

Higgy's Heroes – The Stroud Half Marathon

By Alastair Hignell, Patron of MSRC

For the second time in a year, I salute my Heroes!

Even in my playing prime, I used to argue that I was built for speed-not distance, and if anybody so much as mentioned a cross-country, I'd run a mile, or preferably less, and only in stages. As a result, I've always been in awe of those who devoted so much time and energy and effort to long-distance running. My admiration doubled whenever I came across someone willing to put themselves through so much pain for the sake of charity, and doubled again when that charity was the MSRC. When it became personal, I became speechless and my awe became boundless.

Kent-based headmaster Joe Davies had no idea what he set in motion when he persuaded some of our contemporaries from Oxbridge sport in the Seventies to run the London Marathon in April on behalf of the MSRC. When one of the fifty-somethings declared with some feeling that his first marathon would also be his last, it seemed logical to assume that the race was both the beginning and



A happy Higgy



Higgy, Jeannie and their sons Dan and Adam
the end of Higgy's Heroes.

Stroud-based journalist Ashley Loveridge, however, had other plans. He wanted to get fit but he knew himself well enough to realise that, without the commitment to a team of like-minded individuals, he might well do a runner when the running got tough. Why not, he argued, transport the Heroes from the capital to the Cotswolds? And why not, he ventured, with what he assumed was even less chance of success, get your family involved?

Large & Spirited Family

But my family is as large in number as it is in spirit. I admit that Ashley's story that my wife Jeannie would be running appeared in the newspaper slightly before I had broached the subject to her, but once presented with a *fait accompli*, this amazing woman wasted no time in getting others on board. Our sons Adam and Dan were more amenable than they had been for more than a quarter of a century, while my brother, my sister, their spouses and a couple of nieces succumbed at a timely family birthday party.

Others found themselves in the

wrong place at the wrong time. Angela Findlay is a neighbour, while Carpenter Phil Moorsom came round to fix our cupboards; Ant and Aimee Lax invited us to a local art event, while Amanda Spitteler found herself at a party given by mutual friends. All took 5 minutes to realise something that has taken me the best part of 28 years; when confronted by the force of nature that is Jeannie, it saves a lot of time if you surrender straight away! All became Higgy's Heroes, as did a couple Jeannie met at a wedding.

More heroes appeared from the running group organised by the Stroud Athletic Club and coached by marathon runner Simon Barnes. Thanks to his expertise, enthusiasm and cheerful and patient encouragement a bunch of unco-ordinated, unfit and ill-disciplined plodders were transformed into something that resembled a running machine. Most importantly, they had a lot of fun along the way and by following Simon's advice not only avoided injury on the day, but retained an appetite to run again.

While it soon transpired that a virtual Jeannie is as unstoppable as the real one- her e-mail blandishments landed personal sponsorship of more than £3000- Ashley was using his contacts book to conjure up items to put in an auction and a venue to stage it. Stroud Market Organiser Claire Gerbrands meanwhile not only chose to run for the Heroes but also allowed us to set up an MSRC stall, and local tea-rooms owner Steve Philpott not only devised a green-and-white speciality coffee

but also provided a cheering point on race day .

And what a day it was! Everything except the weather- and the worst of the rain held off until most of the runners were safely gathered in- was just about perfect. The Heroes , boosted by the ministrations of of voluntary physiotherapists, Sara and Rick, ran well. The supporters, boosted by

the presence of so many MSRC staff, used their rapper-clappers to great effect and the post-race auction at Bar Nine raised another £2000 for the MSRC. Several weeks on, the euphoria shows little sign of abating.

And, it seems, you can't keep a good man down, much less the amazing bunch of men and women who ran the Stroud half-

marathon for the MSRC .

It looks like Higgy's Heroes will run and run. And possibly swim and cycle. And maybe walk and talk. In fact, they could be up for anything, and they're always open for new members. So, if you've got a different charity challenge for the Heroes or want to sign up for next year's Stroud half- marathon, please contact New Pathways.