

Ep #68: Ultrarunning and Beating Type Two Diabetes with Betsy Hartley



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With Your Host

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 68 of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. I'm your host, Jill Angie, and today I am speaking with the one and only Betsy Hartley, who has an incredible fucking story of personal triumph to share. I mean, it is just unbelievable.

So if you don't know who Betsy is, she's one of the most inspirational people I have ever met. She fought with weight her entire life and was diagnosed as morbidly obese with type two diabetes at the age of 30. And this was not enough to prompt her to change her poor eating habits and inactive lifestyle, and by the early 2000s, she weighed close to 400 pounds, was taking three insulin shots a day, along with a handful of other prescription medications.

But in July of 2011 she made a single decision to change her life and reclaim her health and started with a simple plan of eat less, move more, no crazy diets or anything like that. She started walking at local races with friends, which turned into an intense desire to learn how to run on the local and the scenic mountain trails around where she lived.

Now, fast forward to 2018, Betsy has finished multiple 50K and 50-mile races on her feet, running, not on a bike, as well as completing her first 100-mile trail race in the fall of 2016, and she just finished her first half Ironman. So she's just a fucking rockstar. We're going to talk about all of

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that today plus the mission she has in life now to help others who were in her shoes make the same life-changing decision that she did and change the trajectory of their lives.

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Jill: Alright rebels, I am here with the amazing Betsy Hartley, and I know I just introduced her, but I'll tell you what, I'm fangirling a little bit here so I'm going to get a little squee with you guys. But I just want to say thank you to Betsy for joining me today and being willing to share your story and all of your wisdom.

Betsy: Oh, I'm so excited you invited me. Thank you.

Jill: And so Betsy and I are - I just became a Skirt Sports ambassador, Betsy has been one for quite a while.

Betsy: One year.

Jill: Just one year. Oh, okay. So we are actually going to get to meet in person in June at the Skirt Sports ambassador retreat. Super excited about that. But we're not here to talk about that today. We're going to talk about the amazingness that is Betsy. So let's just jump right in. Can you tell us a little bit about your story? What do we need to know? What is the essence of Betsy?

Betsy: Well, I turned 50 years old today - sorry, not today. I turned 50 years old this year.

Jill: Congratulations.

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Betsy: Sorry, yeah, wow, you know what, I need more coffee.

Jill: I think you might.

Betsy: But I turned 50 years old this year but when I turned 40 a decade ago, I weighed close to 400 pounds, I was type two diabetic, I was taking three shots a day and a whole bunch of medicine and I really was being medicated to stay alive. And about eight years ago, I woke up in the morning and decided that I didn't want to die that way, that I actually wanted to live a life and enjoy it. But my weight and my health were keeping me from doing that, and I started on a journey to really - I was not going to lose weight. I didn't care if I lost weight. I just wanted to reverse type two diabetes, but healthy lifestyle changes, one thing led to another and I ultimately lost over 200 pounds. I reversed type two diabetes, I'm no longer considered type two. I am slightly metabolically broken, so I kind of have to stay on a modified diabetic diet to stay off of medicine. I've run a 100-miler, I just finished my first half Ironman. I'm living a life I didn't know existed 10 years ago and I am just blown away at what pursuing a healthy life and a healthy lifestyle has given me. I'm 50 years old and I'm more fit, more healthy, more happy than I have ever been in my life. That's me in a nutshell.

Jill: That is like, the best nutshell I have ever seen.

Betsy: I'm pretty happy with my nutshell.

Jill: You are like, the macadamia nut of the bunch.

Betsy: Thank you.

Jill: They're the best ones, right?

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Betsy: Yeah, they are.

Jill: So okay, so there's a lot to unpack there. What I think is fascinating is you never - you didn't go into it to lose weight. You were like, I just want to feel better, I want to be more fit, but you ended up losing over 200 pounds. So that's one thing I want to unpack, and then the other thing is you said you didn't even know this lifestyle existed. So what - 10 years ago when you were 40 years old, did you even know what a half Ironman was?

