

## Ep #148: Catching Up with Mirna Valerio



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jill Angie**

## Ep #148: Catching Up with Mirna Valerio

Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives, and now I want to help you.

Hey, rebels. I am so pleased to bring you an awesome interview this week with none other than Mirna Valerio, The Mirnavator, the founder and leader of The Mirnavation Nation. Now, if you don't know who Mirna is, she's a native of Brooklyn, New York, a former educator and cross-country coach. She's an ultrarunner, obstacle course enthusiast, and author of the memoir *A Beautiful Work-in-Progress*.

Although she began running in high school, she recommitted to the sport after a health scare in 2008 which reignited her love for running. After that, she started her blog *Fat Girl Running*, about her experiences as a larger woman in a world of thinner athletes. And I know y'all can relate to that.

So, Mirna's work has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, in *Runner's World*, on the NBC nightly news, CNN, on the CW Network. She was in a REI-produced short documentary called *The Mirnavator* that became viral. I'm probably missing something. Those are the ones that come off the top of my head. She's also written for *Women's Running Magazine*, *Self Magazine Online*, *Outside Online*, and *Runner's World Magazine*. And in 2018, she was chosen as a *National Geographic Adventurer of the Year*.

Now, that's a lot of stuff about Mirna. She's a really accomplished human. And what you might know about her though is that she's also a diversity educator and she has created workshops and talks to help others create change. She's really, really good at what she does.

We have included a link to her most recent workshop, which is called *Introduction to Identity, Social Justice, and Anti-Racism for the White*

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Community. We've included that link in the show notes. I highly recommend that you check it out.

Now, I do need to warn you, during this interview, there was a crazy-ass thunderstorm brewing outside my apartment, and right towards the end, we started experiencing, or I started experiencing internet outages. So, as we were recording, you will notice a little bit of discontinuity, possibly swearing. I was very frustrated with the weather.

I'm very sorry about that, but my amazing podcast team Angela and Pavel were able to save the majority of it, so there's some little spots where you'll notice a pause and then we sort of pick back up strangely and out of context. I'm hoping we explain most of it in the show. But anyway, I just wanted to let you know about that.

And besides that, it is a beautiful interview. You're going to hear so much about what's going on with Mirna right now, like, what are some of the exciting and fun things happening in her life. And we just really had a great time chatting. So, I hope you enjoy it. and without further ado, here is Mirna Valerio.

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Jill: Hey, rebels. So, I am here this week with a very special guest; the one and only Mirnavator, Mirna Valerio, 2018 National Geographic Adventurer of the Year, mom, ultrarunner, author, all around badass, and actually amazing singer. So, maybe you can sing your introduction to us, Mirna. Welcome.

Mirna: [singing] Hello... And that's it because I usually get paid when I sing so...

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Jill: You got it, you got it. Okay, but seriously, welcome back to the *Not Your Average Runner* show. You were actually my very first guest on this podcast.

Mirna: Wait, did I know that?

Jill: Well I think I probably told you way back when we recorded, but that was three years ago, so...

Mirna: I don't think I knew that.

Jill: You were my very first guest.

Mirna: What? Because you were so good at it, I was like, "Oh, this is just, you know, your sort of run of the mill podcast thing." Oh wow, well, I feel special.

Jill: Well, we had so much fun though. You're just super-easy to talk to, so I think that's probably why it seems so natural because we were just shooting the shit. But anyway, we are here to talk about you and what's going on with you in your life and, you know, maybe a little bit of current events. But for the most part, I just want to get an update on the amazingness that is The Mirnavator. So, I don't even know where to start because there are so many exciting things about you. Should I just pick randomly?

Mirna: You can pick one of the 30 things we talked about pre-show.

Jill: Okay, alright, I want to talk about dream analysis. We were legit talking, you were like, "Oh, I had my dreams analyzed," and then we kind of lost the thread of that. So, let's just dive in. Actually, let me just stop for a second and let everybody that is listening know, this is not going to be a podcast on how to be anti-racist or how to be a white ally because y'all can do your

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own research on that. And the amazing Mirna, she's an educator in this area.

She's got a course coming up which we're going to talk about at the end of the show, we'll have links to that in the show notes. But you can also Google, you can do your own research. There are a lot of resources out there and a lot of people talking about great resources on, if you're a white person, how to be anti-racist, be a better ally, just clean up your shit, recognize your privilege, and show up the way you need to show up. So, this is not what this podcast is about. This is a podcast about Mirna.

