

Ep #43: Running Through Adversity with Kristie Bittleston



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who is midlife and plus sized and you want to start running but don't know how, or if it's even possible, you're in the right place. Using proven strategies and real-life experience, certified running and life coach Jill Angie shares how you can learn to run in the body you have right now.

Hey rebels, you are listening to episode number 43 of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. I'm your host, Jill Angie, and today I am speaking with Kristie Bittleston. Now, Kristie is a pretty amazing and talented human. She's a total rock star and she's an awesome success story too. She has risen above some pretty significant physical challenges, including being told she would never be able to run. And she set some super fun goals for herself in the process. So we're going to get into all of that plus a lot more on today's episode.

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Jill: Hey rebels. So I am here this week with the one and only Kristie Bittleston. She is tall, she is German, she is always the tallest person in the back of group photos, she is @runningamazon on Instagram, she's also a nurse coach and a Girls on the Run coach, a Reiki master, a mandala artist, and she plays guitar and violin in Irish pubs when things get stressful for her. So welcome, Kristie, it's so exciting to have you on the show here.

Kristie: Hey, thanks for having me. It's a real honor.

Jill: Yeah, so you and I have known each other - what? About three months? Four months now? Not a super long time but I feel like we've become pretty good friends in that timeframe. And what I want to talk about

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today - because you have like, this amazing - in addition to all the stuff that I just listed out, which is just like you're an amazing, diverse human being, you do a lot of like, super fun stuff, but you also have an amazing running story and that's really why we're here today is to share your story. So I would like to turn it over to you and have you tell us a little bit about your running journey, like, when you started, why you started, what you love about it, so go.

Kristie: Alright, awesome. Let's see. So when - my first taste of running was in high school. It was army RTC and we had this master sergeant, sergeant marshal, he was like, in his mid-60s, and he could outrun all of us. No kidding. And it was awful. It was like, 85 degrees outside, we were always on the track, but he taught me about breathing and about taking shorter strides. Didn't matter how you got there, as long as you got there. That was what he would always say.

And the other piece that's kind of funny was it taught me really how to focus because here you have, you know, this old army guy on your heels, screaming, "Move it," you know, you had to try to not fall, you had to try to breathe, and the whole time you're in this ridiculous uniform. So now that I look back, I've learned a lot from him, really most of the important stuff. But then nursing school, the funniest part was like, a lot of us - the two things that nursing students did back in 1994, you smoked and you ran. It's like, I always thought it was so bizarre. You could go out during the break area and all the respiratory therapists and nurses would be smoking, and the ones that weren't out there, we were running.

So we would always run by them, "Hey, how you doing," and it was really all we had because it was so stressful and you were either studying or in clinical and you know, we would run on the hospital campus, or if it was raining, then we would use our badges and sneak into like, cardiac rehab and we would run on the treadmill. And I just remember that as, you know, I

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felt accomplished when I was done. And in nursing school, that's a rare feeling to really feel like you know something, I'm doing this, I feel strong, I'm doing something right. It became very important to me for that reason. And I didn't realize until later how much the feeling strong would be important. But that's a lot of the reason that I love it now. It's my time to organize my thoughts because I know how to focus and one of the things that you were talking about was the mandala artist. I have the worst ADD. I mean, it's bad. I was diagnosed as an adult. The two times that I can really focus is when I'm running and when I'm doing something artistic. So it's really something that I treasure and always have.

Jill: I love that so much because like, there's something about the movement of legs that like, releases your brain or just allows your brain to go to different places.

Kristie: Yes, absolutely.

Jill: And so I love that you find the same kind of peace in your art. That's really cool. What is that feeling like for you when you're able to really focus versus typical day-to-day activities?

Kristie: It's a contentment, it's quiet. You know, if you ever visited our house, it's like a barn. I mean, it's never quiet. My husband is just this wonderful bubbly Colorado man and he's always laughing, and Ally - you know, she's always going and then we have two Bengals, for god's sake and so you know, I love my life, I love my home, and I love the opportunity that when I can and if I want quiet, it's there. It's just a pair of shoes away. So you know, it's just a time where you can't breathe but you can.

Jill: I know right? The irony.

