

Libby James, Runner and Writer

Her Legacy: Persisting in the face of adversity and challenging herself physically

When Libby James came to the United States from England as a child during World War II she was petrified but managed to survive her first day of kindergarten in Silver Springs, Maryland. But, as she describes it, “On day two, suddenly realizing that I had to go through this ordeal *again*, disaster struck. As my dad walked me up the steps to the schoolhouse, the breakfast that I’d forced down earlier reappeared all down the front of my pretty little dress. Undaunted, my dad turned me around, took me home, told me to change clothes and escorted me back to school. Not an auspicious start, but perhaps I learned something valuable. From that day on, I loved school even though I was often the ‘new kid’ with the strange accent.”

During the war years her father had a job in Washington, D.C. When peace came they returned to the UK for two years to live in Scarsdale, New York. A few months later they crossed the country by train, landing in Seattle, Washington—to stay. At 16 she found herself in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the high school there she first fell in love with words, thanks to “a very special English teacher.”

Libby studied journalism and English at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, married the summer she graduated and moved to Boulder. She earned a teaching certificate at the University of Colorado, taught sixth grade language arts and began having babies, occasionally writing a few words during nap times.

By the time of their arrival in Fort Collins they were a family six. She attended graduate school and completed an MA in American Literature in 1971.

The year before she entered graduate school the entire family traipsed around Europe in a VW camper, from Norway to Turkey. (Yes. It was cozy.) They ended the trip with a visit to family in the UK. During the time we were gone she sent weekly articles to the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* under the heading *Europe with Four Children Every Day*. Once home again she began a freelance career, writing for local publications and eventually editing the first version of *Fort Collins Magazine*.

About that time she became obsessed with running. She was female and over 40, and there weren’t many older woman runners in those days. She ran her first marathon in Denver in 1978 and after that “I thought I could pretty much do anything.” Libby was inducted into the Colorado Running Hall of Fame in 2012 and in recent years has found it possible to set a few age-group records.

A move to Greeley opened up the opportunity for her to help start *Greeley Style Magazine*. Before they returned to Fort Collins in 1989, she and her daughters biked from Iowa to Maine to celebrate her 50th birthday and their graduations from Colorado College and the University of Wyoming law school. After that trip she led bicycle tours for 10 years with Denver-based Timberline Tours.

1991 was a challenging year when she became a widow and had to make a living. Fortunately, she had a job she loved working with single teen mothers to help them complete their educations and get job ready. In 2004 she took a year off and lived in Mozambique with a daughter and her family. She substitute taught in the American School and did a weekly blog for kids back home.

White Shadow, a historical novel she completed in 2017, grew out of my experience there. I have also written two middle grade novels and a picture book for children.

She now writes regularly for the *North Forty News* and is working on *Are You Still Running?* a compilation of articles written for the *Fort Collins Coloradoan*. She enjoys being a grandparent.

By finding her way through difficult times and forging new paths later in life, Libby James has shown traits that make success possible, persistence and not taking herself too seriously.

“Success results from feeling at peace with yourself; knowing that you are making some small contribution to bettering the world and that you have been able to accomplish at least some of the goals that are important to you.”

Written by Barbara Fleming, Author, Coloradoan Columnist and Living Her Legacy Wordsmith