

PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO DO CRAZY STUFF

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Abstract Everybody has some time to spare during their days. No one is so occupied that he/she cannot take time for their health. Especially in this coronavirus time, some understand how important our health is, others stay oblivious of this fact. I realised that health is important years ago when I didn't feel fine with myself and also with my time management. I needed a change in my life. So I began running. The first few steps were hard, then as the time flew by, I enjoyed it more and more. In this essay, I will explain how it all began, and how I invested my free time into running.

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Introduction

The first hard part of this task is to find an interesting topic to write about. I have done a lot of things in my life, some of them interesting, some of them not. I realised that a lot of time has passed since my last task that was at least similar to this one - to write something with a lot of words. I am a person who doesn't talk a lot. I prefer the quality of speech over quantity, so the second hard task is to talk about the chosen topic with really a lot of words. But what needs to be done must be done, so let me do it.

It was some years ago when I was sitting on the balcony looking down on the street. People were walking their dogs, some of them still lazy because of deprived sleep due to New Year's celebrating. I had begun with my inner speech, thinking about which unusual thing I could do this year. I was thirty and something at that time. I did not have a family at that time, and was living alone with my two sphynx cats. My usual daily routine was boring. Wake up in the morning, taking care of personal hygiene, going 11 floors down with the elevator, going to the parking spot, sitting in the car and driving to my job. Then the 20 and some minutes drive to work. Sometimes even more, when the traffic was busy. When I got there I always parked my car on the same spot, then going to the office and pretending to be a good employee for the next eight and some hours. After the job again back home, feeding myself, feeding the cats and work again. Unlock the computer, think and finalise some nuances for my work for the next day, then sleep, and the next day the same routine again. Day by day, always the same. Getting nothing out of my life, just those two days when the hardly anticipated weekend had come.

So I said to myself, something needs to be done here. You are getting locked inside daily routines, do something that you have wished to do for a long time. New year, new opportunities, new decisions. I always liked nature in all times, so I figured out, maybe this is something to do...going out enjoying the snow, make something for myself, something that will make me feel better. In previous years, I had put on some additional weight, so this drove me to decide that I would begin to run. I put on my sneakers and dressed warmly and went outside. So where to go now? The decision was to go and run a circle with a length of 20 kilometres. I began running, really slowly, step by step; after an hour I was still progressing, and the winter didn't bother me. Approximately 5 kilometres from home I stopped, I couldn't run anymore. I

was thinking of a great job, but I still needed to come home. I was not very close yet, still a long way to home. I was very thirsty and very tired. Somehow I managed to get home. I went to the kitchen took a glass of water, sat in the chair and thought how unprepared I was at the age of thirty. The next day when I woke up I was feeling like not one, but more bad things had happened to me the day before. There was not a single muscle that didn't hurt. The whole day was very painful. When the night came again I again dressed warmly, put on my sneakers, turned on the repeat mode, and again went to yesterday's circle. It took me 40 minutes more to complete it. For the next fourteen days I was more or less thinking what is wrong with me, why can I do things with more sense, why don't I do it as all the others do. First, they walk, then they run three kilometres, maybe five to prepare the body.

Somewhere in my mind I did know that I liked running a lot, but I needed time to prepare my body and enjoy it. So I did it as regular runners do, I surfed the web, searched for information on how to do it properly. I found an article where the training seemed fine and decided to train by that programme. I was training without any purpose, without some goal to do a half marathon or marathon, the goal was just to get fit. I was feeling better and better each day that went by. In September that year, there was this radio broadcast where some runners advertised an event that would happen soon. The event was a 75 kilometres run from Celje to Logarska Dolina. There were also 17, 33 and 42 kilometres available, but for me, the only thing was to complete 75k. I filled in the application and went there on the start line. It was Saturday at 6 am when we started in Celje. I was looking at all these guys and girls. Everybody waiting to go. I wasn't scared, I was willing to do it. The only possibility for me was to get to Logarska Dolina. There was night, day, rain and sunshine metaphorically and actually during the run. After ten hours I was at the Finish line, feeling euphoric and happy, also grateful that I did it without any real trouble. There were some runners in really bad shape on the finish line, doctors helped them. I was glad I was not one of those athletes.

In the next few weeks my mind was occupied with thinking about the completed task, and also playing with the thought what more can be done in the future. I found a race in Hungary, a four-day event at which the runners will complete at average 53 kilometres per day. Ok crazy man, do it the said voice in my head. The winter was here again, short days, long nights. I was dedicated to this goal in March the next year. Day by day I went out and ran. I was running everywhere, roads, forests, hills,

a stadium, everywhere. After almost 15 months of running, I went to Hungary. At that time I also was not scared. Some ultramarathoners there were well known to me, people I read about, people who were dedicated to running, to a healthy life. I thought, oh my god what am I doing here, again me and my unreasonable decisions. But what is here is here.