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Kristie: Right. But it's the time where I can sort through memories and especially - today was an example. This was a strength training day and I had to go out and at least walk because I just had one of those mornings. When I got back from the grocery store the cats were getting in the silverware drawer. Cats do that.

Jill: How is that possible?

Kristie: One of them can turn on faucets. I mean, we have to like, guard the faucets. So it's just one of those - I'm either going to have to go out and move or I'm going to scream. And it made all the difference. And it's a whole lot better - everyone has their coping mechanisms and the bad part about this is when I was injured, running was replaced with Ben & Jerry's, which is delicious, but it's not good for you. So it's nice to have a healthy outlet.

Jill: Right. Well, I love what you just said is that I think - I hope I get it right. You said peace is just a pair of running shoes away.

Kristie: Yes.

Jill: Yeah, I feel like you need to put that - that needs to be on one of your mandala rocks. I swear to god. Because you guys, so Kristie has an Etsy store, what is that name of your Etsy store?

Kristie: It's called Metta Mandala Art, and Metta just means love and kindness and it's one of Buddhist's pillars. I'd seen a lot of this art being put up. I actually started by painting rocks and it was just so expensive, and I thought it would be nice to get this in the hands of people that maybe can't pay \$200 or \$300 for a nice canvas that's been hand-painted so let's do something good and get something out there that's affordable and pretty.

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So I've been doing that, and then, of course, fox cups. Everybody needs a fox cup.

Jill: The I'm out of fox, or...

Kristie: Fresh out of fox.

Jill: I love that. So I love that you have - because let's talk about injuries because you've had some physical challenges like, throughout your life as far as running goes and then recently. So can you talk a little bit about that and what it felt like to not be able to run for a while? And I know you did some Ben & Jerry's therapy which is totally fine, but you also - it seems to me like I saw you doing a lot more of your mandala rocks when you were injured. And so like, can you just talk a little bit about what that whole process has been like for you?

Kristie: Sure. So one of the things that you had asked me about was what was the hardest thing about running, and the hardest thing for me had been the setbacks and the injuries. So years back when I was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, and then when they found out that it had attacked my spine, there was the, "You're not going to run again," and you know, the first time it was just like, okay, I'm not going to run again, well, great. And the second time I remember just thinking, if you say so. But whenever you get an injury with that behind you and knowing everything that you had to do, there's always that fear.

You know, what was it like for Ed Sanford, is this the big one, Elizabeth? Is this it? You're going to have to find something else or really hate all the things. So there's - that's the one thing as far as like, working with your mind - what you talk about in the group that has been my biggest struggle and the hardest thing about running is just running and not being afraid of if

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I get hurt I won't get to do this. It's like, well, you're doing it now, you know? That's where that inner badger, you know, you're doing it now, stop it. And the badger has your accent.

Jill: The badgers from Philly, I love it. So talk to me about that because like, you don't have an inner mean girl. You have an inner badger. Is it an inner honey badger or just an inner badger, and if so...?

Kristie: It's an inner honey badger.

Jill: What's the difference?

Kristie: The difference is the honey badger is kind of like the one that looks at the inner bitch and says just stop it. You know, there's an inner mean girl. Mine is an inner bitch. She's ugly. And she really had her run of the playground for a long time, and there was just a point to where I was like, I'm running, and yeah, I'm big and yeah, I'm slow, I'm running, and I'm doing something that 10 years ago people were telling me I would never be able to do. And at that point I was just ready to look at that inner mean girl and say, you know, screw you. I mean, okay, so I'm getting moored at, you know, I told you about I was running one day with Ally and a kid in a school bus moored at me. I mean, who does that?

Jill: You're like, is that the best you've got, really?

Kristie: But at the time it was devastating and it took me weeks before I could get out again. So - and I hadn't told you about this but a few weeks ago I was out on a training run, I didn't have Ally with me, but I was at a stop sign and there was this guy, he was probably like late teens, whatever, you know, it's - he looks out and he's like, "Hey, can't you go any faster there?" And without even thinking, I just looked at him and said, "Why don't

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you get your ass out of that car, come catch me and we'll find out?" And I remember thinking, oh my god, he could have a gun. So you know, I got a few explicatives, which were again, hilarious. Normally it would just be like, you know, really? And he drove off and I stood there and laughed for a minute and then I thought, how did that happen? Where did that clapback come from? I mean, that's just - has never happened. And that was when I was like, this inner mean girl is getting some competition because I'm just over it, I'm just over it. I was tired of worrying about being fat. I had surrounded myself with these people who are just amazing, you know, like, working with you, Latoya has been wonderful and supportive. I got to meet Mirna Valerio, for god's sake. I mean, I got to hug Mirna. If you cannot get some kind of positive energy off that, you don't have a soul.

