



FITNESS
IS IN
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GENES™

CASE STUDY

RUTH
DOBSON

RUTH'S STORY

Meet Ruth, 43, a management consultant who lives in South London. This is a story of what can be achieved when you really put your mind to something, but more impressively, Ruth has sustained the lifestyle changes she made and continues to challenge herself every year with a new goal. In 2016, it's an Ironman competition, and I'm sure there'll be other adventures aside from that. Whilst her story is inspirational, it's sadly not that unusual. Thank you to Ruth for sharing.

CHRISTMAS 2007

My entire family, including my 6-month old niece, have had to change their Christmas plans at the last minute because I had just had emergency surgery on my back, for the second time. I am 85kg (around 13st 6), far too heavy for my 158cm (5ft 2in) frame and very unfit. No wonder my back gave out.

I thought I was having fun in living a fast-paced expat life in Beijing working in a fulfilling but highly demanding job. In reality I was stressed, eating badly, drinking too much, sitting too long and hardly doing any exercise. Everything I did was starting to seriously jeopardise my health.

My life was too sedentary and too indulgent – I had no interest in any real exercise, although I had always loved being outdoors and had grown up loving hiking. I had no real concern about taking care of my body (or my mind!). I was living extravagantly and seemed to think I was indestructible.

I'd already had some wake-up calls but hadn't heeded them. This time, thankfully, something finally clicked.

Fast forward to April 2015

I have just completed the Marathon des Sables, allegedly the "toughest footrace on earth": 156 miles, self-supported over 7 days in the Sahara Desert. I weigh around 58kgs (around 9st 2), less than when I was a teenager. Leanne, from Bodyshot, who lived every step of the training with me, is at the finish in Morocco to celebrate.



THIS HAS ENTIRELY CHANGED MY MENTAL SELF-IMAGE



A difficult journey

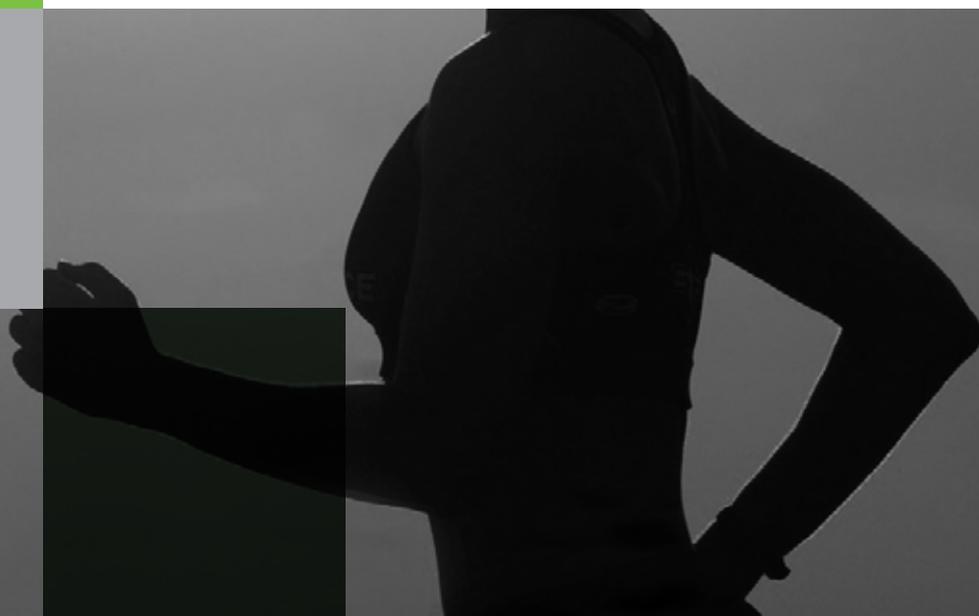
There were many ups and downs on the road from a hospital bed in Asia in 2007 to triumph in the Sahara in 2015. Support from other people has been paramount in getting me through – and personal training has played an essential part. Along the way I have discovered that exercise is not only important for my physical wellbeing, but is essential for my mental health. I've also discovered that not only do I like exercise - I can't imagine living without it.

