieve. Being active keeps you positive and gives you something to aim for.’

To enter Pretty Muddy, visit raceforlife.cancerresearchuk.org. To donate to Cancer Research UK, visit donate.cancerresearchuk.org.



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11/ Kelly ran five to six times a week before her diagnosis
12/ Kelly with her friend Laura Harrop at the start of the 2015 Manchester 10K, seven months before Kelly was diagnosed with lung cancer
13/ Last year, Kelly finished a Pretty Muddy in support of Cancer Research UK



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‘If the show must go on, I can find a way to make it happen’

‘I was a keen ultrarunner before being diagnosed with stage four, incurable bowel cancer in 2022, aged 36,’ says **Nat Dye**, 39, from East London. ‘I was told the average stage-four patient has a 50/50 chance of surviving a year and about one in 10 will be alive after five. I shared my story in the May 2024 issue of *RW*; it covered my 2023 UTMB, where I did 98km in 24 hours, and my 100-miler from Essex to London in autumn that year which, to my knowledge, is the furthest anyone has ever run with a stoma. When my story ran, I was about to run the London Marathon while playing the trombone to raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Support and, well, a lot has happened since then.’

‘As I arrived at The Mall in April 2024, feeling that heady mix of elation, relief and exhaustion, an unusual thought crossed my mind, “What was I going to play as I crossed the line?” Having spent 26 miles taking requests and jamming with the bands lining the course, I hadn’t given this enough thought, so I improvised a fanfare.’

‘I’d run the marathon while playing a green plastic trombone while having cancer in three places and a colostomy bag. “I had no right to finish,” I said, struggling for words in a post-race interview. A brutal three-month block of chemotherapy had rendered me almost unable to run, so I hadn’t exactly stuck to the training plan. But I’m nothing if not a performer and it turned out that if the show must go on, I can find a way to make it happen.’

‘Then came the question, “What next?” What does an ultrarunner do when they’ve battled to 100 miles, then lost that hard-earned fitness by being poisoned by cancer

treatment? It helped that the poison was working. After surgery in June, there was a chance that I didn’t have any active cancer. ‘So I decided to take a long walk to clear my head. This would start in John O’ Groats and finish, well, I’m sure you can guess. This was going to be ‘fast packing’, running as much as possible. My adventure started in mid-July in Scottish drizzle, and I completed the 23-mile first day in good spirits as I ran/walked/trampled over overgrown paths and sand dunes. The first few days were a shock, but it was remarkable how I adjusted to an average of 20 miles a day. Life became incredibly simple: keep going until you run out of road. One foot in front of the other.’

‘Well, not quite. Running with even a light backpack has consequences, and on the Pennine Way my shins started to murmur, moan, then scream. By the halfway point and drop bag at Hebden Bridge (courtesy of Runequal campaigner Maud Hodson), even the delight of fresh socks wasn’t enough to forget the pain. So I took my only rest day to see a physio.’

‘Armed with pink tape to take the edge off the shin pain, I set off up hill and down dale. By Bristol, I could run again. Then came the ups and downs of the South West Coast Path and, after 60 days, I arrived at Land’s End’s famous signpost, having covered 1,197 miles and over 3m steps.’

‘In April this year, I was back in Greenwich, having received a last-minute place after winning the Spirit of London Marathon award. I got round in just under eight hours, two hours slower than last year. Although the effort seemed to capture hearts and minds, it’s been hard for me to be proud of a marathon ‘run’ at walking pace.’

‘It’s important to remember the barriers. I’d done no training and was in a block of chemo for my active-again cancer that includes over 50 tumours on my lungs alone. Then there was another twist: I was admitted to hospital with a large blood clot in my lungs. I was told if it got any worse, the clot would kill me. Thankfully, the 48-hour danger window passed, but there’s a good chance that I ran my marathon in the early stages of a pulmonary embolism that almost killed me. With that context, even I have to admit that I gave it everything. It meant a lot to put my body on the line for what might be one last time.’ 🍷

You can sponsor Nat at justgiving.com/fundraising/bowelcancerbucketlist



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14/ Nat ran 26.2 miles while playing the trombone
15/ Nat on his epic John O’Groats to Land’s End journey
16/ Nat receiving his Spirit of London Marathon award

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