Jill: I know, right? Right? She's amazing.

Kristie: And then like, you know, getting to know Betsy Hartley, oh my god, you want to talk about somebody amazing, when you surround yourself with people like that, eventually, that negativity, you run out of room. It's still there. It's still a challenge. And it's always going to be there. You know, you can't get engrained with something like that for so long but you learn that if you really want to live and enjoy your life, you don't need that. And there is where that inner honey badger comes in and...

Jill: Wait, so why a honey badger? I don't know anything about - like, you live in the South so is this a Southern thing?

Kristie: It's not really a Southern thing. It was more like this YouTube phenomenon that came up where this guy was narrating like, National Geographic, and he was talking about this honey badger and showing pictures of him. He's like, eating snakes and the snake bites him and he passes out and then he gets back up and he goes and does something

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else. And the whole time he's like, the honey badger doesn't give a shit. And the whole time he does what he wants and he eats what he wants and screw the world, and the honey badger just became this sensation of you know, this big-time badass hero. I mean, people would like, wear t-shirts, says like, "Badass honey badger," so whenever I think of somebody that's just going to come in and do what it wants and who cares what anyone thinks, that, to me is a honey badger.

Jill: I love this so much.

Kristie: Yeah, go look it up on YouTube. It's honey badger and I think the narrators name is Randall. He also does a really funny one about the stiffy goat.

Jill: Oh, are those the goats that like, their legs so stiff and then they fall over?

Kristie: And he goes, oh my god, he's dead.

Jill: So yeah, I had no idea about this honey badger thing but I'm kind of in love with the whole concept. I think that should be our new like - screw the turtle. The Not Your Average Runner mascot is going to be the honey badger. Let's just call it that.

Kristie: Be the badger.

Jill: Okay, so rheumatoid arthritis, you know, you were told you weren't going to run again, you came back from that and you've just gotten through a whole bunch of injuries and you're coming back from those. So talk about that. So like, you found your way back to running and then injury struck again, which is super fun. The way it always seems to work.

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Kristie: Well, the first time when I started, I'm not sure exactly what came over me but I just wanted to and I remember I fired my current rheumatologist at the time and I went to see this guy that apparently - new in town, everybody loved him, and I took my gallons of bag of prescriptions and I put them in front of him and I said, "I don't want to do Medicaid anymore and I want you to make these go away." He said, "That's going to be hard." Well hello, Elwood.

Jill: The kitty has been - I love that his name - is that after The Blues Brothers, Elwood?

Kristie: Yes.

Jill: So good.

Kristie: But you know, he said it would be hard and you know, he said that it may make the condition worse, and I said, "Is there any possibility that it can make it better?" And I remember he kind of halfway smiled and he said, "Anything's possible." And for some reason, that just stuck in my head. Let's do it. And it took almost two years. And you know, once that happened, then I was like, okay, I'm going to get out of the wheelchair and start using the crutches more, I'm going to go walk. And my friend would always go walking with me just in case I fell and then one day I was like, let's try this without the crutches. So he carried the crutches for me and then we walked. And I remember the day where I was like, okay, it's time. And we took the crutches, we took my handicapped hanger and everything, we just threw it in the dump. I remember what the weather was like that day. And it was probably about a month from there, I was out walking and it was so hot, it was like, a busy intersection in Charlotte and I'm like, I wonder if I ran what it would feel like. Jill almost puked. I mean, I had gotten...

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Jill: But a good puke, right?