And I felt like I needed to say that just because of everything that's going on in the world right now. So, we've got that out of the way. Let's talk about your dreams, girl.

Mirna: Well, okay, so you know how lots of people have been having massive anxiety dreams – hold on. That was my son...

Jill: What's he cooking for you today?

Mirna: He usually dances in the background of all my calls, even the most professional ones, he's in the background dancing, just because that's where we are right now.

Jill: COVID quarantine day, what, 78?

Mirna: I don't even know, day X. I don't even know – just to tell you a little bit about Rashid, we call him – well, I call him – Gordon Ramsay the Black, GRTB on Facebook because he's really, really into the culinary arts and sometimes even cosplays Gordon Ramsay while he's cooking. It is hilarious and he's like, "Well, this tastes like piss," you know. So, that's where we are in my house. But he's a really fantastic cook and I try not to praise him too much because he doesn't like it and he doesn't like me talking about it. So, there's that. But I don't even care.

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Jill: You're his mom. You get to talk about him. It's the rule.

Mirna: Exactly. So, yeah, so if you hear some pots banging in the background, that is GRTB doing his work.

Jill: Got it.

Mirna: Yeah, so dream analysis. So, I had this dream, because lots of people have been having anxiety dreams or dreams that they think are anxiety dreams. And because we are all being traumatized because, number one, because of COVID and the effect that that has had on every single aspect of our lives. And people are out of work, people have health insecurity, food insecurity, et cetera, et cetera.

And so, everyone's having dreams. Everyone's drinking a lot. Most people I know are, including myself. And so yeah, it's a tough situation to deal with. So, I had this dream in which I was in a show. I was the lead in a show in musical theatre, which I don't do. And I walked into the theatre, in the greenroom, in the backstage, and I wasn't ready.

I didn't have my costume on, I didn't have my makeup on. And I also didn't know the choreography, the blocking, or my music, or any of my lines. And I've never, ever had this kind of dream before. And the clothes that I was dressed in were very casual and it so happened that the person who I was looking for to tell all of this and to tell her that I wasn't ready and that I didn't know my music and stuff happened to be Natalie Miller. And Natalie Miller, as you know, is a coach at Hello Seven, a group that you and I both belong to, you know.

It's a sort of amazing, phenomenal, women-led entrepreneurial group. It is almost one of the best things that has happened to me in the last year and a half, belonging to that group on Facebook as a sole-proprietor, business owner type deal who is also a woman. So, I'm looking all around and trying to find her. And someone says she's in room 10, but room 10 was on the

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second floor for some reason. It was the only 100 room on the second floor, and I come looking through all these rooms and everything is mixed up.

I finally found her on the second floor and she looks at me expressionless when I tell her that I am not ready and I don't know what to do. And so, she looks at me, looks down at the music, the score, and then hands me the score that's all marked up and says, "You have 25 minutes to learn this." And that was the end of the dream.

Jill: Alright...

Mirna: By the way, is that rain? I can hear the rain.

Jill: You can hear that? Yes, it just started. Welcome to – well, you know, you've lived in this area. It's like, one moment it's fine, then all of a sudden it goes deeply dark and then all fury is unleashed. So, we're in the fury stage of the storm.

Mirna: It's really loud. I can hear the fury of the rain trying to wash away all the racism. Anyway, so...

Jill: If only it were that easy, right?

Mirna: Yeah, so I had this analysis. She volunteered to do this analysis. She's trained to do it and she used the Gestalt theory of analyzing dreams where you have to embody each of the aspects of your dream. So, I had to embody the greenroom. I had to embody the people that were in the greenroom, singing and warming up. I had to embody the space that she was in. I had to embody her.

Because, according this theory, all of those things are part of me, speaking to me. And so, I had to lie down and close my eyes. I felt like I was in a shrink's chair. But it was so cool because what it ended up being, this

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particular analysis, was that my brain is everywhere. Like, I am everywhere. I'm everywhere and nowhere all at the same time. I'm all over the place. I do lots of different things and I'm always busy and my mind is always full and I sometimes worry that I'm not going to get stuff done and I'm not going to be able to do it will because I do so many things.

But that's just how my brain works. And part of this was – part of me embodying her was telling myself that this is just the way I am. This is the way I work. Not everybody understands it, because I definitely get that feedback from people, but I always get the job done. And, for the most part, it's good work or very good work.

