

‘Running the London Marathon brought me closer to my daughter’

Good Housekeeping's editor-in-chief, Gaby Huddart, was spurred on to run her first London Marathon when her daughter Lara Huddart-Ouabdeslam signed up to do it – and it's a memory they will cherish for ever



Running the TCS London Marathon was, without question, one of the best experiences of my life. Nothing can beat the thrill of hearing thousands of people calling out your name, of knowing you are pushing yourself to the absolute limit of mental and physical endurance, of being slap bang in the middle of a truly iconic international event.

But for me, the icing on the unbelievably delicious cake was the fact that my daughter Lara was running that race with me.

I'm in my 50s and not a natural sportswoman, so I knew I was doing something pretty special, but Lara had only just turned 19 and she'd never entered a running race before. My feelings of pride were quite overwhelming.

Lara ran ahead of me, bagging a seriously impressive time of 4:45, and when I jogged through the finish line around 20 minutes later (recording a time of 5:09) she was standing there waiting for me with open arms. It was a wonderfully euphoric mother-and-daughter moment and a memory we will both cherish for ever. There's no doubt we are bonded by our shared experience of that rainy April day, but, in fact, the months of training and preparation also brought us closer in ways I couldn't have anticipated.

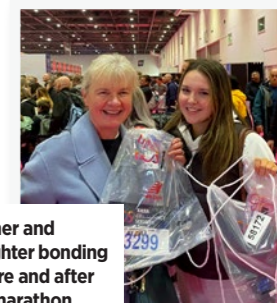
MAKING A CONNECTION

Lara is the younger of our children (Juliet, her older sister, is 22) and her departure for university last September left me and her dad, Moussa, feeling quite emotionally bereft about our newly empty nest. Lara didn't look back for a second. After the horrible social restrictions of lockdown, she was desperate to make the most of every minute away from home and keeping in touch with her mother was clearly low on her freshly independent list of priorities.

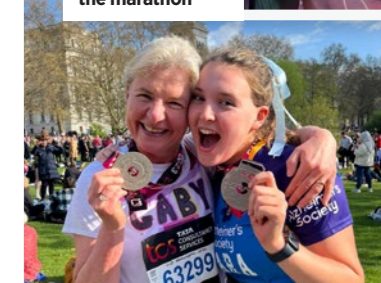
Lara was always the more minxy of my daughters, and through her teens we had an occasionally tempestuous relationship – we certainly knew how to wind each other up! I was worried that she'd see university as a chance to break free from the parental bonds and abandon me completely. I found the separation tough and would resort to sending pictures of dachshunds (a shared passion) to prompt an 'Aw, cute' response, which was enough to reassure me she was alive and well. Then, completely out of the blue last December, Lara posted a message on our family WhatsApp group saying she'd signed up for the London Marathon and asking us to sponsor her. I was shocked and impressed, but also green with envy. I'm a keen but casual runner (I completed a half marathon three years ago) and for the past 30 years I've been saying I would enter the London Marathon, but I always thought I was too busy to fit in the training required.

Lara's commitment spurred me on. I checked she didn't mind, then put my name down, too. I thought it might be a fun experience for us to share, but I had no idea how wonderfully bonding the months of training would turn out to be. We both signed up to an app called Strava, which records all your training runs – the distance, speed and times – then gives you the option of sharing your results with friends using the app. The regular notifications of Lara's increasingly long and fast runs were all the

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Mother and daughter bonding before and after the marathon



Love and relationships

reassurance I needed that she was alive and well – no cute dachshund photos required!

She would ping a thumbs-up when I sent her my run information and we'd trade details on the weekly longer run that formed an important part of the marathon training. Lara's progress really spurred me on. Every text message we exchanged about running was a comfort and a connection.

The full reality of what we were actually doing only hit a few days before the race, when we travelled to the ExCel centre in London to register and collect our numbers. It was swarming with thousands of people, all of whom, to my eye, looked supremely fit and athletic. That's when the nerves really kicked in, my mind constantly playing games, saying, 'What do you think you're doing?' and 'Why the hell are you doing this?' Lara had chosen to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society in memory of her grandfather John (my beloved stepdad), who had succumbed to dementia before he died in 2020, while I was running for *Good Housekeeping's* 2023 partner charity, the National Literacy Trust.

Suddenly, I noticed Lara had grabbed a Sharpie and was writing on a big canvas, dubbed 'the runner's wall'. When I saw she had written 'Dear Grandpa, I'm running this for you...' all the bottled-up emotion, love, fear and tension of the previous months came flooding out. I completely lost it and burst into tears. It makes me well up now to think about it. Lara was beyond excited. I was a mess.

HIGH ON ENDORPHINS

Race day got off to a chaotic start – our train was delayed, it was hammering with rain, I was fixated on the thought of having to use a Portaloos (I have a bit of a phobia – don't ask!) and tensions were high, high, high. But I needn't have worried. Once you start running, you get swept along by the roar of the crowd. Lara had scribbled 'Gaby' across the front of my vest, so every time I turned a corner, someone in the crowd shouted my name. For (most of) the next five hours I felt invincible. A proper athlete!

