

FAI: One year later

A year ago today I was off work so I could go in for hip surgery. My hip was resurfaced (which is a really weird term for me when applied to something inside my body; not a comfortable image), I spent a while on crutches, months in physical therapy, and there were times when I despaired of ever being able to run again.

Today I ran. I've been running for a few months now. I only ran 1.67 miles because I had to take some time off due to irritating my hip by moving lots and lots of boxes. It feels good to be running again. I still have moments of frustration that my distance is so limited now when I used to be able to run much farther, but I'm getting better at accepting that it will just take a while to work back up to that level.

There are days that my hip is still a problem. If I'm very tired, it gets achy. Sometimes pressure changes can make it hurt; the first time I was on an airplane after the surgery, which was about five months later, my hip was extremely uncomfortable. I flew a couple of weeks ago, though, and only got a little bit of an ache on the last of four flights. I can overuse it, as evidenced by the fact that moving boxes was not my best idea ever. Necessity sometimes dictates my choices, though, and we needed to get Xander and Katja moved. I have a few weeks before I have to make another trip, my move to our new home, and my hip is already almost recovered from the move last weekend.

I'm glad I got surgery for FAI. I was in a lot of pain before the surgery and it was getting worse, not better. The recovery has been slow, but not as slow as it could have been. It has definitely been frustrating. I can run without pain now, though, and running is my stress relief and relaxation. I decided I wanted to run a half marathon and, somewhere in the training cycle, I ended up loving it. I am very glad that

modern medicine can allow a doctor to make three small incisions, slide in a camera and some tools, and take off a nasty little bit of bone. It's better now. It's not completely healed, but I can move freely, enjoy life, and go running. That's a huge difference and it means my life is better than it would have been if I'd decided not to go through with the surgery.

A little bit of an old home

I went on a trip this week and my change of planes was in San Francisco. I was on relatively small planes (still commercial, but one held maybe 30 people) so I walked the tarmac to get into the terminal and then again to get out to the next plane instead of going straight from the plane into an enclosed tunnel.

When I got off the plane and took a deep breath, I smiled. Completely unselfconsciously, I lifted my face to the wind and breathed in the air with an edge of brine to it.

I grew up by the bay and I also spent a few weeks every summer near the beach in Southern California. I love the smell of the ocean. Spending those few minutes breathing the air I grew up with, tasting the salt and enjoying the wind, was surprisingly relaxing. Lately, relaxation has been something I have had to focus on. That travel day, between getting to breathe such familiar air and spending almost five hours straight reading a book, relaxed me more than I had any reason to expect.

Travel is not generally relaxing. There are timetables, pressure changes, people who wear too much perfume, and the general feeling of being overwhelmed by too many people. This time, though, was different. The planes were on time. I didn't

have any schedules I had to meet on the other end, just a night in a hotel room before an interview. My hip didn't object to the pressure changes. No one wore too much perfume. Someone made the mistake of eating sauerkraut on the second flight, which almost caused several people to be sick, but that dissipated fairly quickly. I like sauerkraut, but that smell in a small, enclosed space with that many people was a seriously bad idea. I got off the plane in San Francisco, checked the boards for where the next flight would be, turned around, and walked back to the gate I had just left. I can't remember ever having that happen before. All of the pieces just seemed to fall into place for once and it was a pleasant several hour long stretch of reading a good book and actually being able to relax.

I won't be stopping in San Francisco on the way back, unfortunately, but I will be able to curl up with a good book and not worry about anything for a while. No lists, no stress, no packing or scheduling or making sure everything is done. All I need to do is get on a couple of planes on time. I can do that. In a week we'll be packing the trucks and Xander and Katja will be moving, but for a day I will not be thinking about that. I'll just be curled up either on an airplane or on a seat in an airport losing myself in the enjoyment of an interesting book. It will be easier because I got to breathe San Francisco air, however briefly; I spent a lot of my childhood curled up with books, too, and I was quite good at letting go of everything else while I was reading. I'm going to enjoy practicing that skill on the way home.