Kristie: It was a good puke. I think at that point I was right around 300 pounds. So it was a hard block but at the end people were staring at me because I was like, doubled over and I was crying. And I was just like, oh my god, you know, look at what my legs just did, and I looked like a Weeble Wobble because I can't feel most of my left leg from the knee down. So I was like, hobbling around. It took forever for me to balance, but it felt amazing and it was hard. I mean, it was not easy. I'm not going to blow smoke here and say that, oh, I never hurt. Hurt like hell. But it was just kind of the mindset of look at this, I'm running. And I'd much rather have blisters on my feet from running than blisters on my hands from steering a wheelchair any day. And just the fact that I was blessed enough to be able to do that - not everybody that has RA gets that chance. You can be - in some cases, you can be as stubborn and I'm going to do this as you want, and life just happens, and I got very lucky. Very lucky.

So when you compare the injuries that I've had to that, you know, plantar fasciitis, it's not that big of a deal but the injuries weren't as big of the problem like I said is the fear and what if this is a big one, and it never was. All I had to do was stop running, get my head out of my butt, do what they said to do. Take my anti-inflammatories, do the rolling, do the icing, and let it heal. And when I do, it works, and it's just like you know, when I did a 10k this weekend, I may have to walk the whole time. That's okay. See, I'm fine with that. I'm moving.

Jill: You're like, I'm not in a wheelchair.

Kristie: Yeah. I don't have to have crutches or a wheelchair. I'm moving, and even if I run one minute out of an hour, I ran.

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Jill: Yeah, that's amazing.

Kristie: So it's just getting - it's so mental and that was one of the things that drew me to ultra-running and she said part of ultra-running is managing your brain.

Jill: I would say 80% of ultra-running is managing your brain. Yeah, for sure. Well, let's talk about that because when you and I first met, you were like, okay - you had a block in your mind about four miles.

Kristie: Four miles.

Jill: And then suddenly fast forward like, two months and you've got a 50k and your vision board.

Kristie: Yeah.

Jill: So walk me through what happened between that first conversation and putting a 50k sticker on your vision board.

Kristie: Well, it's your fault because...

Jill: Alright, I will take full responsibility.

Kristie: I remember that conversation because you asked me how far I'd gone. I'm like, "Oh, well I've gone 3.7 or 3.8," and you said something like, "So you didn't go four miles when you did the walking for the rest of the day?" Oh god, I feel so stupid. And I'm like, yeah, I guess I kind of did.

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Jill: Right, because you were saying I can't go four miles, I've only gone 3.7, 3.8, and I'm like yeah, but you had to walk back from your run. So you actually had gone four miles and you just weren't - in your head. Okay.

Kristie: Yeah.

Jill: Sorry, I was like, ah, I remember that. Okay.

Kristie: And I mean, from that point I was like, well, I mean, it really makes perfect sense so let's just go out there and do it. And I did. I went out and I did the four miles, and when I did the four miles, I was kind of doing a loop like, the first two miles I was listening to podcasts and the second two, one of the books that Mirna Valerio had recommended was called *Nowhere Near First* by Cory Reese. I was listening to that audiobook. And a lot of it stuck, and I just got this curiosity of like, this sounds torturous and awful and amazing and wonderful and what is this ultra-running, you know?

And so I started doing some research and started kind of, you know, getting to know people and trying to seek people out online and asking people here locally like, what's it like, and the challenge of it, just the whole - and this is what clicked. This really isn't something that your body is supposed to be able to do. And that with me, I was like, really? Let's talk about that. And unfortunately, with me, that's a big motivator. Like, tell me something that if you looked at me you didn't think I would be able to do. And I still might not be able to, but boy, that's a hell of a goal and I'm having a blast just learning about it and you know, when I do four miles I'm like, alright, now it's time for five, now it's time for six, let's keep going. And it was funny like last night during the coaching call, you had said you know, well, the half marathon is - and to me inside my head I'm thinking, the half marathon's like, candy. I'm going for a 50k, so if I do six miles this

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weekend, it's like, I'll be able to go to that half marathon and be done and maybe not throw up.

Jill: Exactly. I love that you're thinking of like - you're like, half marathon, pft.

Kristie: It's kind of like a rung in the ladder so that's why I put all three of the stickers on my vision board. It's like, okay, this is number one, 26.2 is the next step, 50k, you know, and I think the biggest part of it was I had talked to a friend of mine that's in ultra-running. She's all the way on the west coast and she was like, you can get to 50k. I don't care where it is, I'll come out there. And I was just like, that's it, I've got to. I have to at least try. I have to at least try. And one of my friends is doing a 50k this November, Latoya is doing one, and I'm going to be going with her and trying to support her there so I'll get to see it at least - it's an obstacle race, which...

