

MY LETTER TO THE YOUNGER ME

HEATHER HAWKINS



Dear Heather,

Don't be frightened, I know you're feeling overwhelmed by the shocking news that you have cancer but hang in there and trust that this time in your life will become a positive turning point.

You notice changes in your body at age 41, from becoming full quickly after eating small meals, to dramatic abdominal swelling where you couldn't fit into your favourite red skirt that you'd worn two days previously.

You did the right thing to listen to your intuition which told you that something was wrong and to see your doctor. This was backed up from your skills and knowledge learnt from your earlier days practicing nursing. You now encourage others to go see their doctor if something doesn't feel right. Your instinct will continue to guide you in the right direction where you will not only heal but become stronger, find pursuits that you love and achieve things you never dreamt you were capable of.

You're now questioning whether you're going to survive or ever be the same again after having this tumour grow inside you. But it's important to stay positive which you'll do with the support of your family and friends as you won't face cancer alone.

You undergo extensive surgery and then place your trust in your Oncologist, Professor Michael Friedlander

who is at the forefront of the latest cancer research. You will be reassured by his treatment plan, which will guide you through your journey with cancer. Your doctor will advise you to start exercising to aid your recovery, so you learn to ocean swim the at the age of 44 and complete your bronze medallion alongside fellow mum friends as a volunteer surf life saver.

After being cancer free for five years you will go from never running before to taking the first step training for a 4km run to raise awareness for breast cancer. You go from worrying about how on earth you will be able to run that far to listening to that voice inside you that tells you to keep going.

You then build up running distances from 14km to 21km and beyond and discover lots of training tips from online research such as what nutrition to eat, how to taper and cross train.

You never dreamed you'd love exercising so much, nor the places it takes you to where you'll appreciate the majesty of nature from the star filled sky of the Northern Territory to the mountains of Nepal, where you'll trek for five months with your two children. You grow so much from this experience of being removed from normal life to climb over high passes, cross glacial rivers, trek to far remote western parts of Nepal where you get caught in monsoonal rains where you're drenched but it gives you a chance to reflect and realise what you're capable of.

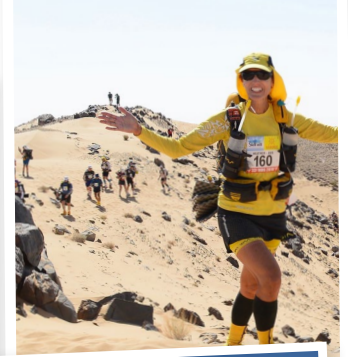
Running will also open unexpected doors for you including becoming an author, public speaker and ambassador. As a Can Too ambassador you help others wanting to beat cancer to accomplish things they never thought they were capable of from trekking up to Mt Everest Base Camp and climbing Mt Kilimanjaro.

Supporting this Foundation will tick your boxes – to provide support for people training to achieve their goals and fundraising for Australian cancer research.

For the first time you'll join a professionally coached training program with Can Too for the New York Marathon, being able to train for, travel and accomplish that goal with a special group of people will be an experience you'll always treasure. Every year you will challenge yourself with a physical pursuit be it running a marathon in the North Pole or the Sahara Desert. You'll even complete a 522km ultra-running race from Alice Springs to Uluru in over 40-degree heat for ten days. The tough conditions prevent more than half the field finishing the race. You look internally and externally to find that strength to keep your body moving despite fatigue, blisters and bruising to cross the line as the second female overall.

You look at your photo at the finish line and think that's what 10 days of being lost in the dessert looks like. During the outback race you will run through and camp at the Curtin Springs Cattle Station where you worked as a 21-year-old governess. You advise the Severin family that you won't be driving or flying there to visit but will run to their property. Catching up with the family patriarch: the grandfather, and son again at your campsite will feel like you've gone in a complete circle in life.

'You must be writing to the wrong person', you're thinking. Well you'll discover that by being given a second chance at life, you can reach physical heights you never considered before.



By beating cancer you know that if you can get through that you can complete ultra-running events and scale mountains. Even when you're tired and in discomfort you now have additional purpose to help others going through cancer.

Your life will go in directions you never planned for or could imagine, embrace the change and take steps forward to discover something new about yourself and celebrate every single opportunity that will nurture your adventurous spirit.

Heather Hawkins