Slow Running

I love running. I'm back to it despite hip surgery. When I thought I'd never be able to run again, I cried. When we were told that surgery could make it possible for me to run again, I had to think for a long time about whether major surgery and up to a year of recovery time, with, of course, possible complications, was worth getting rid of pain and moving freely again. The final decision was not just about running; it was also about not living with constant pain. Running was a part of it, though.

I'm running again. I've never been fast, but I'm more comfortable with being slow this time. I'm running at a pace that doesn't hurt me. I'm still doing intervals, so I don't know where my pace will settle out. I was running at four miles per hour last time, though, so I'm sure I'll get back to that, if nothing else. My cadence is settling at 180 steps per minute, my breathing is okay, I'm doing core and strength work, and when I'm done with a run, I feel tired and centered. I'm still a little worried that my hip will break, but every run that I come back from without pain lets that fear back off a bit.

Being slow does not mean I'm not a runner. It just means I'm a slow runner. I run three days a week and cross train with strength and core work two more days. I'm working my way back to a half marathon. I know myself well enough to need a goal, so I have picked one and signed up for it. Next February I'll be running the second half marathon of my life. I won't be fast, though I expect to be faster than I was when I ran the last one. I expect to be neither first nor last and I'm discovering that I'm quite happy, in this particular area of my life, to be in the middle of the pack, probably somewhere near the back.

I am a perfectionist. I'm learning to curb the tendency, but

it still rears its ugly little head on a regular basis. Running helps. I know I won't be fast. I have short, stubby little legs, but they're strong legs and, once I'm comfortable with running without intervals again, I can keep going. While we were growing up, my dad compared me to a Clydesdale at one point because I just kept chugging along. I was never fast (and, to be honest, when I was younger I really didn't like running at all) but once I have a reasonable level of fitness, I can just keep going. I have decided that I am happy, finally, with not being fast, but being steady. Stubbornness has always been one of my stronger traits, and now I am applying that to running. I don't have to be perfect. I just have to be myself, a runner, though not a fast one. I run. It makes me happier. It calms my brain. It eases my stress. It settles my anxieties. In running, I have found one of the very few places in my life where my body can work hard and my brain can stop niggling at everything. If I start worrying at a problem, I count my cadence as long as I can. By the time I've counted for a while, I've forgotten what was worrying me.

As far as I can tell, except possibly at the elite levels, other runners really don't care how fast I'm going. They're kind. We're all part of a group of people who are just a tiny bit nuts. We go out and run in weird, uncomfortable weather. We push harder than we should sometimes. No matter how slow or fast, we know that bad days will be made better if we can just get a run in there somehow. I've run in races, slowly, and never had anyone say anything unkind. On the contrary, I get cheered on, all of us do, almost as much as the first runner. Sometimes more, actually, since the people ahead wait at the finish line to yell encouragement.

My run on Tuesday was immediately after a very windy night. I spent some of it jumping over downed tree branches and stepping on twigs. It was a very odd experience in the dark of 5 AM. It was a good run, which is defined as one that doesn't leave me hurting afterwards, and the rest of the day,

stressful as it was, went much more smoothly because of that run. Sometimes I struggle, especially when I run with other people who are much faster than I am. My approach to life is drastically better when I run, though, so even if I will always be a slow runner, I am a runner.

[Back to running!](#)

Slightly over a year ago, I ran a half marathon. It was slow, but I did it. I got all the way through.

About ten months ago I had hip surgery for femoroacetabular impingement. It was not exactly pleasant. I spent a while on crutches, another while moving very carefully, a ridiculous amount of time at my physical therapist's office (it's surprising how easy one-legged squats get when you are doing them every day!), and a lot of time at the gym. It was winter for a lot of those months, so gym workouts weren't bad, especially while I was terrified of slipping on ice. I swam. I worked on the treadmill and the elliptical trainer. I did lots and lots and lots of strength work. Finally I achieved my goal: 20 minutes on the elliptical trainer with no pain the next day. I was ready to run again!