And I'm always worried about that. I'm always worried about, you know, not doing well enough because I perceive myself as very disorganized. But that's just how my brain works, and that I do find the space and quiet to get it done. And it was just like, it wasn't really about anxiety. Because I've never really had an anxiety dream. Maybe once or twice but nothing as memorable as that.

And so, it was the coolest thing to have that be the first part of my day and just to kind be thinking about that. And then, later on that day, I had a voice lesson and my voice teacher, Martha Brewer Hong, who is out of the San Francisco area, she is also a healer and she's trained in indigenous healing techniques and stuff. And so, we talked about that and it was so cool.

And then I sang and then I – did I have my bike lesson too that day? It was just like an amazing day. So, if you have the resources to get some dream analysis done and also to know people who are in the healing arts, what an incredible addition to your life that is.

And so, my mind is on fire right now. So, anyway, that's what happened the other day. So, I got my dream analyzed and that was the first time I'd ever had anything like that done.

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Jill: So, I think what's so interesting is that you somewhere have a belief maybe that being disorganized isn't a good thing, or you're saying the way that your brain works, you're making it mean that you're disorganized, which is not necessarily true.

Mirna: That is true. And I know that intellectually, but it still bothers me all the time.

Jill: Yeah, like why doesn't my brain work the way other people's brains work?

Mirna: Yes, why can't I be, like, super-logical all the time and not veer off into different directions. I mean, I always come back. But that's it. I always come back to what it is that I need to get done. But I need to do it like that. I need to go this way and follow that spoke of thought and follow this spoke of thought.

Jill: Yeah, you're more of a mind map than a spreadsheet.

Mirna: Oh, I am not a spreadsheet. I am definitely a mind map.

Jill: Yeah, but I think there's – mind maps are awesome though. A lot of times, I'll use a mind map just on my brain. I'll be like, "I can't handle what's going on in here. I've got to put it down." And then I'll just, like, rearrange everything, like little bubbles and clouds. And then I'm like, "ow it all makes sense, right?"

But yeah, you can't expect everyone's brains to operate the same way because then we get a lot of the same old shit and that's not super fun. So, I'm grateful that your brain works the way it does.

Mirna: Thank you, and I'm learning to be grateful that my brain is all over the place.

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Jill: Your brain allows you to do so many different creative disciplines, which blows my mind. And I consider running to be a creative discipline because sometimes you have to be creative about getting your ass out of the door.

So, you're an athlete, you're a multiple-sport athlete and you're accomplished. You're an extremely accomplished runner. I mean, what's the longest that you've ever run, like, the longest distance at once?

Mirna: 100K.

Jill: See, I mean, come on. And so, how many people are like, "Oh yeah. I can run 100 kilometers and I can also teach diversity classes and I can also be a music teacher; I can also be an accomplished musician and singer myself, and I can also run a business, and I can also write a book?" You excel at all those areas. And if your brain was logical, I do not think that you would excel in any of those areas.

Mirna: Thank you. Are you going to send me an invoice for this coaching that you're doing right now?

Jill: No, I will not, as a matter of fact. You're welcome. I think you already got probably the same coaching from Natalie. But this sort of is a good segue into something else that I wanted to talk about, which was self-care. And you take amazingly good care of yourself. So, can you talk about – like, you've mentioned some things already that you've used to care for yourself, but can you just talk about your general philosophy of self-care and what things are important to you, what's non-negotiable?

Mirna: I'm still working on that aspect of my life. I wasn't always good at it. and I wouldn't even say that I'm good at it now. But thinking of this week, last week, and the week before that in particular, the number one thing that I really have been trying to do is not staying off of social media completely,

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because that's where a lot of my work is, but really being very, very cognizant and aware of what is on my feed.

And so, I've been deleting people, blocking people, not necessarily anyone who has done anything, like, awful, awful to me personally, but you know, just kind of watching their feeds and watching the things that they invite into their own spheres. I don't want anything to do with that. And so, I've been kind of curating my social media in that way.

I really, I haven't watched TV in probably a month. I will not watch the news. And then, the good thing about social media is that you can have your own PLN, personal learning network from trusted sources. And so, that's what I've been doing.