Jill: Yeah, so for those of you who don't know who Latoya is, Latoya Shauntay Snell, she's the Running Fat Chef, she's amazing. And what is...

Kristie: Hey hey.

Jill: Hey Latoya. What is the race that she's signed up for again? In case anybody wants to like go with you and share her...

Kristie: Oh wow, so it's going to be in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and the date is leaving me right now but it is in November. So if you do a search on the Spartan Ultra Beast and...

Jill: Just the name, oh my god.

Kristie: I mean, it's like they made the race for her.

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Jill: Yeah, so awesome.

Kristie: It's 50k plus it's obstacles. So what I'm trying to do is get everything that I can together just to support whatever she needs through that race. So I'm learning about crewing, I'm learning about nutrition and hydration. She's kind of guiding me through that too, so I'm learning that end of it while I'm kind of getting my body up to distance and strength. So it's been a really neat experience. When I looked and saw that here was a fire jump at the end, I'm like, pulling out my nursing books, how do you treat a burn. And finally, she's like, "Kristie, it's not that big of a fire."

Jill: Right, because there has to be some sort of like, level of safety, but still, wait - because I've seen these - it's not the Tough Mudder. What's the one where there's like, electrical wires hanging and you have to run underneath them? Is that like the...

Kristie: I think that's Tough Mudder.

Jill: Or maybe it is Tough Mudder.

Kristie: It might be because I remember her saying at some point like - I think because the Tough Mudders might be the ones that she said Mirna liked to do and that she didn't want to do them because she didn't want to be electrocuted or something like that. I'm sitting over here thinking, you're jumping over fire.

Jill: I know. I would pick jumping over fire over electrocution. I don't know why. It's like, which seems crazier? They both seem crazy but I love that they're not just people out there doing it but like, super powerful like, plus sized athletes doing it, which just - it's just so fucking awesome. Okay, so you're crewing for her. You're also a Girls on the Run coach and so like,

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talk to me about that because I think that is so cool. It's something I've actually always wanted to do and just have not checked it off my list yet but I'd love to hear about your experience.

Kristie: One of the - this is my first year and so we're just getting started going to the training and everything. I'm going to be coaching here - actually, this school in my neighborhood, which is going to be awesome. It will be Ally's school so she's still too young. It's from like, third to fifth grade and she's still in first so she's going to kind of be mascotting and passing out water bottles and things like that, but Ally can outrun me in distance, in time, in everything, so this is a really big deal for her, and she's told everybody at the school, "Oh, my mommy's one of the coaches," so it's a lot of it I'm doing for her in a way because I mean, this is a kid who when she was born, she didn't breathe on her own and now she climbs the walls. And she loves to run and she thinks that it is so amazing that mommy runs.

And what a good opportunity it is because these are kids that normally wouldn't be able to get on a sports team. Girls on the Run has a lot of scholarship programs that they can offer. And if you cannot afford to get into Girls on the Run, they will find a way. If you want to run, they're going to help you get there and one of the people that I've met just through online - I hope I get to meet her personally but Molly Barker, she's the founder of Girls on the Run and just what I've seen of her online, you want to talk about an amazing human being, just - and everything about her and how she thinks and how she looks at everything, I mean, you know, she's amazing and I can see how that kind of an organization came from someone like her. And just you know, putting in the application and having them come back and say we want you to coach. That was huge. I mean, that was - I hadn't even taken a step yet and I was so proud. And just having a chance to get these girls at this age and go after the inner mean girl and stop her before she has a chance to take these kids over. I mean, it's not just running.

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They do lessons and a lot of it is about confidence, it's about integrity, and you know, just every kind of strength. Not just physical. And teaching these girls that yeah, you can. If it's something you have in here, you can do it. And they probably have an inner mean girl but you know, our job is to tell that inner mean girl, "Sit down."

Jill: And it's so interesting because well, we're not born knowing how to criticize ourselves.

Kristie: Right.

