

MY LETTER TO 14-YEAR-OLD ME

MELINDA GAINSFORD-TAYLOR



Courtesy of David Tarbotton'

Dear Melinda,

I know you're struggling, feeling homesick at boarding school; you're missing your family and can't participate in the sport you love at the moment but you will persevere to discover that you can become the best you can be on the world's stage.

You'll win medals, championships, make finals and break records but away from the sport you'll achieve something else that's the best thing you'll ever do.

Even though you're going through a difficult time and you feel like the world is against you, with the criticism you're receiving in the media and from others, you'll learn resilience and will overcome your current injuries.

You will experience ups and downs, and your sport will teach you that in life things don't always go your way, and it's how you deal with these experiences that is most important.

Your coach Jackie Byrnes will give you the support you need to get you through the dark times. Jackie will always encourage you and show you that even though you have stress fractures you can still do pool sessions to help keep fit.

You will get back on the track. The support from your family will help you prevail. Your brother David will show responsibility above his years to provide

a home for you in Sydney so you can take your training to another level.

You will go on to run full-time, travel the world, and you will be proud to make it to three Olympics in 1992, 1996 and in Sydney in 2000 – which is the highlight of them all.

The disappointment of not making the Commonwealth Games Relay Team in 1990 gives you the 'kick in the but' that you need to knuckle down and get serious about your running.

You'll demonstrate the key to being a successful elite athlete is resilience. You'll demonstrate this when you win gold at the 200m World Indoor Championships in Barcelona in 1995, after learning the night before that mum is sick.

Finding out that mum had cancer will give you the fire to win the World Championships. Mum will inspire you to see that when things are tough you've really got to step up to fight for what you want.

You'll learn from mum, who beats non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 1996, to keep a positive attitude. And

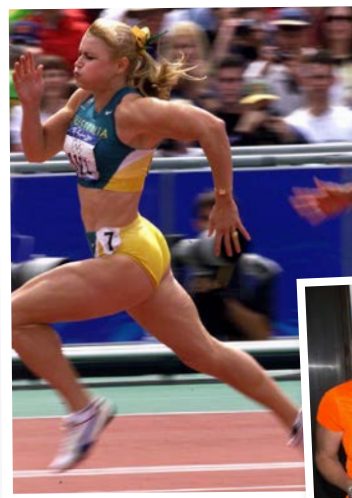
you'll be grateful to your competitors, particularly Cathy Freeman, for bringing out the best in you.

You'll get injured and told you may never run at an elite level again 18 months out from the Sydney games. You then make it the finals of those Olympics. This is the most rewarding Olympics experience of all.

When you line up in the 200m and 100m races you hear the crowd go berserk when your name is called. You relish in this home crowd support and end up coming fifth at those games. Your biggest achievement is yet to come: you'll have two children which is the best thing you do in your life.

You'll turn to running again to get you through hard times. This time it will be doing something you never thought you could do: to run slowly to complete a marathon. It will give you positive steps to take after a devastating time losing someone you love to cancer.

To throw yourself into this challenge will be like therapy – it will be a god send doing it. Doing it for a reason with Can Too, knowing it will help other people so they're not in the position of losing a loved one to cancer, will be the perfect way to cope.



The marathon program is what you need to get through the grieving stage. It's good to be able to run with others who have had loved ones facing difficult times with cancer as well, as they can relate to what you've gone through.

With Can Too you'll see that everyone's there to support each other and are all working towards the same goal, which makes you accountable, and keeps you motivated. You will make some great friendships and feel blessed to be a part of the community.

Melinda Gainsford-Taylor