And so, I get all of the mainstream – some mainstream media outlets and some other writers and thinkers and thought leaders whose information I trust. But I still vet when I read those things, and I'm also trying to teach my son how to do that. And so, that's been very important in terms of my own mental health because I know that as I did catch myself kind of scrolling through Twitter, my heart rate was going up and I had a physiological response to that.

And so, that's when I knew that I had to put my phone down. It's very hard to do. Lots of research has gone into the fact that these platforms are built like casino machines or gambling machines. And so, they want you to keep scrolling.

Jill: Like, literally, an alarm just happened on my wrist while you're saying that.

Mirna: So, to be aware of that and to be able to be metacognitive about that is very important. So, I almost never sleep with my phone in my room. I have to get an alarm clock. That's the only reason I'll sleep with my phone in my room. I don't take my computer into my bedroom because my

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bedroom is for sleeping and reading, and other things... Just keeping it real.

I think you have to figure out what that is for yourself. I like to have a routine in the morning and that has been very important for me in terms of setting my day up. And so, I get up super-early, sometimes around four, sometimes five. And I'll get up and I'll read, I'll just lie in the bed because I'm trying to make it so my physical body is rested too.

And then I'll have coffee and I work on my gratitude list, which I don't always put on social media, but a gratitude list, kind of think through the day, how I want my day to be, and really being metacognitive about how I want my day to be. Because when you put that into the universe, you write it down, you think about it, you say it, then subconsciously you are trying to create that space within your day to make it the way that you want or need it to be.

So, that's something that I've been working on. And just being outside as much as possible. And, in the last three days, I have not been outside a whole lot, but I know that it completely changes my mood if my mood is going sour, if I go outside. Even if it's to walk to the supermarket or to just walk around the block or something, or to go downstairs to the liquor store and get a bottle of wine.

Jill: That counts.

Mirna: It does count, right? And I make my son go outside. My husband goes outside too. Everyone's either biking or running or walking or sitting out on a bench or something like that. And that's been very, very helpful to me. Yeah, and just like, you know, not responding to a lot of requests.

I've been getting a lot of requests from people I don't know to kind of weigh in on things. And I don't have the mental energy for that, you know. A year ago, I would have said yes. A year ago, I would have said, "You know

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what? I'll never get this opportunity to do this again or to speak to this writer or to speak to this whoever from this media outlet." But now, it's too much. And I really do need to protect myself so that I can do the work that I set out to do without all the noise.

And that was one of the parts of my dreams. I do the work that I need to do without all the noise, and all the noise was downstairs. And so, I have to create the space so that I can actually focus and get done what I need to get done.

Jill: I love that. So, what I'm hearing is that your self-care is all about your mental health.

Mirna: Well yeah, yeah.

Jill: You didn't say, like, "Oh, I go out and exercise every day," or, "I eat this," you know. You were just like, "This is what I do to prepare my mind. This is what I do to protect my mind. This is what I do to energize my mind." I just, I fucking love that.

Mirna: I didn't realize that, but it's true. I mean, I go outside and I run and everything. But I know that running is good for my physical health. I know that with running or hiking or whatever, or cycling right now. And I know that. But those two things, the physical and mental aspects are inextricably linked, so that's just a given. But I don't think we think enough about our mental health because that also is very much linked to our physical health, you know.

And I know that when something is traumatic, I have a physiological response to that because I know because I feel my heartrate rising and I feel my shoulders kind of crunching up to my ears. And so, all of that stuff is related. But when I have good mental health, I also have good physical health.

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Jill: Yeah, I really think that that's where it starts because if you're taking care of your mind and making sure that you're constantly, like, cleaning out the stuff that's not working for you and replacing it with stuff that does, then all of the physical stuff falls out from that. Those are natural actions you take when you're working on thinking and your mental health.

I mean, I love that, like, "This is my self-care," and it's like, "Here's how organized my routine, I set myself up for success." It's just fucking awesome.

Mirna: You know, it's definitely a work-in-progress because I didn't have all that, again, even a year ago. I'm so worried about everything and doing this and doing that and flying here and flying there, you know. Again, the gift of this time, this pandemic has been now I have mental space to figure all that stuff out and I have the mental space to say, "Oh, maybe I should make up my bed every morning. Maybe that will change my day." And it does.

Jill: Isn't it amazing. I know. So, would you say that you found maybe some silver linings in this whole COVID quarantine clusterfuck?

Mirna: Yes, clusterfuck it is, number one. And, you know, silver lining is such a weird term. I wish we had a better one that better-addressed the fact that this is so awful and people are still dying, by the way because COVID is still happening.

