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## Great Strides



» Danielle Roberts (left) and Darla Soetaert running the 2014 Banff Jasper Relay

## Gratitude: A Reason for Running The 16K run that changed my life

By Danielle Roberts

WE ALL HAVE a variety of reasons that keep us running. They are what get us out of bed at dawn for a long run or motivate us to run when we are exhausted after a long day of work. We run for our health, we run to stay sharp, we run to have energy and because it makes us feel good, but we all should be adding one more item to that list: gratitude.

It was my second year running on a team at the Banff Jasper Relay, which takes place every spring in the Rocky Mountains. It's a breathtaking but gruelling event in which each member of a team runs a stage ranging in difficulty and distance. When I started my 16K leg, I intended to really push myself as I had been attempting to improve on my overall speed from the previous year. But when I started I felt sluggish, stiff and slow.

Five minutes into the race I was already struggling. A woman who seemed close to my age caught up to me. Although I was having a tough time, we began to talk. "I'm Darla," she said. This is my first time running more than 10K," she admitted.

Our discussion turns towards the race's main charity, the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. She tells me that her mother had recently relapsed with a brain tumour. As we continue, I learn that she lost her father to lung cancer and a sister to a brain tumour. I am literally at a loss for words, I cannot fathom the amount of pain that she has gone through and yet here she is, this strong, courageous and beautiful woman running for her family. It was then I realized that my time goal from before the start of the leg was meaningless. I wanted to finish side-by-side with Darla.

When we crossed the finish line, Darla burst into tears. I embraced her, thanked her and told her how much I admired her. I will likely not ever see Darla again but her strength and positivity carried me through what was going to be a difficult race. That short amount of time that I spent with her has shaped and shaken me in the best way possible.

This year, the teams of the Banff Jasper Relay raised \$51,513 in support of the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. Running brings people together, gives us the fuel to be our best, allows us to recognize and be grateful for the wonderful people that we have in our lives – even those that we spend just 16K with – and that we must make every moment count. The next time you're out on a run think of the people and moments that you're thankful for, relish each and every run as a blessing and add gratitude to the list of reasons why you run. Every time I'm out for a run, I think of Darla. 