Betsy: I knew what an Ironman was because I had watched Kona on TV and I thought they were totally crazy and it was nothing I was ever going to do. So I guess I knew about it socially and culturally just from references, but I had no idea what it actually was, what it consisted of. And so it wasn't something that from the get go - there are people I see that want to lose weight to do an Ironman. I didn't do it in that order. I just didn't want to die of type two diabetes and one thing, I watched my mom - my mom died, in May it'll be nine years and she died of ultimately, an autoimmune disease, but it was complicated and her health was complicated by the fact that she was obese and had type two diabetes. And I just remember that thought of like, you can choose to die this way because that's all you have, you don't have an autoimmune, or you can try to pull yourself out of the gutter and live a different life. And then the doors like Ironman started opening when you're getting fit, getting healthy and getting active and meeting different people. But it wasn't - if you're asking if it was like, an organizing principle or a focal point, wasn't even on my radar.

Jill: So what was your organizing principle? Let's kind of go into that because reversing type two diabetes, it sounds like that was your goal. So how did you approach that?

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Betsy: Testing my blood sugar every day and trying to hit the right kinds of glucose numbers was hugely motivating to me because I started to see that if I walked a little bit more, drank a little more water and didn't eat a crap diet, that I could make that number a little bit better, and I started to realize that type two diabetes was - it is not for everyone. If you have a listener that wants to jump down my throat over this, I'll take it, but type two diabetes by and large is a lifestyle disease. Like, I did this to myself, and it became apparent to me that I could probably undo it or back out of it or make it less or manage the symptoms. And so it became a game of can I get my blood sugars healthy, can I get off of insulin, do I have to see my doctor every three months or can we go to six months or a year. It really became a game of not wanting to be dependent on the healthcare system.

Jill: God, I love that so, so much.

Betsy: And I didn't want to - you know, I went to go on a trip with my former job and it was like, can I travel internationally with insulin and needles? Do I have to have a prescription to get into the country with this medicine? What am I going to do with the needles once I've used them? I just went to Mexico to do a half Ironman and I didn't have to take any medicine, any needles, any prescriptions, nothing. Like, that is - I don't know how to explain the quality of life in those two of being beholden to the medical community to keep my healthy, as opposed to taking control of my own health.

Jill: Right.

Betsy: It's huge. So that was like, the organizer.

Jill: It's just so powerful because then it has nothing to do with the number on the scale at all, and everything to do with how independent can I be,

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how much can I run my own life rather than having this disease run it or, you know, the pharmaceutical industry.

Betsy: And I definitely - when I started losing weight, I definitely got in the battle with the scale. I uncovered the fact that I had binge eating disorder, which is kind of how I got to be the 400 pounds to begin with, but I don't want to mislead people. I do battle a number on the scale and I do battle body image stuff, but when I started this whole thing, I was just trying to save my own life and get off insulin. That was the whole thing that got this started.

Jill: I mean, I just think it's so powerful. I just wanted to save my own life.

Betsy: I did. That's what it was. I could see myself in a hospital bed having parts of my feet cut off because I couldn't control my blood sugar, and I thought, "I'm 40 years old. What the hell am I doing?" Especially because this wasn't something that I didn't lose the genetic lottery. I didn't get something horrible through however it happened, like, I'd done it to myself. And so it becomes this puzzle of can you undo it. And I didn't realize how stacked the odds were, how few people when they get this far into diabetes can actually reverse it and not have a whole bunch of damage, but it's fairly rare.

So one of the things that I'm like, super keen on is trying to get people to pay attention to the pre-diabetes diagnosis, when you can really impact things pretty quickly. And if you're type two and haven't been type two for very long, you, on some level, can reverse or minimize stuff. And I think that people think they get type two and it's kind of a death sentence and you go on insulin and they'll tell you in their very smarmy, medical way like, insulin is a growth hormone, you're either going to grow up or out and you're 40 years old, so you're going to gain weight when you're on insulin.

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And I just remembered having a little thing in my head that went, "F you. I'm not everyone." And it was like, should have been something that was denigrating and depressing and instead for some reason, it was motivating. I was like, well, watch. Let's see what happens. Let's see who's right. I was able to stay - I was on insulin for about eight years but then decided I was going to reverse it and was able to come off insulin fairly rapidly once I started some weightlifting and walking.

Jill: That is amazing. And that is like - it's powerful because you saw what it was like to be on insulin and have it run your life. Literally, right? Having to...

Betsy: Every minute.

