

# The Daily Marathon

Category: Grit

written by Steph Davis | January 6, 2025

When I was in medical school, a physiology lecturer told us about a book called *Pride and a Daily Marathon*. This narrative case study, written by neurophysiologist Jonathan Cole, is about the struggles and triumphs of a young man in his quest to live a full life after he awakes one morning having lost all sensation below his neck.

I had no aspirations to run a marathon—I'd never even gone for a jog. But although I sat through many hours of physiology lectures in medical school, and spent even more hours studying physiology, I think that story is probably the only thing I remember about the subject.

I remembered it a few years later when I was lying on a hard single bed in a strange town, staring at the gray morning light coming in under the doorway and willing myself to get up for another shift in a soul-destroying emergency department. A few years later, I remembered it when the phone rang, yet again, 20 hours into a 24-hour on-call rotation in a very remote part of Australia. More years passed, and in the throes of terrible postpartum depression, I remembered the story once more as I bounced my crying baby for hours. At all these times, I told myself, I just needed to get through that day's marathon.

I've still never gone for a run, though around this time every year I put "learning to jog" on my list of resolutions. But I still think about "the daily marathon" a lot, particularly with regard to the patients I see as a general practitioner.

I thought about it when I saw a young woman with crippling depression who managed to get out of bed to come and see me. I thought about it when I did a home visit to an elderly gentleman who provides his disabled wife with dutiful and loving care, despite what he disclosed has always been a difficult marriage. I thought about it as I prescribed methadone for a middle-aged fellow who has a terrible history of childhood trauma and is trying once again to get off drugs.

When it feels right, I tell my patients that for some people, every day can be a marathon. And that, in my eyes at least, such people are heroes.

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