The marathon route takes you on a wonderful tour of London, through neglected areas, past huge, welcoming Afro-Caribbean communities, around the space-age Canary Wharf complex, over Tower Bridge and right up to Buckingham Palace. With music blasting out of pubs, bands playing – at Limehouse Roundabout a massive rock choir was belting out show tunes – I didn't have the chance to notice my tired legs.

Catching sight of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament gave me a surge of energy, and when I spotted a '600m to go' sign I pushed into what felt like a crazy sprint. In hindsight, I probably peaked too soon – it was a really, really long sprint! – but in my head at that moment, I was Paula Radcliffe and everyone in the crowd was urging me on.

It was wonderful to cross that finish line and fall into Lara's arms. I'm so proud I stuck to my guns and never slowed to a walk, and I'm also very proud that the £2,600 I raised for the National Literacy Trust will buy books for 600 children who wouldn't otherwise have a book of their own.



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We loved the experience so much we've signed up to do it again. Lara says she is chasing a sub-four-hour time and I'm set on coming in under five hours. If I hadn't slowed to high-five all the children lining the streets, and if I hadn't stopped briefly to hug family and friends (who kept dropping down into the Underground and popping up again for another hug a bit further along the route), I may well have finished with the elite runners!

For the next three days, I was high on the endorphins. The run gave me such an amazing sense of achievement. I found myself googling flat marathons (I hate hills, but give me flat terrain and I'm like *Forrest Gump*) and it turns out Copenhagen is completely flat, so next year, Lara and I hope to run London in April and Copenhagen in September.

Who knew that marathon running could be such a wonderful hobby for us to share? I'm pretty sure that as long as I keep offering to pay for her entry fees, Lara will run with me!

PHOTOGRAPHY: LIZ McCAULAY; HAIR AND MAKEUP: LINDSEY POOLE

'I am so proud of what Mum achieved'

Lara, 19, remembers the emotional moment when she welcomed her mum with open arms as she crossed the finishing line.



I'd been a competitive swimmer through my teens, but I struggled to find a sport I wanted to throw myself into at university, so I took up running just to keep fit and decided I'd set myself a marathon distance as a challenge. When I told Mum I'd signed up for the London Marathon, she seemed really concerned for me, saying, 'Are you sure?'

That's so much training to try to fit in with your studies! Then, to my complete surprise, she added, 'Can I join you?'

At first, I did think, 'Hey, that's my thing,' but once we started sharing our runs on Strava, I found myself feeling spurred on by her dedication. We got quite competitive with each other! It's funny how Strava connected us. It meant I could check how Mum was doing without having to call her, and she seemed to find it reassuring that if I was running well I couldn't have been partying too hard. Without making any conscious effort, we were messaging each other almost daily just to check up on fitness levels and training schedules.

After four months away at university, I returned home for Christmas and the highlight was a trip to a serious running shop together to buy our marathon trainers. We were so excited! Getting the kit brought everything into sharp focus. I'd been doing research into different gels and electrolytes to keep me going while I ran, and I badgered Mum into buying me a special vest with pockets to hold them all. She insisted on going 'old school' with plain water and jelly babies.

As the day drew nearer, Mum got more and more twitchy. To be fair, I was having anxiety nightmares, too – the sort where you turn up at the start line to find you've forgotten your shoes! – but she kept repeating, 'We'll be fine, we'll be fine,' over and over again. So annoying! I had thought we would be fine all along, but now she was making me worry.

THE BIG DAY

In the end, the race was truly amazing. I loved every minute. I was standing at the finishing line when Mum blasted through. I felt so proud of her!

I'm so impressed by what Mum achieved. Not just running the entire 26 miles – no walking! – but also how she managed to find time for training, considering everything else she does. The training schedule is

harder than the marathon itself, but Mum missed fewer training runs than I did, even though I had far more spare time than her. She's pretty amazing.

FAVOURITE MOMENTS

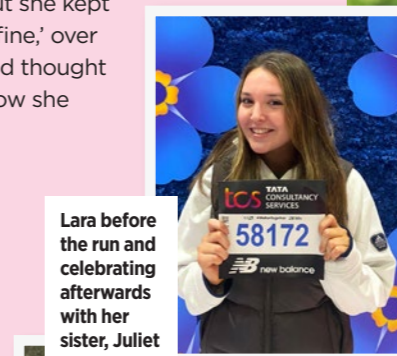
For the next days and weeks we didn't stop talking about our run, swapping anecdotes and comparing favourite moments: for me, it was the narrow track around the Cutty Sark, where you're incredibly close to the crowds. For Mum, it was the long tunnel in Docklands, where the air was thick with the beats of hundreds of synchronised drummers.

I'd love us to do more runs together and it would be fantastic if this became a tradition for us, especially if we get to travel the world together chasing marathons.

Yes, it would have been lovely if Mum had been on the side of the road cheering me on, but if I'm completely honest, she was a huge source of motivation for me. If she hadn't signed up, it would have been a lot easier for me to quit during training. And when I was out there running, I knew I couldn't stop or slow down or she'd overtake me – and there's no way I was going to allow that to happen!

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Gaby was running to raise money for the National Literacy Trust, GH's charity partner for 2023. Half a million children in the UK don't have a book of their own at home. With a donation of just £15, you could give them the gift of reading. To donate, please visit literacytrust.org.uk/goodhousekeeping



Lara before the run and celebrating afterwards with her sister, Juliet