Mentally ready and physically ready were different things, though. Rattling around in the back of my brain were the physical therapist's warnings. "If you do too much, too fast, you can actually break the bone in your hip because right now it's remodeling." "Don't fall on it if there's any way you can avoid it." This, of course, was being said to a klutz!

I finally decided I needed to just start. I rejoined the Facebook group for my 0-13.1 training. If you want to run a half marathon, start with [Nicole](#). Her program is very good. I

started reading about training, good runs and bad, the normal swirl of questions about various injuries and treatments, and ongoing discussions about shoes and tracking and other small things. I started remembering that I liked to run.

I got a new pair of [Vibrams](#), since I'd run holes through my last pair, and a few new pairs of [Injinji](#) socks.

I started the program again.

I'm doing each week twice. It's going to take me a long time to get back to a half marathon, but I will get there. The first couple of weeks were walking because I wanted to make sure I had actually healed enough to do this. I found myself facing my first run with a certain amount of trepidation. I set out my gear, got up early, packed myself into my [Enell bra](#) (if you are well endowed, these bras make sure nothing goes anywhere it shouldn't!), got into running gear, did my warm up exercises, and started running.

I had decided that I was going to switch my cadence from I'm-not-paying-attention to 180 beats per minute. It was a little hard at first. I run with a metronome, 3/4 time so I'm not emphasizing the same foot every time, and I'm mostly keeping pace with it. I'll be doing intervals for a while. The first weeks were 60 seconds jogging, 90 seconds walking. I'm working on 90 seconds jogging, 2 minutes walking right now and I'm very ready to be done with jogging by the end of the interval.

It has been surprisingly anticlimactic. My hip aches when I'm tired, which is hard since sleep is in somewhat short supply right now, but I haven't had a problem with it while running. I'm working on the mantra from the book "Born to Run": easy, light, smooth, and fast. I'm running faster than I did last time around and I'm happier with how it feels.

I was really angry when I found out I couldn't run. I'm still struggling with remembering being able to run miles without much stress and being limited, now, to 90 seconds at a

stretch. On the other hand, I'm running again, and I was afraid that might never happen.

I'm not all the way back, but I'm getting there.

[FAI: update](#)

Almost four months after the surgery and life is pretty good. I'm off crutches. I've been released from physical therapy. I'm no longer under a doctor's care, though I have my physical therapist's email if I have any questions. I have a list of exercises to do to get my left leg back to full flexibility and usefulness again.

I should, barring anything else going wrong, be running by the end of next year. Hopefully sooner, of course, but that's a very safe bet.

At the moment, I'm allowed to walk half a mile and see how that goes. I did ten minutes on the elliptical trainer tonight and will see how my hip feels about that in the morning. I'm doing my balancing squats (on this thing with the round side down: <http://amzn.to/1dzC7nI>) every time I'm at the gym and I'm slowly getting better at them. I'm allowed to take Nyx for a walk, though I'll wait until all of the ice has melted before I do that.

My hip still aches, especially when I'm tired. There's one rotation that still hurts a lot to do, so I ease into that stretch every day and sit with the pain for a little while, then let up. I don't push too hard, but I'm allowed to push a little bit.

I can only swim for about 20 minutes before getting tired. My

stamina took a huge hit from not working out much for six months and it will take a while to work back up to it. After ten minutes on the elliptical tonight, I was ready to be done and sweat was dripping down my back. I am working hard on not being frustrated because now, at least, I am getting better.

I met a lady at the gym tonight named Sara. I was doing my balance squats and she was doing lunges; she had to move so I could get the balance ball out. I said I was doing physical therapy and she responded that she was supposed to do the same squats but didn't always. I told her I was recovering from hip surgery and we got to talking a bit. Turns out she recently found out that she has FAI, too. I knew I was lucky to be diagnosed so quickly, but I didn't know how lucky; she's been putting up with this pain for six years. She said her doctor was very firmly against the surgery and wouldn't do it if at all possible. Physical therapy isn't helping. I gave her the name of my doctor who specializes in hips and has a lot of experience treating FAI; hopefully she will be able to get some help and eventually get it fixed soon. Living with constant pain is draining. I would hate to have lived with it for years without knowing what was wrong. The problem with FAI is that it can only be diagnosed with an MRI and some doctors don't want to do one unless they have exhausted all other options. At least she knows what she has, now, which will help her figure out what to do next.