Jill: It's not going away anytime soon.

Mirna: Right, not anytime soon, but I think we can hold various things in our hearts and in our heads, in our minds. We can hold the fact that that is so awful. But the other part of it is that suddenly many of us now have time. Not all because not all people are able to be at home right now. And so, you know, with their families, even though they're still working – I'm actually working more than I ever have in my life. And I'm not complaining at all.

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But I have been able to, again, have the time and space to do some thinking, to do some radical reprioritization of my life, to spend time with my son, not on a plane, to spend time with my husband. You know, we don't see each other a lot because he works in Africa and in New York when he's back here in the states. And so, we've been hanging out. And then I'm reading. I'm reading. And I am a reader. I'm a huge reader. But I am reading.

Jill: What are you reading right now?

Mirna: I'm reading everything.

Jill: All the things.

Mirna: So, at this point, last year, I probably had only read four books. And that's another thing that is part of my identity and I'm like, "Oh my god, I'm not a reader anymore because I've only read four books. I mean, I'm just listening to podcasts." But that's where my mind was and what I was able to do. But I've read over 20 books since the beginning of the year. A combination of non-fiction – I love non-fiction writing, especially non-fiction by journalists. But I've also read things by Jennifer Weiner, who is fantastic and phenomenal and incredible and I love her.

Jill: And she mentioned you in her latest book, didn't she?

Mirna: Yes, she did, page – I don't have the book right in front of me but it's like between page 40 and 50 or something. And then, the funny thing was that she tweeted both me and Jessamyn Stanley because we were both mentioned in her book. And then Jessamyn says, "Oh my god, this is like a dinner party with all my heroes." And I tweeted back, I was like, "Well, we could have dinner. Maybe not now, but at some point." And then Jennifer Weiner chimes in, she's like, "I will make dinner. I'll cook." And then I said, "I shall bringeth the libations." And then Jessamyn says, "I shall bringeth the edibles." And I was like, everybody was on-brand.

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Jill: Yep, got it all covered. And so, Jennifer Weiner lives in Philadelphia...

Mirna: Yeah.

Jill: Well, you know, if you come down here, obviously...

Mirna: I'm going to have to invite some other people.

Jill: Well, I mean, I would 100% love to be invited to that table. But I was more just saying, like, could we have lunch?

Mirna: Could you imagine? Oh, my goodness.

Jill: I love her. I just absolutely love her.

Mirna: I've read everything.

Jill: Same. She's just so relatable. But anyway.

Mirna: But yes, in addition to that, I started the year reading romance. I've never, ever read romance, these books by Jasmine Guillory. And she puts black people – I mean, she's black. But black people are her protagonists, antagonists, you know. And I had never read anything like that. And they're not all super-lighthearted because they deal with some very heavy issues. But it was really cool to read stuff like that.

I'm looking at my books over here. I've read this wonderful book called *The Island of Sea Women*, by Lisa See. It's a historical novel. And I, you know, I'm not necessarily into historical novels. I say, if I'm going to read history, I'm going to read history. But this is a book about these women, they're divers, professional divers on the island of Jeju in South Korea.

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And it's like tis phenomenal – no pun intended – dive into the history of these women divers and how only the women can do it because they have special powers on this particular island. And the island is named after a goddess, a Korean goddess. And it's so cool, so well-written. Very difficult to read because a lot of it is very dark, and based on history, so a lot of this stuff is true. It's just fictionalized history. And so, that was one of the best books that I've read so far.

I mean, there are so many other things. Now, I'm reading a book on redlining, segregation and housing in preparation for my course, and so that's kind of heavy. But there's tons and tons of things that I've been reading that have been – you know, when you read, especially when you read fiction, it allows you to practice empathy and it definitely has an effect on empathy in real life. So, because you empathize with characters, you walk in their shoes and it allows you a greater range of expression.

And so, there are all these things that reading does for you, I'm speaking as a teacher, obviously, but it's true. When you read really good fiction and the characterization is done in a way that they really do seem real, it allows you to expand your idea and experience of empathy.

Jill: I love that. I love, like, books where the main character is flawed and you're still rooting for them because then you can apply that to your life and be like, "Hey, maybe everybody isn't perfect and I can still love them."