Jill: Right? We are taught how to do that by what we see around us, the messaging that we get. And so by being - by stepping in with a third, fourth, or fifth - so how old is that? Eight, nine, 10 years old? 11 years old? Like, stepping in before that messaging has become like, permanently engrained in the brain and turning it around is so important. Because then there's no need for you and I in our 40s to do this because it never becomes a problem. Like, my...

Kristie: Put you out of a job, Jill.

Jill: Please, please do that. I will calmly - we'll do mandala art. That will be my job.

Kristie: Absolutely.

Jill: Really, so I think it's so important that what you're doing, and it's something that we talk about in the rebel runner formula a lot under the community piece, that it's important to be an example to others, it's important to help others see themselves differently and teach them the self-confidence and the ability to love themselves. It's not just about the

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running. It's about - like, you became a runner because you saw other people doing it, right?

You saw - okay, Latoya's doing this, maybe I can do an ultra. Like, you saw other people doing something, other people that have the body that you have and you're like, maybe this is possible for me. So you're now paying that forward by basically being an example to other people and by helping young women. I just think that's - it's so important. It's so important. They are really lucky, these girls. And your little girl is so lucky that she's got a mom that's leading by example, and a mom that's real about it too, right?

Kristie: Yeah, it's - I have to be with her. I owe her that much. It's - god, with that kid, I'm lucky. I don't know how I lucked out because she has taught me 10 times more than I ever teach her about life and I just want to make sure that I get her ready. I mean, there are a lot of, you know, just get through the day, but I think my job is to teach her how to make it without me. I got to get her ready to be in the world. She might have not been strong when she came into the world, but when I send her out, my god, she's going to be invincible if I have anything to do with it.

Jill: I love that. I do not doubt that she will be totally invincible.

Kristie: She'll either take over or end up in jail. I'm not sure which one.

Jill: Either way, she will have an attitude though, I love that so much.

Kristie: Gusto.

Jill: Okay, so let me ask you this. What is like, one piece of advice that you would give to somebody who's just starting out running and thinks maybe that they - either they're too fat, they're too old, or maybe they have a

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physical challenge that other people might not have, like, what is your piece of advice that you would give to that person?

Kristie: There would be so much I would want to tell them. I'd definitely start with anything's possible, and you know, those things that are, what do you call them? Circumstances, okay, your BMI is this, you know, you have this health condition, but if there is any shred of possibility, please don't deny yourself that privilege of movement. Do not deny yourself that opportunity for that peace that you can get from running. You know, just that chance to really see how powerful your body can be. And you know, I struggle with things in running; sweat. I hate sweating, but the thing with me that, for some reason, has never been a struggle – finding time is hard, but once I find the time, getting out the door is not a problem. Motivation is not – I love getting out the door. Getting me to strength train on a day where I'd rather run, that's hard, you know. But if you frame it in that this is an opportunity, you know. This is an opportunity to move, you can do something for your body, you can feel strong in a world that's trying to make you not. And don't deny yourself that chance – you may do it and decide it sucks and you don't like it, and that's fine, but make sure that you at least try. Just like anything in life, if it's at all feasible, do it. This is not a practice run. Just take advantage of it. This is the race.

Jill: Life is not a practice run.

Kristie: You can take your training runs where you want to, but life is not a training run. If you have an opportunity to strap on a pair of shoes and an hour to enjoy a beautiful day, for the love of god, do it. Netflix isn't going to give you what moving your body can.

Jill: And Netflix will always be there. Save that for an airplane ride. Get out there and run; I just love that so much. Okay, so I do want to ask you to

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share, what is something – and I know quite a bit of fun quirky things about you, but what is something fun and quirky about you that is not running related the average person might not know about you?

Kristie: When I first started to lose weight, before I went back into running, the first – gosh, because I remember, my highest weight was 312 pounds and I was like, “I can’t go into the gym looking like this.” I could have. What are they going to do? But I didn’t know that then. The inner mean girl is like, nope, can’t go into the gym. So I was like, well what could I do? And I have a friend, her name is Pam Swayze. She taught belly-dance, so I drove to Gastonia and I took belly-dance classes. And this is somewhere where you can be curvy, you don’t even have to buy shoes, you know.

