Chris Genes

As a youth I was a sprinter/hurdler and represented Leicester Coritainians running at places such as White City and Meadowbank and was fortunate to have an international athlete as a coach and my future was bright. I really enjoyed track sessions, however distance running and longer run training destroyed me. I could not handle the peer pressure from youths who chased me, threatened me, threw sticks and stones at me when I ran the streets, all because runners were considered wierdo’s and running wasn’t a main stream. That was back in the late 60’s early 70’s. Fortunately times have changed now – look how many runners you see out there nowadays.

Although I played a lot of sport (football. Cricket and badminton) I did not take up running as a sport until 1999, when at the age of 45 I was successful in getting an entry in the 2000 London Marathon, running for Seargant Caring for Children with Cancer, who was supporting my eldest grandson Joseph. I started from a zero base in the December and by the April I crawled round London in 5 hours 35 minutes – but I did it and I got the running bug.

Two weeks later I was talking to a seasoned Strider (Mick Stephens) and he told me all about Striders and I thought, why not give it a try. So one Wednesday evening I just turned up. I was welcomed into the club as a ‘novice’ runner and I soon made improvements - running and racing all over the country both with the Striders in local league races and also further afield. I had definitely got the running bug. Over the next six years I ran another six marathons (four London, Amsterdam and Dublin), plus countless half marathons, 10k’s, six and five milers (as parkrun wasn’t around then there were very few 5k races unless you went to a track event). I was an active member of SSRC and for two years I was Club Secretary and also Race Director for the clubs Chris Ingram Race which was run in and around the grounds of Stapleford Park.

With starting to run in my mid 40’s I picked up quiet a few injuries along the way, then in 2007 I had to stop running completely, as I had to have a major operation on my right hip. Still relatively young and active, I was able to have a resurfacing procedure (known as a Birmingham hip and the same procedure Andy Murry had recently), as opposed to a full hip replacement. Although the procedure was a success I was advise by my consultant not to run again. I took the outcome hard and difficult to accept and severed all my ties with the club (I couldn’t cope with watching and supporting without being able to join in). I even threw way all of my running gear and draws full of race tee shirts. Later I regretted this, but fortunately I did keep my race medals. I was so disappointed at not being able to run again I even threw away my race records and personal best times. That’s how not running ever again hit me.

That was until I started supporting and helping my daughter Nikola train and prepare herself for her first London Marathon in 2018. I came across runners in Melton Country Park on a Saturday morning whilst walking my dog and I learnt about parkrun. I though, should I try and could I run 5k with my hip? So over the next few months I secretly trained myself up to run the distance and on 4th November 2017 I turned up (much to Nikola’s surprise) and completed my first parkrun. The running bug was back. I became a regular parkrunner and I ran with Melton Running Club on Monday evenings. My hip was standing up to me running again, so long as I was careful and ran within my limits.

I then went with Nikola and ventured out on a few SSRC outruns on a Wednesday evening and then I rejoined SSRC after a break of about 10/11 years. My running improved and I soon started running in races again, much against my consultants advise, although I do know my limits and will not race any more than the West End 8 mile event. That’s far enough for me now. I made the mistake of running the Hose half with Nikola and that really hurt.

The hardest part of running again after a long break is accepting you cannot run as quickly as you could all those years ago – even though you push yourself to do so. That’s were Club Standards come into play. Looking back on the SSRC website I found a few race reports when I was running in 2006 and matched them again my age category at that time (MV50) and I was achieving Silver standard for most of those races. Looking at my times now as a MV65 runner I seem to be getting Silver standards now. Really pleased with that and it puts it into perspective for me.

During the last few years I held the position of Men’s Captain and the club saw a resurgence in cross country running. In January 2020 I took on the role as Club Chair. What a difficult two years it has been for the club and its members with Covid 19 producing restrictions of various degrees that meant for the majority of the two years we became a ‘virtual club’ with no formal activities and races. Fortunately, at the time of writing this we are coming out of restrictions and races are back in the diaries.

As a club we have ridden the dark days out and although we have dropped a few members our numbers are increasing again with lots of new and returning members joining us on club nights and racing.

With regards to my running story – I enjoy the support and encouragement all club members give to each other and it’s great to see so many people of all abilities out there running and racing – such a change to attitudes from my time running in late 60’s and early 70’s.

I plan to continue running and support the club and its members for as long as I am able to and also to invest in my long-term health with the benefits running provides. My mantra is “One day I’ll not be able to run – but that day is tomorrow and not today”.