It's nice being on the recovery side of the curve. I am feeling very lucky about where I was treated and who treated me. It took a couple of months to figure it out, but that's a lot better than six years!

I will be running again eventually. Swimming butterfly may take longer. Bellydancing will take longer yet. Eventually, though, I will be able to do the things I love.

FAI: three months

I'm off of crutches!

I have been released from the care of the surgeon and am almost done with physical therapy. I asked my physical therapist to sit down with me for my last appointment and go through exercises for me to use to build up to running again. I know it's likely to be up to a year before I can run, but I want to know what I can do and how and when I can push.

There's still pain. When I'm tired, my hip gets tired and painful, too. I still can't do a whole lot of breaststroke because rotation is still an issue. There are things I can't do easily, like sit cross-legged. I can sit that way with a pillow under my left leg, at least for a little while. My exercises include single leg squats. They're still hard. They may be hard for a while. Single leg lifts are getting easier, though.

Overall I'm much better. I'm better than I was before the surgery, finally. I feel like I'm almost back to mostly normal. It still hurts to do certain things, but most days, most of the time, I'm okay. I know (and am frustrated by the fact that) it will still be a long time before I am fully back to normal. I have a hard time with not being able to exercise. I'm getting to do a little, of course, but I get tired fast. I want to push, but I just can't.

It's better. It's amazingly better. As the surgeon said, I was miserable when they first saw me and I'm actually happy now. That's much, much better. It's just hard to know how much longer it's going to take before I can be as active as I'd like. It will get there, though!

FAI: 2.5 months

Big news: I've spent the past four days completely off of crutches! My hip still aches by the end of the day, but it's more a gentle reminder to sit down than the crippling pain it used to be. I can pick up Katja now, too. I can't carry her far without getting strong "Quit it!" pain, but at least I can pick her up if I need to.

I was very concerned with the pain I was still feeling with the front leg lifts. Everything else seemed to be working out well, getting stronger, less pain, all the normal things, but that one exercise was still really hard for me. I asked the physical therapists to help and they gave me a bunch of new exercises (including single leg squats and single leg bridges – ouch!) which, while difficult and painful, did what I needed. I can do the front leg lifts now and only have an ache at the end, which is a lot better.

I was out with Katja today and we were watching people jump up and down. Katja joined in quite happily. My hip twinged at the thought of it, which I know quite well is psychosomatic but made it very clear that I'm not all the way better yet. Swimming is getting easier, though breaststroke still has limitations on how far I can go using the kick as well as the arms. That particular movement still causes pain. Other than that direction, I don't have flexibility problems in physical therapy right now, which is good.

I'm healing. I'm back to almost mostly normal. I won't be running for a long time yet; even walking fast is not a good idea right now. I am getting to the point of being able to swim, though, and I can bike for ten minutes at a stretch, which is a start. I can't twist or turn in certain ways and I

sometimes catch myself right before I move my leg wrong, but it's clearly improving.

I think it will be a while before I take the 130 pound dog out for a walk, though.

FAI: two months

Eight weeks after the surgery, I'm on one crutch, swimming and once in a while kicking, doing upper body work at the gym, doing some biking on stationary bikes, and still rather sore some days. I can't do leg lifts easily yet because the surgery site gets painful. I am allowed to walk around with no crutch in the mornings as long as I don't overdo it, as long as it doesn't get sore, and as long as I'm careful. It's very freeing to be off of crutches at least for a little while, though it does get sore.

