

# 'A walk with my dad changed my life' - May launches new book

Just over a decade since completing a mammoth charity walk along the Suffolk coast, May de la Rue has launched a fundraising book reflecting on the experience.

A medical student from Melton has just officially launched a book about the inspirational journey she made with her dad along the Suffolk coast 11 years ago.

Due for launch in 2020 on the 10th anniversary, but pushed back due to lockdown restrictions, *Fifty Miles with My Dad*, written by May de la Rue, follows the 22-year-old author (then aged 10) and her father Colin's 50-mile trek from Felixstowe to Lowestoft.

As covered by this paper at the time, the duo, who walked the challenge in stages over eight weeks, raised more than £10,000 in memory of a close relative. Government matched funding made the total enough for Suffolk Community Foundation to invest as a permanent endowment, making May its youngest fundraiser.

Net proceeds from the book, will aid the fund.

Members of the Foundation and other charities were at the launch at Seckford Hotel in Woodbridge earlier this month, where May recalled her experiences of the feat. She picks up the story...

"Anyone who met Dad and me in Lowestoft at the end of our walk, and indeed anyone who has read the final chapter, will know that I made my first ever speech that day, standing on a chair

"Although it's my name on the spine - and the story is told from my perspective - the book was actually a joint effort with my dad, Colin. It was not only his idea, but he was involved in the drafting and, in fact, he even set up a small publishing company, Sarnia House, so the net proceeds could go to the fund. Ultimately this whole walk was



May de la Rue and her father Colin at the end of their walk in 2009 Picture: ARCHANT

his plan. Little did I know what would evolve from what I originally thought was a nice Bank Holiday stroll with my father.

"Fundraising posters that were displayed about Suffolk around the time of our walk had three statements printed at the top:

- Enjoy the pictures
- Be part of my journey
- Help the Suffolk Foundation support young people with disability in Suffolk

"Dad has always had a passion for photography. I think we could have reached

Lowestoft a lot quicker if we hadn't had to stop every three minutes for a photograph. In all he took nearly 1,300 pictures of the scenery and wildlife described in the book - many of which can be found on our fundraising website.

"This is surely a testament to the great natural heritage with which we are blessed here in coastal Suffolk. With the help of research Dad did into its history, and passed on to me during the walk, I really did fall in love with the county I've grown up in.

"My first hope is that the book

may inspire others to walk the coastline, perhaps discover new things about it, and come to know and love it even more than before.

"The journey. Now this might sound dramatic - 50 whole miles, walked in sections at weekends and in holidays, with a couple of overnight stays in nice hotels thrown in for rest and recuperation. But this was a trek that involved so much more than just the physical walk.

"At one level it was an unforgettable parent-child experience. Dad was commuting in those days to the City, so I rarely had him all to myself. As we walked most of the way side-by-side, often with no other soul in sight, our conversation found depths that aren't normally explored at the kitchen table.

"Dad kept notes of things we discussed, and some of the dialogue is reproduced word for word. I hope this will be a story that families can relate to; and if it encourages them to share more quality time, it will have been worth telling.

"When we reached Lowestoft it seemed that our journey was over, but in another sense it was only just beginning. This second bullet point on the poster - 'Be part of my journey' - was picked up on by David Sheepshanks, the

Foundation's chairman at the time, when he spoke to our gathering there and said that a journey is exactly what charity is.



"Of course, meeting the needs of others is the main objective, but the good that comes from it doesn't end there. Other benefits come from things that donors themselves may gain, perhaps quite unexpectedly, when they set out on the path of philanthropy. And that was particularly so when starting at such a young age.

"With the Foundation's help I have been involved in choosing local charities to receive grants from the fund, with focus on those that have resonated with my values and interests. I have also been able to visit them to see what they do. One of the first, just a couple of weeks after we'd finished in Lowestoft, was the Woodbridge branch of Riding for the Disabled, where I learnt that the benefits had a lot to do with therapy.

"As my musical interests developed, I was able to concentrate on charities providing music therapy and opportunities for those with special needs, including Music In Our Bones, and Pro Corda who are with us today. Since the fund was set-up,

additional amounts have been raised by my brother Sam and sister Rose, and grants from it have broadened to include not only the young, and those with disability, but also vulnerable individuals.

"Not only have the charities benefited, but so have I. As I explain in the epilogue, it was exposure to people with disabilities and various therapies, and the fulfilment gained from the impact on others, that led me to study medicine.

"This is a story which I hope may encourage other people, of whatever age, to try something similar themselves. And if it inspires just one person to embark on their own philanthropic journey, a purpose will have been fulfilled.

"Of course, the purpose of encouraging others is ultimately for the benefit of those in need. Which leads me on to the third bullet point on the poster - 'Help the Suffolk Foundation' - now known as Suffolk Community Foundation - support young people with disability in Suffolk.



In my speech at the end of the walk I spoke about a girl I had met only the day before.

"This girl and I had things in common - we were both 10-years-old - but unlike me, she had Perthes' disease, a rare condition affecting her hip joints. Swimming was a form of treatment for her hip, as it promoted blood flow to the affected area. Financial support

was being provided for the travel expenses of a volunteer who took her to the fitness centre. Meeting this girl I learnt two things.

"Firstly, how lucky I was to actually have the ability to walk 50 miles.

"Secondly, I learnt how little money is needed to make a big difference. In the greater scheme of things, the volunteer's travel expenses were really quite small, yet it was obvious to me how important the swimming sessions were to the girl's health and wellbeing.

"I would like to thank all the original donors to the fund, along with those who contribute by buying the book and spreading the word. Your support has and will continue to make a true difference to many people's lives."

*Fifty Miles with my Dad*, by May de la Rue, is available in bookshops (hardback, 50 colour plates, £18).

Net proceeds from the sale of the book will support the growth of the *Fifty Miles with my Dad* Fund at Suffolk Community Foundation.

May De La Rue recreating a picture taken 11 years ago when she completed a 50-mile walk with her dad on the Suffolk coast  
Picture: ANDY ABBOTT