



## Easingwold Running Club – Advertiser article October 2023

### My Running Story - Hannah Storm

I am writing this during the week of World Mental Health Day and just days after learning I have qualified to represent Great Britain for my age group in duathlon. The two might not seem connected, but it's no exaggeration to say running has helped save my life.

I have been running for more than two decades, but in recent years it has taken on a special significance. In 2019, I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, resulting from multiple traumas connected with my work as a journalist. My diagnosis came after several years of symptoms, including nightmares, anxiety, hyper-vigilance, irritability and avoidance of anything that reminded me of my traumas.

Running has long been shown to benefit our mental health, and it had helped me prior to my diagnosis. But as the pandemic began, and we were all plunged into uncertainty, it became a tether. Running helped me process the traumas I survived, which included several sexual assaults, and helped me see I was not to blame for what happened to me.

I had been trying to outrun my past and came to see running as a form of mindfulness, where I could focus on my surroundings, the sound of my breath, each footfall. When times were tough, I convinced myself to put one foot in front of the other and keep going. It was an analogy that worked for darker days in my mental health, as well as during tough runs.

At the end of 2020, I moved back to North Yorkshire, close to where I had grown up, and found solace outdoors. On sunrise runs I kept company with wild birds, deer, rabbits and hare, cherishing the world around me. I would post pictures on social media of the views that helped me, and friends and strangers from around the world would tell me how much those images meant to them.

In mid 2021, I ventured to my local parkrun at Millfield, where I was met by such a friendly community that I was soon encouraged to join Easingwold Running Club. Around the same time, I started working with a running coach. I'd met him through the renowned South African runner Bruce Fordyce, who holds the record for winning the Comrades ultra marathon a record number of times. Bruce and I met more than a decade ago at the parkrun in Bushy Park, near London, both sporting finishers' t-shirts from the previous week's Paris marathon. He'd invited me to check out a 'little run' he was involved with if I ever came to South Africa. I didn't know then that 'little run', Comrades, was the equivalent of two consecutive marathons. I now know that, alongside his running feats, Bruce's sense of humour is legendary. I went on to complete Comrades in 2017, which is another story. When Bruce later set up a

coaching project, Fordyce Fusion, with fellow South African runner Iain Morshead, I was delighted to be invited to work with them.

Since joining Easingwold Running Club and being coached by Iain, I have achieved personal bests in distances from five kilometres to the marathon. But even more importantly, I have really enjoyed my running, and my mental health has improved. In 2022, I started cycling, struggling with clip-in pedals at first and lacking confidence. Thanks to the patience, spare kit and advice of a friend from my village, I started to improve and love the freedom my bike brought. I got injured after running my fastest half marathon in January's York Brass Monkey race and realised cycling might help me recover. As I did, I decided to focus more on duathlons, where participants run, cycle and then run.

In my first full year of competing at the sprint duathlon distance, I have succeeded in qualifying to represent Great Britain for my age group at the World Championships in Australia next year. I am proud of how far I've come.

I know I have a mountain to climb between now and the championships next August. I'll need to train hard and smart. I'll also need to seek support to upgrade my kit and fund the trip. I know there are likely to be days too when the sun hides stubbornly behind the clouds, when the weather conditions make it tough to train, and when they may be reflected by dark days in my mental health. But if my journey so far has taught me one thing, it's that if I keep on putting one foot in front of the other, I will move forwards.

I hope sharing my story helps anyone else who has felt isolated by their mental health to know that they are not alone.

Hannah Storm