The doctor said 2-3 months before I'm mostly back to normal. I'm expecting three months. I was also told I wouldn't run for 6 months to a year, and at this point I'm expecting a year. The labrum was damaged and has limited blood supply, so that healing will take a while. I will swim and bike and do weight training and just not stress it as much as possible. I need to heal completely, and if that means not running for longer than I'd like, that's life.

In the meantime, the rest of life is going well. Katja is helping me bake; she mixes and pours and has fun. She's talking a lot. Her favorite characters at the moment are Batman, Hawk Girl, and Tigger. I'm pretty sure she likes Tigger because she's so much like him – so much bouncing! Xander is going to be visiting England soon to present his work and I couldn't be more proud of him. He's pretty amazing.

I just made my first batch of English muffins, which is a small thing but I always wanted to learn. Despite the slowly healing hip and the frustration involved, life is pretty good right now.

FAI: A month and a half

I went swimming today for the first time. I've been putting it off because I've been a little afraid. My hip still hurts and I didn't think I was ready to figure out how to get in and out of the pool without hurting myself. It worked out well, though I only managed about twenty minutes before I got tired. I did ten minutes on the bike (I'm allowed to do that now) and I did some upper body work, too, so I feel like I got something done, but it's hard to get so tired, so fast.

I'm on one crutch now. One of my exercises now is standing on my left leg for ten seconds at a stretch, so I'm starting to be able to put my full weight on it. It still aches. By the end of the day, I am always very tired. It's getting better, clearly, but it's nowhere near all the way better yet.

I'm going to physical therapy twice a week. It's hard work, but I can tell from the exercises that my strength is (slowly) improving.

I'm having to work hard on not being frustrated with myself. I know that they did a lot of work on my hip, including reshaping the bone, and a lot of muscles and nerves got shifted around in the process. It's going to take months before I'm back to normal. I was told that I wouldn't be off crutches for up to three months. I'm about halfway there. Another four and a half months before I can even think about running again. I can't push this, and I'm working hard to not

push it, but I want so much to be able to do normal things again. I can't take Katja to the park because I can't keep up and I can't go up and down slides and other activities. I can't take Nyx for a walk; she doesn't much like crutches, and I can't brace myself if one of the silly little dogs that run loose crosses our path.

It is better. I keep reminding myself of that. I can stand on it now. I'm on one crutch, which is an amazing improvement. I'm not in pain all the time, just when I get tired. I can move around pretty well. I can pick things up now. Katja can sit on my lap and it doesn't hurt, which makes me ridiculously happy. I can sit on the floor with her in the mornings, too, because getting up has gotten much easier. I still can't twist or move certain ways, but I'm moving much better than I used to.

Slowly but slowly, I'm improving. It's hard still being so slow and so incapable, but I know I'm getting better.

FAI: About a month

Life is getting a lot better these days. I'm allowed to use just one crutch around the house, which means I can actually help a little bit. The pain has gone down considerably. I still get some aching and some nerve pain, but it's much less than it was. Sleeping is still not great because it isn't comfortable to be on my back all night but any other position makes my hip ache. I haven't taken anything for the pain in days, not even ibuprofen.

Physical therapy is hard and getting harder as they add more weight for leg lifts. It's okay, though, because I know I'm getting better. It ends up aching by the end of it, but the

ice helps and it isn't hurting by later in the day, so I think it gets classified as a good pain.

My incisions still haven't healed up. One is completely healed, one has only a little bit of a scab, but one of the scabs is still not healed. I really want to go swim again, so that's been quite frustrating, but I'll get there eventually. I miss my endorphins. Showering has gotten much easier, though.

I am feeling somewhat less depressed now, but there are still times that this is incredibly difficult. I don't like being helpless, useless, and slow. My brain is still not working quite as well as I would expect. I can't keep up. I can't do grocery shopping on my own if it includes things like milk because I can't push a cart. A friend has to water my plant at work. There are so many things that I want to be able to do and can't that some days it feels like a mountain of everything I can't do.

It's better. It's getting better. It's slow, but that's okay in the long run.