

## Buzzing

I'm going to tell you what makes me different straight away. If I don't, it sort of buzzes around at the back of my brain like a fly stuck in a room. And it bugs me. You know that thing where they bang against the window and you just have to let them out because they're stopping you thinking about anything else? Well, that's how it feels. So what I do is either I open the window and let the fly buzz out into the world or I decide to never, ever let the fly out and eventually it stops buzzing. It depends

who I'm talking to.

The thing that makes me different from other eleven-year-old boys, apart from my fantastic running ability, is my parents have learning difficulties. It's no big deal for me. Really it isn't. I don't look after them. We look after each other.

My mum makes the best cakes ever. She's the kindest person in the world too. Honestly, you'd know if you met her. She might not be clever in the way of making sense of lots of things very quickly but she's clever in the way of understanding bigger things better than most people. She doesn't waste years of her life sending messages or texting. She doesn't do any of that. She won't even answer the phone. She talks to people if they're with her but apart from that she's not bothered. And she doesn't spend loads of time worrying either. She worries about something and then she stops worrying and then she's happy.

And when I worry I'm awake all night and in the morning my head hurts and my stomach aches and I can't concentrate at school. And I'm supposed to be clever. Not brilliant but sort of OK. But when Mum gets up she's smiling. Even though there's lots to worry about, she's smiling. So who's cleverer?

My dad's more like me in the way of worrying. He

can't just stop. If he's worried, he walks up and down the garden, even if it's the middle of the night. He just walks up and down, up and down, between the vegetables.

My dad practically lives in the garden. If you came to our house you might not see him unless you look out of the kitchen window, and then you might just see the top of his hat poking out from behind the beans. He grows potatoes, onions, beans, pumpkins, spinach and garlic. And if that makes you think we've got a big garden, we haven't. It's seven steps from our kitchen door to our back fence. I'm not kidding. One more step and you'd knock yourself out. Dad just grows everything really close together. Grandad taught him that.

My mum has four rules for life. My dad has one.

My mum's are:

*Be kind to people*

*Do your best*

*Check everything's switched off*

*Remember to look at the sky*

My dad's rule is:

*Love Alice (that's my mum)*

As for any other rules he follows hers. She's the most

important person in the world to him. They are like two halves of a whole. They fit perfectly. They're just not so good at the complicated stuff, like sorting out forms or if the washing machine needs fixing. My grandad did all that. That's my mum's dad.

My grandad lived down the road but he died two months ago. Just before school broke up for summer. And I know it really wasn't my fault, but sometimes I think maybe he died because of me. And that makes me feel so bad. Because I was the last one to see him alive.

### **100 metres is 100 metres**

My grandad was always running. Even when he was old he never really stopped. When I was eight I said can I come too and he said yes. He was pretty pleased I think. And those times running with him were some of the happiest times of my life. I'm not kidding.

We've got this little park round the corner and we went round it one day and measured the path like a running track. Grandad had a little pot of red paint and a tiny paintbrush and he just knelt down and made a dot every hundred metres in exactly the right place. He didn't even pretend not to do it. He just painted a dot and nobody seemed to notice.

We worked out it's 100 metres from the flower bed to the dog-poo bin, 100 metres from the dog-poo bin to halfway down the bench, 100 metres from halfway down the bench to the broken tree, and 100 metres from the broken tree to the shelter with the graffiti. We went round the path twice and marked out 1,000 metres, all in exactly the right place. I'd tell you more about it but it's probably best if you come yourself, if you want to see. Because it sounds quite boring and it really isn't boring at all.

And the best thing about our track is Grandad said it's exactly the same as the Olympic track because 100 metres is 100 metres wherever it is.

Anyway, last time I saw Grandad he just ran from the dog-poo bin to the bench and then he said, "I'm going to have to go home, AJ. I'm not feeling too good."

I said, "Please, Grandad, just a bit more. You can sit on the bench."

But he shook his head.

"No, AJ. Got to go."

And then he smiled. "See if you can beat your record," he said.

And as he walked away he didn't even look back. He just walked down the shortcut through the bushes and he was gone. I was quite disappointed to be honest but

I jogged round the park a few times and then I ran 400 metres in about 60 seconds. It was my fastest time ever. I couldn't wait to tell him, I knew he'd be really impressed.

But when I got to his house he wouldn't answer the door. My aunt Josephine and my cousin Aisha were round, so Mum and Josephine went to Grandad's with the spare keys and I stayed at home and looked after Aisha (the best kid in the world by the way). And they found Grandad dead. He'd just sat down on his chair and he was dead. And although the doctor said he had a weak heart and he was lucky to live so long it doesn't feel lucky at all.

One funny thing though. Mum and Josephine said he was smiling when they found him. They even said it at the funeral. I don't know what they meant exactly. I didn't see him myself. But I think about it sometimes. I think about all sorts of things in fact. Sometimes I think, *What if he'd sat on the bench and waited for me?* He might have died there and that would have been worse. I'd have come running round the bend and he could have been dead on the bench. And he would not have liked that. It might have been on the news. It would have been terrible in lots of ways. Social services might have come round.

Josephine said the way Grandad died was the best

way. She said if only everyone could go like that, like dying in your chair is a dream come true. It's the sort of depressing thing grown-ups say. It made me feel awful because Grandad wasn't depressed at all. I don't think he wanted to die in his chair. Not then anyway. He was only seventy-two. Maybe if he was a hundred he wouldn't have minded.

Anyway, in case you don't know what it's like to lose someone you love I'll tell you. You can't even understand how your heart keeps beating or why people are acting like it's an ordinary day when actually it feels like the end of the world. And you can't imagine how you're going to be able to keep putting one foot in front of the other for the rest of your whole long life. You can't even imagine it.

Mum was so sad she didn't speak for days. Dad doesn't talk much anyway, so that didn't change, but his face looked like all the bones had fallen out and his head was collapsing on to his shoulders. And when I saw them like that I realised Grandad was right at the centre of our family and now there's a huge space where he used to be. And that's when I decided I'm going to fill that space and sort everything out just like he did.

And I'm going to keep putting one foot in front of the other too, even though it's hard, and I'm going to do it

fast. Because I'm a runner like my grandad and one day I'm going to run on a track in a stadium. Maybe even the Olympic Stadium. That would be amazing.