Jill: Every minute, and to kind of like, have that shift in your brain like, nope, this is not what I want, and to take the action and see the other side has got to be - do you just get up every morning and say, "The fuck just happened? Whose life is this?"

Betsy: Every single day. So it goes between like - there was probably the first two or three years where I would wake up and I would think, "Okay, day as a 400-pound woman," and then my feet would hit the ground and I'd be like, I'm not 400 pounds. I don't weigh 400 pounds anymore. And now it's more just like, wow, today is a gift. I worked hard for this. How am I going to enjoy it? What good am I going to do? What's going to happen today? What do I get to take advantage of today that honestly, in my 40s, I was morbidly obese? I was an extremely - they were very persistent in encouraging me to look at gastric bypass surgery. They were using words like shelf life and that you have a timeline because you're so obese, you're so sick, things are so wrong. One doctor said, "You're not going to make it to 50 if you don't change things." So I remember when I turned 50 I was

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like, suckers. I made it to 50 and I kind of feel like every day beyond 50 is just a gift because at one point in time, that was kind of the deadline on my head and I made it past it and I plan to use every day they give me.

Jill: So okay, so I have some questions about that because so often, people think - and I don't know if this is just what the medical establishment thinks like, if I tell somebody they're going to die from this disease that they're creating for themselves, then that will motivate them to change. And you heard that over and over and it never motivated you to change until you changed your thought to like, I'm going to save my own life. So am I understanding that correctly that like, doctors telling you you were going to die was not really what got you to make change?

Betsy: No, and I have this conversation with people a lot. It's about the dynamic around change. And just because someone thinks you need to change does not mean you are going to change. The adage would be you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. The horse is going to drink when it's thirsty. But I spent years being bullied and belittled and having family members tell me like, "Do you want to be a burden on your family when you're fat and old if you make it to old?" They said it a little nicer, but not much nicer than that. And it was just this perfect storm of realizing like, I had - it was literally like someone switched a light switch on and I realized like, I'm in control. I have to do this. I'm not doing this for anyone else. I want a different life than the life I've been living. Nobody can do the work. There is no magic bullet. There is no shortcut. Am I willing to make the changes? And I had failed at so many diets like, I don't even know how many times I failed at Weight Watchers. I don't even know what to tell you. Over a dozen.

And yet, this time I woke up with this cast iron will to make things different, and it's waivered a few times in the last seven or eight years, but I've stayed directionally correct and I knew I had bigger goals at that point in

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time. But for some reason, I woke up one morning and literally just had kind of a backbone of steel and decided things were going to be different. And I had failed so many other times that I get in all these discussions with people about why was it different this time, because I'd had the death threat on my head. I'd had threats of cutting part of my foot off to get rid of the bone infection and that wasn't enough to make me change. I was like, well, I'm sure I can still wear cute shoes and hide that I'm missing part of a foot. I was rationalizing everything, and so all of a sudden, I woke up one morning in July and it was like, I don't want to live this way, and more importantly, I don't want to die this way. I'd rather go out in a blaze of glory doing something amazing than in an ICU being administered insulin. I'm choosing to make it different. It hasn't been all easy but it was absolutely a choice. And as many people as I've talked to, as much as I've read on change dynamics, it is so internal. You have to make the decision. No one's going to make the decision for you.

Jill: Your thoughts have to change. And that's the only thing that you have real control over in your life anyway is your thoughts, right? So your thoughts drive everything. I believe they drive all of our results. So when your thoughts shift from, "Ugh, how am I going to do this?" to, "Oh, I'm just going to figure it out," or whatever version of that, then like, boom, everything clicks into place, and even if it's hard, you're still showing up, doing the work because you have this belief like, I'm just going to do it. This is just what I'm going to do. Once you start making that decision, it's like, oh, everything - yeah, this could be really hard and difficult and I might fail along the way, but if you just have that belief like this is what I'm going to do, it doesn't really matter how many times you fail.

Betsy: No, it doesn't. So that's honestly why I love ultrarunning is because so much of it is mental. Like, honestly, there's going to be people listening shaking their heads, but almost anybody can run an ultra. They say that you run like, the first third of an ultra on your legs, the second third of an

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ultra is with your brain, like how smart, strategic are you being, but the third third is with your heart, which is kind of your head telling you whether you want to do it, whether you're capable of doing it. And that appeals to me so deeply, but yeah, our thoughts can really help us or derail us and I'm a prime walking daily example of that.

