

My Little Impossible Missions

Many of us have movies that have influenced the way we experience the world – maybe not with the message the moviemakers planned to impart, but our own interpretation. For me it was Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones, and also *Neverending Story*. It fascinated me how an unlikely hero faced a mission that was deemed impossible or deadly, filled with many challenges, and often the hero didn't think he could survive or achieve the end result, but somehow he did. This is how I see my running goals, milestones and experiences. – **BY ALICE DA SILVA**

The Comrades Marathon was to me an impossible challenge and I never believed I could even dare to aspire to run it. In my mind, it was something other people did. So every year on Comrades race day, I spent the day in pyjamas on the couch, watching all 12 hours. For me, watching Bruce Fordyce run and win was the equivalent of watching an astronaut go into space – amazing, but out of my orbit!

I didn't start running with the ambition of completing Comrades – I just wanted to do more than I had previously done – but in 2015 I ran and completed my first Comrades! Me, the unlikely hero in the story. At school I had been a sprinter, but when I tried long distance, I thought I can never do this. Many years later I decided to start running a little. I started with running around the block, 800m... I had to stop three times because I thought I was going to die! Even walking, I would be so tired that I would look at the grass on the sidewalk and would be tempted to lie down.

GETTING THERE...

Eventually I could run all 800m without walking, and when that became easier, I went to the next corner, and then the next. It became 1km, 2km, 5km. One day I tried running 10km, and when I got to 7km I wasn't sure I could finish. But I did a few more, and one day finished a 10km race, realising I wasn't dying at the finish line, that I could have done more. Suddenly that challenge wasn't enough, and that was disappointing, because I like impossible challenges that I think I can't succeed at. If it was easy, I felt the mission was unworthy, so I went for 15km, and then 21km was the next mission.

I ran my first half marathon race and then thought maybe I can run a marathon, so I carried on training and planned to do the 32km Tough One before attempting my first marathon at Johnson Crane. That was 2013. But then I saw the Mandela Race advertised in Pietermaritzburg, and thought that I would like my first marathon to be special, so that my next impossible mission reflected the struggle of Nelson Mandela. I would let that be my motivator, so, without doing the 32km first, I ran the Mandela Marathon. After that, I thought maybe I can do Comrades, so I worked my way upwards with milestones such as doing the 32km Tough One, Two Oceans Ultra, and so on. The challenge to self was on – little ordinary me, who once couldn't run round the block, was going to attempt something I considered impossible in my own story.



THE NEXT STEP

Now I am training for my back-to-back Comrades. I still go about my training feeling like I'm embarking on an adventure. The mission is often gruelling – uphill in 34-degree heat, sometimes I get lost, sometimes I think I'm not fast enough, but I carry on. I do it again the next day, and the next. Each run is a part of my Comrades race, each stretch of road is an episode in my epic journey. The people who greet me on my daily runs are part of my journey, too. The security guards outside the complexes that I run past daily wave and smile, and I am comforted that I have supporters who see me putting in the hours, even when it's hot or uphill. I feel like telling them that the few minutes of my run that they see is a piece of my race on Comrades day.

I still find missions and impossible goals to challenge myself. The next big goal may be Comrades 2016, but in the meantime there are daily missions – get over that hill, finish the long run, keep going even if I'm tired, or disappointed in my performance. Keep on sticking to my plan, even when life happens. And every now and then, I experience the elation of completing another impossible challenge. Until the next one. *AK*