Mirna: Yes, and you can hate them but still feel some empathy for why they're so hateful. And I think that's also necessary. And one of my goals this year was to read books, both fiction and non-fiction, primarily by people of color. And that was one of the reasons why I started reading Jasmine Guillory and the Lisa See book, because I really want to support their work.

And also, I think it's important for other people who are not people of color to read and engage with art and writing by people of color because, again, you know how we were talking about empathy? It allows you to empathize

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more and more with those characters and the people that they represent and the big ideas that they represent.

And, you know, a lot of white people have not read – you know, I don't have any stats in front of me, but just look at the curriculum of various schools and colleges where no people of color are represented in the curriculum or in the cannon, unless you're in an African-American literature course. And in an American literature course, you might have one or two people, maybe one indigenous person, maybe one Hispanic person or Latin X person or maybe this, and that's it. And that doesn't give you enough information. It doesn't give you enough to empathize with.

And so, yeah, so that's been one of my goals and I've been doing it. I know Jenifer Weiner isn't black, or Hispanic or whatever, but the way in which she puts her Judaism at the forefront of her character's lives and experiences, like, that is really, really important. And I notice that. I see it. I'm like, "Yeah, I know what she's doing here," and it's amazing. I could go on and on and on...

Jill: And I'll try to pull out the names of some of the books that you've mentioned and put them in the show notes for anybody who's listening and actually wants to seek those out. If you have any others, go ahead and email them to me and we'll put them in the show notes.

Mirna: Oh my god, I have a lot. I'm just looking at my list right now; I'm not going to read you the whole list but, one of the more important ones – I mean, they're all important, but I've read this book called Algorithms of Oppression and how we tend to think of, when we do a search on Google, for example, or even Bing or whatever, that all of those searches are neutral and when you get the information from your search, that it is neutral. But it's not.

Because the people designing those algorithms are people who live in this world. And if you look at Google, Google is not very diverse. It's mostly

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male. It's mostly white. So, those algorithms are coming from that particular community. They are designing algorithms. So, everything is flawed. Everything is skewed. Sometimes it's intentional. A lot of times it isn't.

But we're not talking about intentions because we're talking about the impact of your actions. Sometimes you're not able to see those things. And that book was mind-blowing, mind-blowing.

Jill: What was it called?

Mirna: Algorithms of Oppression.

Jill: That sounds good. I might put that one next on my list.

Mirna: It's phenomenal. I consumed it as an audiobook. It's probably better to read as a paper book or on a Kindle or something; it was kind of monotone.

Jill: There are probably a lot of spreadsheets in the person's brain who wrote it.

Mirna: Yeah, you know, because it's data. But the narrative is also very good too.

Jill: So, let's talk a little bit about what's going on in your athletic life. Because I know everybody's going to be wanting to know. And by the way, we forgot to say that we're actually recording this on Global Running Day.

Mirna: Oh yeah, running, what about that?

Jill: I know, we hardly talked about it. But what's going on with you athletically? What are you doing right now? What are your goals?

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Mirna: That's a really good question. Everything is cancelled. All the running stuff is cancelled, and you know what, I am not mad. I know that a lot of people are and a lot of people are really dealing with the consequences of not being able to go do the race that you trained for. And it's real, it's real pain, it's real frustration.

And I am right there with you because, for a lot of us who run and who do races and who do things like social events that involve running, it's part of our leisure time activity. It's part of how we take care of ourselves. It's part of how we enter in community with other people. It's part of how we socialize with other people.

And to take all of that away, it is traumatic. And I see a lot of people who maybe are not runners, or who are runners, kind of downplaying the frustration and pain that people are feeling. All of that shit is real. It is very, very real because it tears away at how we identify ourselves and how we live.

That said, I'm taking a break. I need a break, you know. This is my job, you know. And I love it. I love it with all my heart. I love the fact that somebody's paying me to go take a picture of myself running in their clothes or they're paying me to go do a race somewhere and they already know I'm not going to win. They already know that I'm probably going to be last or that I might not finish. But I get paid anyway. That's fucking huge.

I am enjoying the time that I have. Right now. I'm actually injured. And this injury has been hinting at its existence for a long time. But I had been able to run with it, and finally I am not able to run for the next couple of weeks. And it's okay. Had it not been COVID, really, I would be beside myself. I wouldn't know what to do. I'd be worried and anxious about my job and my sponsor and stuff.

