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fearless females

HEARD ABOUT THE LATEST EXCITING NEW RUNNING PHENOMENON SET TO SWEEP THE GLOBE? LISA JACKSON REVEALS ALL ABOUT KATHRINE SWITZER'S 261 FEARLESS MOVEMENT - AND HOW YOU CAN BE PART OF IT

PICTURES: HORST VON BOHLEN

A 261 group performs a pre-run warm-up

Once upon a time, less than 50 years ago, women weren't allowed to run marathons as it was feared that they'd prove much too arduous for us delicate ladies. Kathrine Switzer changed all that when, in 1967, she entered the then all-male Boston Marathon under the name KV Switzer. She was wearing bib number 261 when an angry race official tried, unsuccessfully, to evict her from the race by ripping it from her chest, an action that was caught on camera and sent shockwaves round the world. Switzer went on to campaign against this discrimination and five years later women were allowed to enter the Boston Marathon.

We've come a long way since then, but sadly many women still feel excluded from running, fearing that they're not fast or fit or slim enough, or because they live in countries where women aren't seen as equal to men and are discouraged from participating in sport. And once again such women have a champion in Kathrine Switzer, who decided to create the 261 Fearless Movement, which aims to set up running clubs, a website and a women-only forum in order to create an international transformational running community.

"Everyone relates to that story of me being attacked in the Boston Marathon because everybody has been told

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The German and Austrian 261 girls

at one time or another that they're not good enough, that they're too slow, too fat, the wrong colour or religion, or that they're a girl, and they're not welcome," says Switzer. "But then they go and do it anyway and – hey presto! – they're fearless. Women can run or walk with our group for very little money and find a non-judgemental community that will give them a glimpse into a world that frees them, even if just for an hour a week. Running gives all women a phenomenal sense of empowerment and soon they'll see ways they can change their lives in a positive way."

Jumping for joy!

FEELING FEARLESS

The name of Switzer's new movement came about when women began writing to her saying, "I'm wearing 261 on my back in the race tomorrow because it makes me feel fearless." When women started sending her photos of their 261 tattoos, Kathrine decided to develop a global network of 261 Fearless Clubs and contacted running coach Edith Zuschmann to help make her dream a reality. In 2013 Zuschmann and her psychologist and running/triathlon coach partner, Horst von Bohlen, developed a Train the Trainer course that aims to teach women how to lead all-female groups and set up 261 Fearless Clubs. "We teach our coaches how to create a really welcoming atmosphere for newbies and experienced runners alike, and also instruct them in our unique 261 training programme that includes drills and running games that improve technique and build strength, agility and co-ordination," says Zuschmann. The programme covers how to provide a safe environment for women to train in, how to cater to their specific physical needs and how to manage different personality types.

"For women, running isn't necessarily about getting faster (although that usually happens!), but is more about sharing the experience and creating a sense of community," says Zuschmann. "With our clubs there is no pressure or competition – it's just one hour every week that we call a 'running holiday' where women can run with their friends and have fun together."

Some of the 261 community

GLOBAL NETWORK

Having trained 261 Fearless coaches who've set up clubs in the UK, Germany, Austria, the US, Iceland, Albania and Malaysia, this year Zuschmann and Von Bohlen aim to offer 30 training weekends around the world, one of which will be held in the UK in spring.

Women's Running contributor Juliet McGrattan attended the training in 2014 and was so impressed by it that she decided to turn her existing group into a 261 Fearless Club. "We had embraced the 261 Fearless ethos anyway," she says, "as we're just a group of women who meet once a week to enjoy some exercise and carve some time for ourselves into our busy schedules." McGrattan says the structure of her group won't change but becoming part of the 261 Fearless Movement will open up new doors for them. "We've become part of a global network with opportunities that no longer scare us now we've gained so much self-confidence. For example, we're setting up an exchange with a 261 Fearless club in Austria – we've invited them to the Women's Running 10K in Liverpool – and our coaches will get support and ideas for sessions from the online forum. I also learned that providing fun, challenging activities will make women forget all about their daily struggles: if you're running sideways while

Running round Central Parl, New York

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Edith Zuschmann and Kathrine Switzer

Kathrine (left) at the 261 TTT London, 2014

windmilling your arms and laughing it's hard to think about your unpaid bills and tantrum-prone child isn't it?"

But Switzer's vision doesn't just end with 261 Fearless Clubs: she intends to create a global community of women who'll be able to get in touch with each other via the forum on her website which she hopes will have a safe portal on it in the future. "Women will discover that they're not alone out there," she says. "Even in very repressed situations, freedom and community begin in the heart, and when women start communicating with each other this will open the floodgates. We all know that when we run together we tell each other the secrets of our souls, and we think this'll happen even if women cannot get out of the house and must run together virtually. All over the world, running has been a major barrier-breaker – it has worked before, and it will work again."

→ The first UK 261 Fearless Train the Trainer training is planned for 29 April to 1 May 2016 in Manchester and costs US$261/£172 (accommodation is not included). For more information, email **trainthetrainer@261fearless.org.**

we did it!

These ladies have decided to help other women run by setting up Club 261 Fearless running groups

"I'd been leading two running groups for a couple of years and had already taken the UK Athletics qualification when I decided to train as a 261 Fearless trainer. The vast majority of my members are women of all ages, sizes and backgrounds and I've seen their fitness and overall confidence sky-rocket as they started running. This course gave me more insight into how to structure my sessions and how to deal with the physiological and psychological aspects of running that are specific to women. We did some really fun and more unusual warm-up activities – it was all very playful."

Beatrice Schaer, Croydon

"The image of Kathrine being manhandled during the Boston Marathon is in my head whenever I talk to women who say they can't run. I think of the times when women really wanted to run but were banned from events for spurious, chauvinistic 'medical' reasons. I'm fixated on the well-documented fact that many women feel self-conscious when they attempt sport, especially running. The 261 coaching taught me that being fearful about the way you look is no reason to deny yourself the joy of running, which is a pleasure at any age, weight – or stage of hormonal upheaval."

Ronnie Haydon, *Women's Running* contributor, Lewisham

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