And when she got done with you, you were sore. Your stomach hurt, you know and you would get into an environment of people – I met women that could roll quarters on their stomachs. They had such control of their abdominal muscles; it was amazing. And I mean, you don’t realize the athleticism of that, but that was before I was really able to get my legs strong. Before I knew how to balance on that numb leg, she taught me how to balance on both and how to strengthen my core so that I could work on that. So that was my steppingstone and I still love belly-dancing. I was never good at it, you know, that doesn’t mean I can’t do it, you know. You can do something if you suck at it and you can enjoy it.

Jill: Right, there’s no law that says you have to be good at everything you do.

Kristie: Right, and if you enjoy it, there is no law that said I could not belly-dance. And it’s still something fun, I love dancing with Ally and we have a great time. It’s good exercise, you know. That was kind of like my springboard into really enjoying fitness and to realizing that, you know,

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maybe I can be an athlete. Maybe this is possible. I might have a physical limitation, or I guess whatever the current buzzword is, disability, I don't know what you're supposed to call it now, so if I said the wrong word, I'm sorry, but you can still be an athlete. And to me, those are the athletes that really inspire. But yeah, belly-dancing – if you're not ready to run, belly-dance.

Jill: This is so good. It makes me want to go take a belly-dancing class, for sure.

Kristie: You need to, oh my gosh...

Jill: I took a pole-dancing class last year and that was ridiculously fun. It was...

Kristie: I want to try – that's going to be my next thing.

Jill: That was super fun. That was a great time. Okay, so the last question I have for you before we get into how people can follow you or connect with you is – you've actually been a member of the Run Your Best Life coaching group for a while and you're a very active member, so I'd love if you could share just a little bit about what you're getting out of that group and – because if there's somebody who's been thinking, "I may want to join but I don't know if it's the right thing for me..." what advice would you give to them?

Kristie: Okay, oh gosh, what you had said about ultra-running, 80% of it is in your brain – and I don't know a lot of running coaches, I don't know how much they focus on the mind end of it, but I've never worked with anyone who has like we do in Run Your Best Life, and I never realized how much my mind was holding me hostage and keeping me from really enjoying it. I

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mean, I loved it and I knew how much of a privilege it was, but there was always this- I'd just started wearing tank tops. I still don't like it, but I'm wearing them.

But it's things like that, you know, that before, why would that be such a challenge? Because 80% of it is in your head and your head can screw with you, you know. There was one thing, I had written this down. It said, "Your brain loves to tell you that you're not capable and you need to quit because it really kind of wants to stop the whole process, you know." And getting in this group has taught me how to stop that train, and that's what I say about the inner badger. I mean, your inner mean girl, when I came into the group, she ran the playground. I mean, and I didn't know how to stop that, you just thought it was sort of a part of life. And when I realized, okay, well we have circumstances and we have thoughts, and the thought downloads and looking at – and I remember looking at the paper and thinking, just like that day that Ally brought that piece of paper in because she caught me fussing at the mirror.

It's like, what if Ally wrote that? How would I feel if I saw a piece of paper like that thought download that came out of my daughter? That's when the thought downloads really started to hit me. And these are things that I never would have done had I not been in the group. And just the fact that, yeah, somebody said something, you know, ridiculous out their car window, and I can clap them back. And there's a level of training between my ears that I never would have gotten, I don't think, by any other coach. You know, the training plans and everything, the intervals, my pace when I do the intervals like how you had shown, I think it instantly knocked a minute off.

Jill: That's fun...

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Kristie: I was like, what? I mean, I was doing a 14-minute mile and I thought, you know, well half of it was that owl too; you've got to give the owl some credit. The owl scared me to death. But I was doing these intervals and I remember probably about a 10th of a mile, I was like, I've got to get away from the owl, and I looked; I was under 13 minutes. And I was like, "How does that work?" I mean, I'm sure there was some simple math. I don't like math. But I was always of the mindset of try to get to where you can run that whole mile without stopping, but you don't have to. Why? You still got from point A to point B and when I did it the way you taught me how to do it, I got there faster.

Jill: So fun...

Kristie: So there's a lot to it. Even down to what kind of socks to get, to have that community for things that I would normally not know and instead of having to awkwardly walk up to the lady in the running store, here's this community where I can say, "Okay, man, I need some socks. I've got blisters." Or the best one, the bras. That seems to be the biggest question. You know, I'm sitting here thinking you women are so lucky with your boobs; here I am sitting with my A-cup...

