

The Orange Running Shoes

The story of a dumb commitment



Image created with Dall-E 2. Prompt: "Painting of an orange Running Shoe with blue socks running in a forest"

If you had asked me in 2013 whether I would ever run a half marathon across a highway bridge with a view of the Baltic Sea, I probably would have thought you were crazy. In fact, at the beginning of August 2013, the idea of wearing running shoes was still a distant dream. That's because I was still in the

neurology ward in Roskilde, lying in a hospital bed. You see, I had a stroke at the ripe age of 30, caused by a deep vein thrombosis in my brain. For almost a week, I was plagued by unbearable headaches. I probably tried every remedy I could get my hands on. Multiple visits to the hospital and my general practitioner yielded no results.

A Stroke is no Joke

In their defense, I have to say that 30 years old is not a typical age for a stroke. Unless you're a woman who has been on birth control pills for several years. That was not the case for me.

At some point, an emergency doctor had the idea to test a few neurological functions. So, I had to perform the same exercises that the police once used for alcohol tests on the road. Walking in a straight line, standing on one leg, spinning around, and so on. The result was clear. The doctor told me with great seriousness that migraine was not the diagnosis that applied to me. He also let me know that he had already informed his colleagues in neurology that I would be introducing myself there on short notice.

So, I found myself in the aforementioned hospital with the onset of partial facial paralysis. My balance was terrible. Eating was not as easy as it used to be. Reading, watching TV, or listening to music quickly led to dizziness and more headaches. Even going to the bathroom became unbearably strenuous when you have double-vision. That was because my already pronounced tendency to strabismus was completely out of control due to the paralysis.

However, one day I made the discovery that if I covered my left eye, my ability to move around in space improved a lot. That was an incentive for me to go on exploratory tours in Roskilde. After all, I could only lie around in the hospital room. Over time, the tours got longer, and I ventured further out of the city. Once, I even managed to go on a 25-kilometer journey around Roskilde Fjord. Otherwise, I spent the rest of my days sleeping and eating.

Enter, My Orange Running Shoes

Two weeks later, I was able to go back home. Since I was on sick leave, I tried to make the most of my time by doing some gardening. My garden had never looked so well-tended. And it never did so ever again. However, even though I enjoyed it, I could only work in intervals. Whenever I worked for half an hour, I had to sleep for two hours. Most days, I couldn't get out of bed before 10 AM.

Nevertheless, I managed to put in longer walks repeatedly, which were essential for my recovery. Walking can be a go-to cure for me. Nature itself

is a universal remedy. The sound of the sea or the rustling leaves in the forest is a central part of every meditation app. And for a good reason. But the wind in my hair and the blooming landscapes made the mindfulness experience a bit more interactive.

One day in October, a friend somehow convinced me to go on a short jog. It went as expected, considering I had been a long-time, professional couch potato. But I enjoyed it and wanted to continue.

Of course, I needed a decent pair of running shoes. I chose a bright orange pair of Adidas. I'm convinced that you could see me from twenty kilometers away. Safety first, I guess.

A Dumb Commitment

One day, when I had just managed to run 2.5 kilometers continuously for the first time, my friend asked if I wanted to join a half marathon at the Great Belt.

Reluctantly, I agreed. Sometimes I hated my impulsiveness. But what was even harder for me was to back out of a commitment once I had made it. That has always been the case with me.

The event wasn't too far away, about 9 months or so. And I wasn't even able to return to work yet. Somehow, I had a knack for getting myself involved in impossible projects.

So, the training began. Two kilometers turned into five. Over the next few months, I explored every corner of my surroundings. I was obsessed with finding new routes. No forest or country road remained unknown to me.



Own picture from a local run

In April, I spent a week on a school trip with my students in the mountains north of Malaga. My endurance received a real boost. Danes aren't particularly used to mountain landscapes, you know.

By May 2014, I was almost back to working full-time. I was running five times a week in my running shoes that looked like they belonged to a road worker.

At some point, I managed to run a satisfying 28 kilometers. That was probably in late July or so. I still remember vividly how I ran through the hay dust stirred up by the combine harvesters in the fields along the country roads.

The Showdown for My Orange Running Shoes

Finally, the big day had come. The race went across the Great Belt Bridge from Korsør to Nyborg. With a length of 18 kilometers, it was once one of the longest bridges in the world. Eighteen kilometers in the twilight zone between the seawater of the Baltic and another sea of thousands of ambitious runners like me and some of my friends.

As for me? I had a nasty cold. I had trained for nine months for a unique running event. The soles of my running shoes were worn thin. All for nothing? Not this time. A little cold wasn't going to stop me now. So there I stood on an exceptionally sunny September day, wearing my shining running shoes. You could quickly spot me in the crowd. Yes, I was the guy in the bright orange running shoes, dragging myself to the starting line.

In the beginning, things seemed to be going well. But all my training didn't prepare me for how to handle the euphoria of a big running event. The first 5 kilometers were uphill because we had to cross the suspension bridge first. In my eagerness, I ran faster than I had practiced during my training sessions. I guess I got carried away. That wouldn't have been a good idea, even if I had been in perfect health.

The reckoning came at the Sprogø lighthouse, about 10 kilometers in. My feet felt like they had been dipped in concrete by some mafia guy because I hadn't paid my debts. My breaths started to resemble those of Darth Vader. That's how it continued for the next eight kilometers. At kilometer eighteen, an angel passed me. Well, I'm not religious, but another runner took pity on me, cheered me on, and dragged me the last 3 kilometers to the finish line. 2 hours and 58 minutes. I was one of the last arrivals.

The Running Shoes Have Left the Closet, The Memory Remains

The following week, that cold knocked me out hard. But it was all worth it. It wasn't just about breaking the magical 21-kilometer barrier; it was also a symbol that I had fully recovered from my stroke. My running shoes accompanied me on three more half marathons since then. I can't remember when I retired them, but the orange color is permanently etched in my mind.



Own picture from the run in question