Local Runner Uses Mississauga Marathon to Battle Depression

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Nivin Raizada, a twenty-six year old native of Mississauga, Ontario, will be running the 2016 Mississauga Marathon using his personal experience of battling depression as his motivation. Nivin has never backed down from a challenge, whether it was pursuing a soccer scholarship, graduating from university, or coming to terms with and fighting against the traumatizing and destructive effects of dealing with depression.

Nivin's adolescent years were about as impressive as you could imagine. He was a member of the Tecumseh Secondary School's Mississauga Marathon 10KM Student Relay Challenge championship team and was making multiple visits with his soccer club to NCAA athletic facilities. As Nivin approached his final year of high school, there was a significant drop off in his attitude, social life, and overall happiness.

"Within a six month period after graduating from high school, I could count on one hand the number of times I left the house," recalled Nivin. "I would be up every night until four in the morning, locked away in my room refusing to answer my phone or interact with friends and family; I checked myself out of reality and life."

Neither Nivin nor his parents really understood that he was exhibiting signs of depression. However, after his mood continued to worsen, he knew he had to do something. A self-realization journey through the USA, India, & Europe seemed like a great way to escape and truly find himself. Unfortunately, upon returning home Nivin only saw his depression worsen. "I was confused and unaware of what was really going on. I decided to 'self-medicate' myself with alcohol and pills to try and numb the pain, but nothing was working."

One way Nivin felt he could combat his depression was going to university, which led him to follow his passion for sports as he enrolled in the Sport Management program at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. Throughout his four years at university, Nivin's depression never weakened in spite of regular trips to the university health and wellness clinic. "There were times where I didn't know how I was going to graduate." With the help of his friends and family he was able to buckle down, complete his assignments, and eventually walk across the stage at convocation and receive his degree. On the surface, Nivin seemed fine and in the process of getting better. However, underneath it all he was still fighting this illness back at home in the midst of a job hunt.

After a year and a half stuck at home, still depressed and trying to secure employment, Nivin was getting incredibly frustrated and angry. Relations with his father became strained and the tipping point came on an evening in January 2015 where Nivin, with a bottle in his hand, ventured out into the night looking for answers. Worried about what might have happened to him, Nivin's parents called the police to come to their home and wait for his return. After hours of waiting, Nivin finally came back home to two officers and his parents sitting him down and outlining what had to be done. Later that night Nivin checked himself into a local rehabilitation center where the healing process finally began.

Checking in and completing the rehabilitation program was the first step for Nivin, but the next part would be just as difficult: getting his body back into shape. "Immediately after I got home from my time

at the rehabilitation clinic, the first thing I did was get on a bus to the University of Toronto-Mississauga campus and signed up for a gym membership. I treated going to the gym like my job," says Nivin. "I began to run the two hundred metre track a couple of times a week and by mid-February I decided that I was going to push myself to run the 10KM race at the Mississauga Marathon on May 2, 2015."

Even while he was on the track running, Nivin was still subjected to the lurking effects of his depression. "There was always some sort of force in my head trying to block out any positive thoughts, but I had to push past it and running helped me do that. Running for me is a form of meditation, it allowed me to grapple with knowing that I could fight through the urge to give up and quit when my depression told me I couldn't, and for me, that was the best accomplishment in the world."

Running not only helped Nivin get back to where he once was physically, it also helped him mentally as he developed a new mentality for everyday life that he still lives by to this day. "Every day I wake up and say to myself: my goal today is to set a new personal best, either physically running or mentally dealing with my depression and rising up from the rock bottom I constantly found myself at." Another tool Nivin uses to his advantage is the motto of his alma mater, '*surgite'*, Latin for "push on". The famous last words of Sir Isaac Brock became so meaningful to Nivin that he got it tattooed on his wrist and that "a quick glance at it during a run gives me that extra push to keep going". This motto and new mentality enabled Nivin to complete his training and ultimately accomplish his goal of participating in the 10KM event at the 2015 Mississauga Marathon, where he finished with an impressive time of 46:39.

Just over one year has passed since Nivin sought treatment for his depression, and he now says that he is the strongest he has ever been in his entire life, both physically and mentally. Nivin was able to land a full-time job at a private investigation firm, where he works as a video and informational analyst while on the side he works as a soccer referee in his home city of Mississauga. Nivin continues to train for upcoming races and his dream of becoming a FIFA certified referee.

With one year of experience in the 10KM under his belt, Nivin has decided to not only share his story, but dedicate his 2016 race at the Mississauga Marathon to the cause that had held him back for years. For Nivin, "getting outside and going for a run is the best medicine" and he cannot wait for April 30, 2016 to set another personal best in the MNP 10KM Run.