But now. I have to take care of my patella because it's doing its own thing. It's like, "I'm going to hang out on the side of your knee and I'm just going

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to do that and then make it so you feel unstable.” And it doesn’t necessarily hurt, but like, it’s weird. I’ve been to PT and interacted with the doctor, after not having gone to the doctor for a really long time because now we can go to the doctor. And so, you know, I’m like, “Okay, if this is what I need to do...”

My coach is like, he – I love my coach by the way. He’s a little crazy. His name is Mike Ehredt and he’s out of Idaho. And he used to be a competitive cyclist, she he’s like, “Yes, another way for you to be outside.” And he’s like, “Don’t go too hard.” I’m like, “Come on, man.”

I hired a cycling coach to help me learn about cycling because I didn’t even know about gears. I was like, “I don’t know what to do with the gear thing.” I don’t even know, like, am I supposed to – like, what am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to be braking at the same time? Am I supposed to – I don’t know what to do. And it turns out, I was doing the wrong thing, because I just got a new bike. So, now I get to learn how to be a cyclist. And I love all sorts of sports, even the ones that I don’t know what I’m doing, like cycling.

I didn’t even know the hand signals. And the coach I was working with yesterday was like, “I know the hand signals but nobody uses them.” And you’re supposed to learn those things when you’re driving, in driver’s ed and stuff like that. We learned them for the test...

Jill: Nobody ever uses them.

Mirna: It’s like, make sure people know which way you’re going. I’m like, okay. So, I’m doing that. And there’s still races that are scheduled in the early fall, late fall. Boston was just cancelled. And I wasn’t running. I was going to work it for one of my sponsors. That’s not happening. And, you know what, it’s not the right time for it to happen. We’re just waiting for New York City to cancel, and that’s actually work for me, so I do worry a little bit about that. I was supposed to run it.

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So, we work with the title sponsor, TCS, and they have been awesome to me. And then run a bunch of their other races that were all cancelled. And so, I'm scheduled to run the Mumbai Marathon, the TCS Mumbai Marathon in January, but who knows if it's going to happen? Hopefully it does because I would love to go to India, because I've never been to India. But if it doesn't, I'm just going to have to keep training. Not training for a marathon specifically. But my overarching goal is longevity, or long-term health and wellness.

And so, every bit of training that I do right now, you know, even if I'm not training for a specific race, I'm putting miles in the bank for health and wellness long-term. So, that's how I have chosen to see it. And I hope that other people see it that way too because even though we have these huge goals of races and crossing finish lines, where's the real finish line? That's my question.

And I have to keep asking that to myself, where's the real finish line? The finish line is, when I'm 92, being able to run or play tennis or swim or surf, because that's my other new obsession, or be on a bike, you know.

Jill: Well, and I agree because I think a finish line where you get a medal, you run the miles, you get the medal, whatever, that's a moment in time. And I think so often we think, like, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to train for this race because I'm going to be so proud when I'm done." And then you're done and you feel like, "I felt proud. Now what?"

And so, when you have a grander why, which is like, "The reason I'm training is so I can be like that 95-year-old woman surfing in Costa Rica..." right?

Mirna: Can you picture her, that black lady in Costa Rica, 95, on a surfboard?

Jill: I am here for this. I'm so here for this.

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Mirna: That's going to be me, y'all.

Jill: Yeah, mark it down on your calendars. When will you be 95? What year will that be. I want everybody to put it in their calendar now.

Mirna: In 50 years.

Jill: 50 years, excellent, so 2070. Fuck, 2070.

Mirna: I know, right?

Jill: That sounds so far away, doesn't it?

Mirna: Yeah, it is, but it's going to go by like that...

Jill: I think you're right. Oh my god. Alright, I love this, 95-year-old, you're going to be the world's oldest surfer at this point...

Mirna: Oldest black surfer...

Jill: Oldest black woman surfer, yes, I love this. Okay, well, so we – I think we've covered a lot of ground. Before we wrap up, is there anything that you want to share with people, anything that you're like, "Look, I've got to say this?"

Mirna: Yes, you know, I think that we are in a time where a lot is going on. We are dealing – is that thunder, by the way?

Jill: Yes.

Mirna: You know how much I hate thunder, right? I forget which chapter it is in my book. But there's a whole chapter devoted to my fear of thunder; an entire chapter. But anyway...

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Jill: Thunder is scary. That is a fact. Thunder is terrifying. I'm not a fan either.

