London Marathon runners inspired by loved ones

A pom pom from a pair of Addie Brady’s favourite shoes was pinned to her mother Michelle’s running vest, not on her heart, as she ran the London Marathon in memory of her 16-year-old daughter.

Michelle Brady drew strength from this lucky charm throughout the race. “I felt like she was with me and helped to carry me around,” she said. “Whenever I had a hard moment, I looked on the pom pom.”

Addie, a Herts and Essex High School student, died in February 2014 from a brain tumour. She had battled twice in her short life. She was diagnosed with spina bifida with a fat tissue tumour in 2011, when she was a nine-year-old pupil at All Saints Primary School. After she endured surgery and chemotherapy, her family—Michelle, dad Tara and elder sister Skyler—believed the disease had gone.

But in 2014, after she was rushed to hospital following a seizure, doctors discovered that she had an inoperable brain tumour.

“She was so courageous and showed such bravery,” Michelle said. “She never wanted to let it bring her down. I feel like she adapted her attitude. That’s what should have happened.”

Michelle finished in 4:18:37 for the Addie Brady Foundation—a cause the family set up which works with the Brain Tumour Charity. So far, she has raised £5,361 including Gift Aid, which is her original target of £5,000.

“For me it was about raising money for Addie and keeping her memory alive, but I can raise money for other families going through what Addie’s family experienced then that can do a good thing,” she said.

It was Michelle’s second London Marathon after first running it in 2016. “Addie was very much a part of the build-up to that event,” she said. “She was there on the sidelines, cheering me on.”

This year, Michelle knew it would be difficult without Addie there, but she received tremendous backing from supporters on the route—every couple of miles after the halfway point, she was met with a cheer and a friendly face. “They really helped me forward,” said Michelle.

Michelle was given a little boost at the start by Indie editor Paul Winstead, who ran in memory of Addie Brady Foundation’s charity set up in 2014 by the Wilson family to fund research into epidermolysis, the condition that killed Addie’s life.

Herts and Essex High School teachers Caitlin Haywood, Thomas Stover and Ian Corner ran to raise funds for CLIC Sargent, a cause close to Addie’s heart, as she worked closely with the charity during and after her first fight with cancer.

Ian finished ahead of his colleagues in 4:37:20, while Caitlin and Thomas crossed the line in 4:32:41. Together they raised £4,096.69.

Addie’s old babysitter, Olivia Cocker (22), ran in memory of the teenager, as did Addie’s former CLIC Sargent social worker, Sammie Barr (27) and Cathy Brownfield (52). From Simply Gorgeous in Hoddesdon Street, Michelle said: “I really wanted to give a day to know I wasn’t running alone. I think it showed how many people she touched in her short time.”

Skyler, Addie’s younger sister, was among the supporters on Sunday. “The next day, she told her parents she plans to run the marathon in 2020 for her little sister. The Loughborough University student has already applied for a place.”

Mother and daughter Judi Wilson, 76, and Abi Blakely, 41, ran together as they took a stand against Alzheimer’s disease, a condition from which their husband and father, Roger Wilson, suffers.

Abi lives in St Michael’s Mount with husband Richard, 42, and children Megan, 9, and William, 7, who attend Manor Fields Primary School.

Judi and Roger, who were 35 yesterday (Tuesday), live in Gerrards Cross, Bucks, and have been married since 1972. In May 2016, Roger was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and Judi has since given up her teaching career to become his full-time carer.

“It has been heart-breaking for his loved ones to witness him battle the debilitating illness,” Judi said. “His short-term memory has completely gone. He has no interest in reading, the Guardian crossword, cooking or gardening — things he loved the most. He struggles when the family get together as he forgets names, has difficulty in joining in and finds it hard to cope with noisy grandchildren.”

Abi, a membership manager for the National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS), did her first marathon in Milton Keynes, Bucks, the year her dad was diagnosed. At the time, she decided that once was enough — but when her mum said that she wanted to run this year’s London Marathon, she decided to do it with her.

They ran for Dementia Revolution, the London Marathon charity of the year. “We got places and were then invited to become her revolutionary by the charity,” Abi said.

Together, they have raised £39,000, including Gift Aid, and finished the race holding hands in a time of 5:13:06.

Selina Walker, 47, of Thetford Park, has given herself only a few days to recover from the London Marathon, she will be running the Milton Keynes marathon on bank holiday Monday.

