

# Kelly Egan: Recovering addict trades crack binges for marathons

BY KELLY EGAN, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN NOVEMBER 20, 2011



On Nov. 12, Barry, who doesn't want his last name published as he rebuilds his life from drug addictions, ran in the inaugural Ottawa Mission Possible Half Marathon. He stunned his running coaches by finishing 17th in a field of 212, with a time of one hour, 37 minutes.

**Photograph by:** Image courtesy, Doug Sasaki

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OTTAWA — For eight years, Barry burned through his crack in binges; all-time total unknown, but well into six figures of blown money, up in smoke through a little pipe.

He once went 17 days, he said, barely sleeping a wink, barely eating, bottoming out at a skeletal 135 pounds. The crack was king; he was slave.

It cost him a good job, and a house; on bad days, maybe \$1,000. It cost him many things without price tags.

But he's in a better place now. Barry, 44, who doesn't want his last name published as he rebuilds his life, is nearing the end of a five-month addiction treatment program run by the Ottawa Mission, one of the most intensive of its kind in Canada.

And, since the middle of July, Barry has learned to do one thing very, very well: Run.

On Nov. 12, Barry ran in the inaugural Ottawa Mission Possible Half Marathon, a loop that launched from The Marshes golf course in Kanata.

He had never really run in a road race before, but was an accomplished high school wrestler in his native Sudbury. He stunned his running coaches by finishing 17th in a field of 212, with a time of one hour, 37 minutes.

Is that good?

"It's unbelievable," said Christopher Paine, 49, one of the leaders of the Mission's weekly running group. "It's staggering. Freakish."

Not to mention that Barry, for much of the race, couldn't make sense of the road markers and was never sure how far along he was. But he had a plan: "Pass, but don't be passed." Boy, did it work.

Barry once had a good job with a phone company as a lineman. But booze and drugs were regular demons, despite two tries at 28-day treatments. He beat the booze, but not drugs. "I didn't give crack cocaine the respect it deserved," he says.

He fell into a pattern. He would work for a spell, then binge-use for a couple of weeks at a time. When the lineman job was finally lost, he just geared up with new tools and found another; then binged again.

Crack, he discovered, is not hard to find, not even in small-town Ontario. "It's not hard to get crack anywhere."

He heard about the Mission program while in detox in Sudbury. He arrived in mid-July and started running a few days later.

The Mission run group meets every Saturday morning, from spring to November. Numbers vary; sometimes only one client is there, sometimes eight or nine. It is not an endurance test. Some opt for a brisk walk.

Barry is good with dates, which he keeps written on a piece of paper in his pocket. Clean on July 5, at the Mission on July 16, quit smoking cigarettes on July 25, walked/ran his first five kilometres on July 30.

In August and September, he ran 80 kms. In October, ramping up to race day, he totalled 201.5.

"I think about everything," he said, when asked about his running mindset. "My past. My future. My friends. My family. When I'm running, I can be laughing inside or have tears running down my face."

He had run 20 kms a couple of times before race day, so he knew he could complete the distance. However, a couple of weeks before the big day, he came up with an Achilles injury and had to pause training.

For a man who tends to be obsessive, it was a good lesson, he said. The injury taught him three things: patience, tolerance and acceptance.

The week before the race, he was back running short distances, feeling ready to go.

Despite all the talk beforehand about just having "a good run" and running at a comfortable pace, he found his competitive spirit kicked in once out on the rolling course. Damn straight he would make this a

race.

Near the finish line, in fact, he wasn't thinking about achievement or running as a metaphor for self-improvement. "You know what I was thinking? There was this girl ahead of me and all I wanted to do was pass her." So he did.

It was only later that day, he said, that he felt a deep sense of accomplishment and was nearly overcome with emotion. In only five months, he had gone from being an edgy crack addict to being a competitive long-distance runner.

He graduates from the Mission program, called LifeHouse, in two weeks. He may well settle in Ottawa.

"This has been my home," he said. "What they do here in one day just totally blows me away."

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