Jill: That's amazing. Well, let's talk a little bit about your running now that you've brought up the topic of ultrarunning. So how did you start? At what point in this whole process did you start running and why did you start? What did that look like for you?

Betsy: So I started by walking because I was 300 pounds and couldn't tie shoes. And so I wasn't wearing anything built for speed. That's for sure. But I started by walking and I had a good friend named Hannah who - we signed up to do a 10K, and she's run Boston, she's a very fast runner. She's super proud of me, she wanted to do the 10K with me and she walked it with me, and I got done with it. She literally had to bring the car to the finish line. I was walking and she brought the car to the finish line because I couldn't walk to the car. I was so crippled after the 10K. So I went home and I signed up for a marathon because I decided that if I could walk a 10K, I could walk a marathon, and I started walking...

Jill: Wait, let's just stop for a second.

Betsy: You know what, I didn't tell anybody because I knew people were going to be like, what the hell? You're an idiot. But I thought, well, it's going to keep me motivated to keep walking, right? The 10K's got to get easier. And as a side note, I used all the money that I saved from not having to take insulin and medicine at that point and I ran my first marathon was in Maui. I took myself to Hawaii with all my former drug money.

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Jill: Stop it. This is even more meaningful that you just said that, so okay.

Betsy: I wasn't paying for prescriptions, I banked all the money and I went to Hawaii and walked a marathon in Maui. But in training for that, I started to realize that like, everybody would wait for me very kindly, no judgment, that people would wait for me to walk my training. And I started to realize that if I could run even like, 10 feet at a time, I could get done sooner. I could get done faster and they wouldn't have to wait for me for so long.

So I started secretly trying to teach myself how to run, and so I started running like, across driveways, between telephone poles. Just trying to get a little bit of running in. Now, at the time, I think I was like, a 42F bra, which like, that's a hard sports bra to find. And when you find it, you still need like, three of them to keep from giving yourself a concussion while you run. And shoes were hard to find. I was in like, 3X clothing, so I made a lot of mistakes early on with like, not getting the right shoes, not wearing a tight enough compression. Chafing, ugh. And so running at first was like, super uncomfortable and it was done in very, very short spurts. But then I slowly started working up running between one telephone pole and running two telephone poles, and running to the cross street, and pretty soon I was able to string together one whole mile of running. And honestly, that first mile's probably the sweetest run I've ever had was like, that first mile where it was like, I actually ran a mile, holy crap. Cannot believe I actually ran a mile.

And it just built from there, and then I stumbled into a group of people who were like, yeah, we're all slow, that's why we run ultras. We don't have to sprint to 5K, we just can't stop for 30 hours, and I was like, that's me. I can do that kind of stuff. And so I kind of stumbled in and I stumbled into the ultra-world by accident just by virtue of the fact that I was never going to be a fast runner, but I was loving the community, loving the support, loving the activity. I loved being in a full body sweat that I had earned not because I was 400 pounds trying to fit in an airplane seat, because I had gone out

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and done something physically active to try to make myself better. I guess there are different kinds of sweat, and I liked the sweat from a run. And it just built from there, but it literally started with me running across just the length of a driveway.

Jill: I love that so much. And so okay, so when was that? What year was that when you started...

Betsy: 2012.

Jill: 2012. So it's been six years and you're like - you've gone from running five seconds at a time to running 100-mile races. Like, let's just take a moment.

Betsy: I know. I'm not a huge fan of social media, but I love the Facebook timeline where it'll say five years ago you were doing this and I'm like, holy crap, I was. I've been kind of able - Facebook has helped me catalogue kind of the running journey more so than like, Strava or Garmin or something like that. But yeah, when I started, I was like, I just don't want people waiting for me at races, and then it became no, my body, she's healing and she's healthy and she wants to move and like, let's find something that also feeds the soul, and being out in nature does that. And I don't have to go fast, I just can't stop, and one thing led to another and I ran a 100-miler.

Jill: This is mind-blowing. Well, what's your favorite race been so far that you've done?

