



# The Librarian Who Wouldn't Quit

After a failing fitness grade, it was time to go hit the gym – and then the road

By Pascale Duguay

**I**t all started with a friendly basketball game between the high-school staff and the junior boys' team. When two of the boys walked up to me in the library and asked if I'd like to play, I immediately agreed. I couldn't wait to show off my skills. After all, I often spent my lunch break either shooting hoops or lifting weights when the gym was free of students. This would be a breeze.

It turned out I was completely wrong. I had forgotten to take into consideration that I would actually have to run, something I hadn't done in about 20 years. Less than five minutes into the game and I was ready to pass out. With only my pride keeping me on my feet, I gratefully allowed the other staff members to take over. For the first time in my life, I sat on the bench, out of the spotlight. I could just imagine my younger self cringing in horror from her position on the wall where she stood so proudly among the other school MVPs. "I'm sorry, I don't know what happened," I told her.

It took a few days for my 47-year-old body to finally recover, but my pride was still stinging. Was I over the hill? Gasp, were the kids right? Was I truly an old lady now? I wrestled with my ego all the way to the gym. As I dumped my stuff outside the weight room door, I thought there was only one way to find out if this old librarian had anything left in her. I dug out my iPad, set the timer to five minutes and shuffled off. After one lap of the perimeter of the gym, I was already out of breath, but I determinedly kept going and refused to

stop running until the timer went off.

Those five excruciating minutes eventually led to six, eight, 10... all the way to a big, fat 16 minutes. But then the school year came to an end, which meant I would lose access to the gym over the summer. This large, empty space had borne sole witness to my private struggles for so long that I felt uneasy running anywhere else. But no way was I willing to start over from scratch in the fall – I'd have to brave the outside world.

Fortunately for me, I live in a tiny town in the middle of the countryside, so there wouldn't be that many stares tracking my progress. But as picturesque as my town is, with its dense forests, huge pond and varied wildlife, it's also spread out over a series of hills. My first outdoor run lasted much less than 16 minutes although it felt way longer. The first hill nearly did me in, but, surprisingly, I found myself smiling when I finally returned to the safety of my driveway. Eventually, I managed to get over the second hill, and the third. I can now run a whopping 30 minutes. I have no idea how far I run. Guess that's going to be next on the list. All I know is that even though I haven't quite reached ultramarathon status yet, I couldn't be happier. Who knows, by the time the junior boys ask for a rematch, this old librarian might even give them a run for their money. **R**

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