The bumpy road to recovery

I had a 3-month recuperation period after my back surgery. I started by teaching myself to walk again using a treadmill initially set at 2km/hour and swam as much as I could. I progressed to Pilates to strengthen my core, kept up the swimming and started using a gym. Over a year on, in February 2009, still living in Beijing, I found an amazing personal trainer who worked with me for a year and a half, taking me to my first half marathon in October in 2009 and to the point where I was able to take on cycling the length of Africa in 2011 (Cairo to Cape Town: 7,500 miles over 4 months; around 75 miles a day): a highlight of my life! Later in 2011, however, brought a big down: in the autumn, back in the UK, I got a cough and, despite treatment, this progressed to a serious lung infection. I was eventually diagnosed as having a rare chronic health condition that means my immune system does not work, making me highly susceptible to infection without long-term treatment. There followed 18 months of intensive hospital visits, specialists, getting used to an on-going regime of regular invasive treatment, and a lot of sickness. I tried to keep exercising but was pushing myself too hard.

Another knock...

Eventually, in late 2012 I decided I needed to stop trying to do anything intensive until my body started to recover properly. I suffered from depression and was referred for counselling. The counselling helped at great deal, but I knew that getting back to a point where I could exercise was essential to my overall well-being. It felt like a vicious circle: not being able to exercise made me more depressed and less able to find ways to recover. I had lost around 16kgs (2.5st) since my peak at 85kgs in 2007 but



had started to gain weight again and this didn't help my mind-set.

Finally, after taking lots of baby-steps, in the summer of 2013 I felt ready to step things up again, but I knew that I still needed to take things slowly. I also knew that a personal trainer was likely to be the best approach for me. The experience in Beijing had taught me how beneficial this could be: the enthusiasm and encouragement of a trainer, the diversity of exercise that they bring, the personal attention and adaptation, as well as the need to turn up at a certain time or face consequences!

Finding Bodyshot

I was keen to be outside and I knew that I wanted to incorporate some boxing training into my workouts. Luckily a Google search turned up Bodyshot very quickly. I was pretty nervous meeting Leanne for the first time, despite my previous exercise experience. I was still feeling fragile, overweight, unfit and afraid of overdoing things. I needed a trainer who would bring the intelligence to understand my situation and adapt to it, not just push me hard, but encourage me and push me just the right amount.

Looking back, it's clear that we made really rapid progress: I completed the Marathon des Sables only 20 months later. From the start, training with Leanne was definitely challenging but not too far outside of my - initially quite small - comfort zone. I had also signed up for a beginners running course and had begun running regularly again as a result. Sprints in my training sessions enhanced the running. I made some great friends running, one of whom became my training buddy – an approach that I highly recommend for the fun and little bit of friendly competition it brings.

The Marathon des Sables

The idea to run the Marathon des Sables (MdS) came from a friend who did it herself in 2014, right after her successful completion of the race. She told me if anyone could do it, I could – that it was 90% mental. Well, it might be 90% mental (it probably is) but that 10% physical is pretty important

and took a great deal of work! It was going to be the hardest thing I had ever done, but 8 months on from starting to train with Leanne, I felt confident and well enough to sign up.

Leanne was 100% behind me from the outset and there is no way I could have done it without her support. I found a specialist MdS trainer in Wales (a 12-time finisher) and Leanne was open-minded enough to come down to find out about his approach to training. She adapted and incorporated this in our training sessions. She ran literally hundreds of miles with me in training, sometimes practically dragging me through and always encouraging me to meet my training goals. I remember my first 10-mile run in July 2014 during which I seriously wanted to kill her, but somehow we both survived (and finished!). Trips to a specialist physiotherapist up in Leicester and to the South Downs for fully loaded running training (carrying an 8kg backpack) followed – nothing was too much trouble, including the trip to meet me at the finish, ready with a Bodyshot T-shirt!

Looking ahead...

It's tough to do a race like MdS, but in some ways coming back and continuing with training was as hard as training for the race – it's easy to lose focus after a big challenge. Leanne kept me on track over the summer following the race, despite some set-backs. In August 2015 I twisted my back and had to drop out of a fun event I had been looking forward to. Perhaps this was just a little reminder of what things could have been like if I hadn't taken my health in hand back in 2007. Luckily it's not a serious issue, because of my good underlying fitness, and I am now considering my next challenge, most likely an "Ironman" in July 2016. With help from Bodyshot, it's definitely a realistic challenge. Maybe your challenge isn't quite as crazy as mine are – but I encourage you to find it and push yourself even just that little bit further than you think you can. You might be amazed by what is possible and how amazing it will make you feel!

If you're interested in talking to Bodyshot about how we can help you, please get in touch with Leanne on 07401 441 818 or send an email to info@bodyshotperformance.com.



INFO@BODYSHOTPERFORMANCE.COM
WWW.BODYSHOTPERFORMANCE.COM