The first day was fine, also the second one. Because I ran around 20 kilometres a day at my training these two 50 and some kilometres per day wasn't so hard. But the third-day reality shined in its whole light. I woke up the third day and I was like those guys from Logarska. Bad, my muscles hurt, my mind had stopped believing I would make it through the third day. I went to the start, and a lot of runners were already missing. The start guy announced lets go..and we began. After the twenty-first kilometre, I was exhausted. My friend who went there with me said to me the smartest thing would be for you to stop now. You are on your limits. Look at your body, listen to yourself. He was right, I was beaten by the race, completely. I was obliged to quit the race. There were some mixed emotions. On the one hand, I was happy that I almost came to the final stages of the race, but, on the other hand, I was depressed at being a quitter, but, as my friend told me, it was not the mind that made me stop, it was my body. We went back home and after a few days, I was back on the track determined that next year I would go back and finish what I had started.

So this was the end of arch. I trained through the next month. Then September came and again and there was this 75k race from Celje to Logarska. I participated again. There, on the start, I met a lot of my friends. During all these races I meet a lot of interesting people, we talked a lot before, after and during these races. There were people from all occupations, some of them with families, others without. When we discussed what is the reason that we run, there were almost as many reasons as there were runners. When my friends that didn't run asked me why don't I do regular marathons or something more reasonable, I always answered that I do it because I can. Explaining to someone who never did anything extreme why someone does it is even harder than making the extreme event. Usually, there is no reasonable explanation. I have read that endorphins in our brains are produced at a higher level, and that it is possibly very similar to taking drugs. So, this is probably the reason why people do this unreasonable thing.

I was feeling better in my life, I did something besides going to work and back again. My mind was getting clearer, and through days I went easier because of my running. There were thousands of kilometres on that time for each year that went by. I have read books about running, watched movies about running, searching for the next race where I would go, searching for new roads for my running. At weekends I went to the train station, waited for the train, and with my backpack and goodwill travelled to Most na Soči. In my back pack there were always 3 litres of water, chocolate, a fresh shirt, 2 bananas and a phone. Each weekend when I came to Most na Soči, the procedure was always the same. I ate a banana and begin putting one foot in front of the other, all the way through the hills back to my home town Kranj. Usually, it took me 7 hours to get back home. The distance on this road was 75 kilometres, so I was better prepared. When, for example, I did my first Logarska there was the same distance, but there was 2300 less altitude, and altogether it took me 3 hours more to complete.

On YouTube I found out about this race in Greece that has a tradition of 30 plus years. Every year on the last Friday in September runners go from Athens to Sparta, a total distance of 247 kilometres, with a time limit of 36 hours. Hm...what about this one? But there was still this unresolved 4 day Hungarian race in the back of my mind. I read through the demands that the Greek organisers had for the racers. Everyone should be checked by doctors – ok that's easy, another thing was that every participant should finish a 24h race before applying to race, or instead of finishing a 24hr race, one should participate (and finish) at least one race that is longer than 200 kilometres. One of these things should happen at least in the same year for a runner to get on the list of participants. I found a perfect solution. There was this one day race in Hungary that covered 212 kilometres, and it was mostly on the same course as the one I didn't finish. Things were getting serious and I decided to go to Athens.

So I read more seriously about these long distances and what one needs to be aware of. Mostly people who did this kind of races said that everything begins in the mind. One must be prepared mentally, the body is limited to around 150 kilometres, after that the mind is in charge. I knew that my body was prepared for the advertised length, I had run more than thirteen thousand kilometres by that time, so there were only these two things, keep on with the training and prepare the mind. The race was in June this year. I had an additional three months to prepare mentally and organise

logistics. I asked my friend who was with me when the failed Hungarian race happened to go with me there again. After I told him that it is just a one-day event not a distributed one, he looked at me like I was crazy. But he knew, I saw, that I was in better shape than I was back then. He said sure, I will go, and he said – you will do it. There was not a single doubt in my mind, that I would go there and do it. I needed to do it if I ever wanted to go to the Sparthatlon.

So, in June, we went there to this Ultrabalathon race of 212 kilometres. There were two other Slovenes there besides me, a guy from Ljubljana and a woman from Celje who finished that race, and there were 3 more Slovenes who didn't make it. The race was around the Balaton lake. There were more than two hundred runners at the beginning of the race. There were 42 time zones, at which everyone should be at a specific time. If someone was not at the time zone at a specific time the runner was disqualified. The race itself was great. Hungarians who live around the lake know the event, and during the early morning and the day, there were a lot of people cheering there by the road. Time flies by when there are people by the road, the mind gets occupied easily. When there are so many people the fatigue comes into focus much later than it would if there would be just empty road and the runner. My friend was driving with the car from time zone to time zone, preparing me food and drinks, and also giving me a message if I needed it. He was telling me how much ahead of time I was and he made plans for future points, told me where I would need to be more mindful and where the road would get nicer for me. He did help me a lot with his pieces of advice.

The night of that race was a little harder, because there were no people by the road, although there were some pubs that we passed by, people having a good time at Saturday evening, and we runners having our good time our way. There was also deprivation of light, because we ran through areas with no public lighting. The hardest part of the race for me was when I came to 183 kilometres. The girl who was there on the checkpoint said to me that I still had 10 hours to finish the race. I was feeling really bad, but I did know that I still had less than a marathon till the end and a lot of time. I took my time there on that point, ate, drank and rested, and after an hour's rest, I went further. It was just the head for the next six hours, but I came to the finish line. I had managed the time limit. In the next six hours, there were others who came to the finish line.