“The married mum of two ran in London to help her paradate to children’s hospital Great Ormond Street after her son Dominic, 13, received life-saving care there seven years ago. “Everyone’s been so supportive and generous and I feel very blessed to have had this support and the legs to carry me over,” she said.

Selina finished in 4:44:51. She originally hoped to raise £200,000 for GOSH but is on track to accumulate £2,500.

She is a member of the Girls Go Running group and trained for the race with her good friend from the club, Natasha Evans, 45, who also ran the marathon. Despite not starting together, they found each other along the way.

“Patience allowed us to meet at mile 14 and we did six miles together,” Selina said. Natasha added: “We ran through Canary Wharf together, which was amazing, until mile 26 when I went ahead.”
Marathon newbie Natasha, who also lives in Thorley Park, raised funds for little-known Cambridge-based cause Please Take Me There, which provides free, non-emergency transport for seriously ill children and adults, helping them to access healthcare, family occasions and dream days out on a private plane flown by volunteer pilots.

"I've raised £1,971.40 and would love if I hit £2,000," said Natasha, who crossed the line in 4:28.35 and had her photo taken with Virgin Radio DJ Chris Evans.

"I said 'Can I have a photo please as I'm Natasha Evans... obviously not your wife!'"

Sarah Ockenden, 36, celebrated her marathon finish with pizza and wine on The Strand.

Sarah, who works at Nooldies Solicitors in Market Square, raised money for StepH's Wishes, a charity set up in memory of Stephanie Knight, who died from a rare and aggressive bone or soft tissue cancer called Ewing's sarcoma in May 2013. She was 21.

The Knight family created StepH's Wishes to keep her legacy alive. They give young adults with cancer 'memory days', which can range from a simple family meal cooked at home by a chef to a stay in a five-star London hotel.

Sarah completed the marathon in 5:58:09. "I'm feeling really proud of myself today, glad I did it and the crowds were amazing," she said.

"Fundraising so far is up to £1,630," said Reading University student and former Bishop's Stortford High School boy Jack Stewart, 20, who ran his first ever marathon in under four hours.

He ran in aid of Dementia Revolution, a cause close to his heart as his paternal grandmother suffers from Alzheimer's.

After the race, Jack, his family – who live in St Michael's Mead – and girlfriend Isabella went out for dinner and were joined by friends for drinks afterwards.

Speaking to the Indie on Monday, he said: "I'm doing very well, although very, very sore! I loved yesterday. All of my family, my girlfriend and my uni friends came to support, which really

"I ran it in 3:47:50, which I'm over the moon about. I've also now raised £2,650, which was beyond my wildest dreams."

Liz Duvev, 50, also ran for Dementia Revolution after the illness robbed her of her mother Eileen, who died in April aged 90.

The mother-of-four, who lives in Little Hadham and works as a school driver, finished in 8:14:37 and raised £2,829.20, including Gift Aid.

Stortford brothers Ben and Ed Bowler, were inspired to run after a close friend battled a cruel illness.

Ben, 36, and Ed, 40, who attended St Mary's Catholic School, have raised £14,825 for Leukaemia Care in memory of Stuart Marshall, who died last October from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a form of blood cancer. He was 56.

Stuart and his wife Lorna were babysitters to Ben, Ed and their brother and sister while they were growing up in Bishop's Stortford.

The siblings remained good friends with the couple and even visited the Marshalls in 2017 after they moved to Dubai. Ben and Ed clocked 4:05.59.

Father-of-two Andy Elms, 38, ran in memory of his younger brother, Tim, who died last year from pneumonia. Andy raised money for the Maypole House Charitable Fund and the Colchester & Ipswich Hospitals Charity Critical Care Unit Fund, where Tim spent his last few weeks.

The Maypole House fund provides respite services for the carers and families of children and adults with disabilities. This was a cause especially close to Andy's family's hearts.

Andy lives in Berkshire. Father Bob, is a consultant and former partner with Bishop's Stortford solicitors Tees Law.

Andy finished in 4:58:32 and so far has raised £6,032.20, including Gift Aid.
Herts & Essex High School teachers, from left, Ian Corner, Caitlin Hayward and Thomas Marlow

Natasha Evans with Chris Evans

Selina Walkley with son Dom