Jill: And now you've realized...

Kristie: And I'm like, well, maybe it was more than I bargained for. I'll just stick on my tank-tops, you know. But there's a freedom in that group and everyone in there is real and they all have challenges, they're all different, and there is something you can learn from everybody. Julie Fountain, perfect example. She's running in Shreveport in the afternoon.

Jill: I don't understand this at all...

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Kristie: Yeah, and here I am like, “Oh it’s 82 degrees...” You know what, Kristie, shut up.

Jill: She’s like excited when it’s 82 degrees because it’s usually 100. You’re right, there’s so much you can learn from everybody else that’s in that community that I think is really, really invaluable. And we have been talking about socks a lot lately. There’s been a lot of really good sock talk.

Kristie: There really has.

Jill: So good. Alright, so let’s talk about how people can follow you because you’re actually very active on social media, which I love. You’re that person who’s posting, “I ran, I did this, I did that...” And I know it’s super inspiring, so if people want to follow you, what’s the best place to do that?

Kristie: So the best place to follow me right now is on Instagram. That’s where I really put the art, the running – I can’t cook. I’m going to go ahead and tell you that, but I think it’s fun because if I post up things and it’s like, “Look, I cooked, I boiled an egg, guys.” I can do that, so it’s just like, okay look, guys, you can boil an egg. So I try to post things that are humorous and I think the most thing that’s staged is Ally’s, “Wait a minute, let me put four or five things on before you take a picture.” That’s as staged as it gets, guys. I mean, but it’s so much fun and I have made so many friends through there. So all together it’s @runningamazon in Instagram. I think I’m on Twitter, but I don’t know.

Jill: This is how I feel about Twitter too. I’m like, I think I’m there, but I’m not sure.

Kristie: Yeah, I do have a blog that’s getting started out and it’s runningamazon.com and it’s just what races are like and, “Hey, I had this

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challenge today and this is how I got through it.” You know, so it’s kind of more of a log of just the daily ups and downs of everything. And then I’m on Facebook, you can find me, Kristie Bittleston. And again, it’s just random BS. Social media for me is just another place to cut up and...

Jill: And have fun.

Kristie: Yeah. And then I have a Facebook page for Metta Mandala Art, and that has all of my canvases and my rocks and stuff. And I’m Etsy at the same place, so if you have a new place you’re trying to decorate, take a look around and see if you like anything. We’re going to have Christmas and Bodhi Day type decorations, so get the Christmas and the Buddhist end of it. So it’s pretty eclectic.

Jill: I love it. I love all your work. So they can’t see, but you can see – actually, you might not be able to, my head might be in the way but...

Kristie: There it is...

Jill: I have your art on the credenza in the back of my office and it makes me happy. It’s right next to my sign that says, “In case nobody told you today, good morning, you’re so smart, I love you, and nice butt.” And then underneath it is a piece of Kristie’s art. And then, of course, you guys can always find her if you join Run Your Best Life. Kristie’s there. She’s a very active member and she’s always offering her own perspective and she’s very real in that group too. She shares her talent and her successes and it’s pretty damn awesome. And she’s going to be running a 50K sometime in the next, I’m going to say, 12 to 18 months.

Kristie: That’s the goal.

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Jill: That's the goal, so if you want to follow that journey, you can definitely get some of that in there. So Kristie, thank you so much for joining me today and for taking time out of your very busy schedule, because I know you've got a lot going on. So I appreciate it so much and I love that you have an amazing afternoon. It looks like the sun is shining down in North Carolina.

Kristie: Oh yes, it's going to cool down tomorrow so... But thank you so much.

Jill: Yeah, fabulous, alright, bye.

Kristie: Bye.

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Hey, rebels, I hope you enjoyed my chat with Kristie, and if you want to find out more about what she does and follow along with her amazing running adventures, her gorgeous art, and her cutie patootie mini-me daughter, you can check out her Instagram [@runningamazon](#) to see all of it. And we'll also include links to her Facebook and all that other good stuff in the show notes at notyouraveragerunner.com/43. Until next week...

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