Mirna: I would say specifically to my fellow brothers and sisters, people of color and other communities who are feeling disenfranchised and marginalized right now, who are and are feeling disenfranchised and marginalized right now, I would say to take care of yourself. Whatever that means for you, whatever that looks like for you, do it because there is no time better than now to fortify yourself for the very long struggle that we are embarking upon.

I would also say to members of the white community, please continue your learning. Please continue opening your hearts and minds, even more than you think they are open, to all of the stuff that's' coming at us really fast, all of these terms that have been thrown around, all of the terms, like white supremacy, white privilege, and structural racism, institutionalized racism, all of that stuff. Please find out what that stuff is and see and look at your lives and examine your own life and see where it is that you can be better about those things and you can have more knowledge and you can make sure that your interactions, reactions, your relationships with people can change for the better.

Jill: Okay, so we just lost internet on my end. We've reconnected this call. Seriously, this storm going on outside my window is no joke right now. But, Mirna, I apologize for you being interrupted. Please continue...

Mirna: I'm trying to spread my message and the universe is telling me something else. Anyway, to my friends in the white community, make sure that you continue your learning and use the momentum from this time, of all of the events that are going on for some of us right outside our doors – some of us are far-removed from it, but really use this momentum where everyone is tagging people like me and LaToya and Martinez and everything. It has to go beyond that.

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It has to go beyond you reaching out to people and saying, “Hey, how are you?” That is great. That is awesome. That is a great way to start. Please read. Please hear what all of these terms mean. And I’m talking about white supremacy, white privilege, systemic racism, institutional racism, structural racism, structural violence. All of those terms mean something and everything that is happening right now is because of those things.

So, I encourage you to look those up. Do a Google search, Bing search, Duck-ago search, whatever search engine you have, and educate yourself. And then examine very deeply what is going on in your life where you can make a positive change in terms of eradicating racism, eradicating white supremacy, dismantling white supremacy rather, and being a better catalyst for social change in your own life.

Of course, this is not an indictment of individual people, but all of this stuff affects all of us and we won’t get anywhere until all of us start making changes in our lives.

Jill: I could not agree more and I think, just to kind of add on my own little life coach part, is that white folks, I know a lot of them are feeling very ashamed of themselves right now, maybe because not consciously have they taken actions that have been harmful to the black community, but subconsciously for whatever reason, they’re feeling ashamed, they’re feeling guilty, and they’re allowing those feelings to get in the way of educating themselves and taking action differently because they’re just like, you know, they’re very defensive.

So, if that’s you and you’re listening, I want you to know, hey, we’re all going to fuck shit up in our lives and when you know better, you do better. And I don’t know who originally said that, but I just feel like this is an opportunity for all of us to say, like, “It’s okay that I feel uncomfortable. It’s okay that I’m embarrassed, ashamed, guilty, whatever.” Do not let that stop you from taking action and just being an agent for change instead of silently saying, “This is not my problem.”

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Mirna: And also, I will say that it is feelings of guilt and shame, those are actually parts of racial identity development. And so, it's real. You will experience it, but acknowledging it and knowing it is one thing, but moving beyond it, even though you have feelings of guilt and shame and are frustrated about not knowing what to do, those are things that you can move beyond and actually do something. So, do something with that guilt and shame.

And lots of people, when they have guilt and shame, they start shutting down. And that's the opposite of what needs to happen. And then, they go into denial. That's another stage of racial identity development, of white racial identity development. And so, just to know that those things exist and to know that there are stages and it's real, it's been studied...

Jill: Alright, so apologies to listeners. We got cut off again. Thank you, New Jersey thunderstorm. But really, I just want to make sure we get a moment so you can tell people how they can find you. If they do not know where to find you, they must have been living under a rock. But where can people find you?

Mirna: you can find me on Instagram, @themirnavator, on Twitter @themirnavator, Facebook, Mirna Valerio – The Mirnavator. I'm also on Patreon. I would love your support for the work that I do in inclusion and building community, especially in running. So, that's The Mirnavator on Patreon. And I also have a book called A Beautiful Work-in-Progress. It tells you a lot more about me and why I fear thunderstorms.

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Oh, and one last thing. If you enjoyed listening to this episode, you have to check out the Rebel Runner Roadmap. It's a 30-day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you've always wanted to be. Head on over to [rebelrunnerroadmap.com](http://rebelrunnerroadmap.com) to join. I'd love to be a part of your journey.