

# 'I'll run 24 marathons – fuelled by pizza diet!'

By Nick Bramhill

HE'S the determined athlete who's about to push his body to the limit as he attempts to run 24 marathons in 24 days.

But Shane Finn insisted there's one vice he won't be giving up as he sets off on his punishing charity trek around Ireland tomorrow – his beloved pizza.

The Kerryman – who completed 12 marathons in 12 days three years ago – said he's in the best shape of his life ahead of the gruelling challenge.

But the 25-year-old stressed he won't be cutting the fast-food favourite from his diet, as he bids to complete the 1,000km-plus feat by July 15.



Epic adventure: Shane Finn

He said: 'I enjoy eating real food... I use my food as my fuel, and if I didn't eat the way I eat, my body wouldn't recover.'

'I do eat my share of pizza, and I particularly enjoy it after

a hard week's training.'

Shane hopes to raise €100,000 for the Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland charity with his epic adventure. He said his motivation comes from witnessing the daily struggles of his cousin Mary, who suffers from spina bifida – a neural tube defect – and the associated condition hydrocephalus.

He said: 'The daily problems and complaints I or most other people have are completely trivial and insignificant when compared with the day-to-day challenges faced by people living with these conditions.'

For more information, or to make a donation, see [www.24marathons24days.ie](http://www.24marathons24days.ie).

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# We must have high hopes... even in times of real sadness

**T**OO much sadness now, too much desolation in a world too weary to respond. Fractured hopes, shattered dreams – people unable to cope with their lot. Uncertainty and doubt make it seem like all is lost. And yet, we sense that beneath all the turmoil there is something good and real and enduring. Sometimes, we can't name it, but we know it is there. Sometimes, it simply catches us by surprise.

The child – our child – sings in the school concert. He and his friends are leaving soon and this is their last chance to shine. They sing an emotional version of High Hopes, a song by the Irish group Kodaline.

I have never heard of the group or the song. But once they start to sing, their parents' tears begin to flow. The boys have so many high hopes and it is our prayer that they shall realise each one.

A simple song and the worries of the day drift away. In that moment, life is suspended as you imagine what might lie ahead. You, too, have high hopes, and, as their words wash away the anxiety, you see beyond present limits.

High hopes: who does not possess them? The fact that so many lie abandoned does not mean we should cease to hope, dream or aspire. Remember Cicero: 'While there's life, there's hope.'

All it takes is a song, a smile or the sun to shine, and we find what we need to make it through. Outside, the turmoil continues, but you are taken to a place of peace. As those boys sang, the world looked different and, for us, it has been different ever since.

The dark night of the soul cannot survive the comforting smile of a loved one. It is only a movement of the facial muscles and yet it can change everything. It restores hope when it seems to have fled.

Simple things such as songs and smiles have rescued us from the worst of times. The miracle of being human – and it is miraculous – is that we can change so much with so little. One smile can dissolve a lifetime of discord; one song can purge the emotions of all pain.

They are not tangible things, but

they are powerful and real. When the world is at war, when we are fighting our own battles, they have the capacity to heal, help and give new hope. They have the power to transcend time and place because they are universal.

The boys sang and we smiled, cried and took pride. We marvel at the miraculous, at those who can apparently cure disease and do the impossible. But we have the power to perform far greater miracles.

A smile can save a life. When all seems lost, it is a sign of solidarity and of love. Without words, it says that there is nothing to fear.

A smile restores hope. A song transfigures an occasion so that it becomes a work of art – something to be admired and replayed in the imagination. We shall never forget them singing High Hopes, never forget how they captured eight long years in a single tune.

We sing, we smile and we change our world.

We raise people up and give them a new sense of hope and courage. We free them from their fears and from their demons.

In a world so full of anger, so coarsened by contempt, the voice of a child singing is both cleansing and consoling. It causes us to cry because it is an epiphany of innocence amid all the corruption. And with the final note, our vision is transformed because we have been touched by something so pure and good.

**Y**OU can't force or manufacture such moments. They happen quite spontaneously, but they count for nothing less than salvation. For what is a smile but the white heat that burns away anger, frustration and fear?

Remember Cicero again: 'Nothing dries sooner than a tear.' But if our tears were caused by a song that ends in a smile, how can they ever be forgotten? So often our tears signify that we have been touched and saved.

Too much sadness now, but not enough to dampen our high hopes. So long as we can sing and dance, smile and shine, we can conquer the worst of the world.

For, at some level, we are all in pain and could do with a healing smile.

At some level, we are all in need of miracles.

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