Betsy: The 100-miler is right up there. That's Mountain Lakes 100. We ran in the cascades from Olallie Lake just to the - not quite the foot of Mount Hood government camp and then back on the PCT, and it's just stunning.

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But any race where there is community being built because people are encouraging each other is like, that's why I do it. So I just finished this half Ironman down in Mexico and the whole back of the pack, we were all supporting each other. Like, 32 languages. I didn't even know what language was being spoken half the time, but it's unmistakable encouragement. Like, we're all in the pain cave, we're all hot and sweaty, and we're all just trying to get to the finish line. And there's an absolute breakdown of all the artificial boundaries and everybody's just trying to go the same direction, and that community in any kind of an event like that is just - that's my favorite. That's why I do it. That's what I love.

Jill: I do love that about the back of the pack, and I mean, so many people are like, "Oh, I don't want to come in at the end and it's so embarrassing," and I'm like, that is where the best people are. Really. That's where the people are that will stop and talk to you and say, "Hey, you look like you're struggling, do you want me to run with you for a while?" Or, "I've done this race before, the next mile is just around the corner." That's where you're going to get people that will actually just help you and can empathize with you and really kind of bring you forward. When you're at the front of the race, it's very competitive and everybody's out for themselves. Maybe not completely, but I just...

Betsy: There are some that are like, trying to impress their sponsors or win prizes, or they want the best time, and a lot of times when you get to the back of the pack, it's people that are doing something astonishing in their own life story, and that's all they're up against. Just their own life story. So when I finished the 100-miler, I got a phone call from an ultrarunner who had won one of the major - he'd run Western States, and he's a young man who's actually very mature for his age, and he called to tell me congratulations. And in that post-100 stupor where like, nothing's working for days because you're just out of it, I was like, "But you ran 100 miles and won the race in like 15 hours, and it took me 30 hours." And he was like,

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"I've never done anything for 30 hours. I can't imagine what it took for you to actually do this race."

And I was like, there's perspective for you. I don't know how to run a seven-minute mile, but I know how to hang in for 30 hours. And his appreciation for my effort blew my mind, opened my eyes to the fact that you just have to appreciate everybody's individual effort. And there might be somebody running mid-pack. For them, it's the hardest thing they've ever done. Like, you can't compare. You can't judge your effort against anyone else's, but in the back of the pack, a lot of times, that get stripped so bare and it's just so apparent that it becomes a community even to get everybody to the finish line. Because you know how they're suffering because you're right there with them. You ask about a favorite race, like, I don't have - a favorite race is one I finish and I don't get lost and maybe don't have to go poop in the woods. That would be...

Jill: There's a criteria.

Betsy: But my favorite thing about the race and the event, community is that. Community that pops up and wants to get everybody to the finish line. Like, that's what I love about it.

Jill: You're right. That's the thing about running that's so awesome is the community, especially at the back of the pack. So I'm kind of curious, how long did you have to train for the 100-miler? And you're probably already at a level - I mean, what would you say your baseline distance is when you go out for a run? You're like, oh, I could go out and run 50 miles or tomorrow or I have to train for a 50-miler, and how long did you have to train for the 100-miler?

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Betsy: So those are two really good questions. Right now my base mileage is very low because I'm rehabbing a hamstring attachment tear, and so where I was built up to run between 40 and 50 miles a week and I could have jumped in on a 50K any given day if I really wanted to, it might be misery and I might be really slow, but I could have done it. Right now I'm comfortable at about a half marathon distance because I'm rehabbing my knee. But I'm not panicked about it. I'm not frustrated by it. I know the mileage will come and I'm not going to push to the point where I reinjure myself. This injury's been really good for notching up my maturity around running, and the fact that I truly enjoy it and I don't want it taken away from me, so I'm going to respect it and what my body can and can't do and rebuild a little differently.

The 100-miler was really a two-year process of building through some different increments and making sure that physically I was ready, but making sure that I was mentally ready because a 100-miler is no joke, and you are going to some really dark places and you are going to be in pain for a very long time, and that takes some mental training to make sure that you're really ready for it. I think there's a lot of people that sign up because they want the t-shirt, they want the buckle, they think it's going to be fun, and I was really lucky to be surrounded by people who said, "This event will change you if you let it in good ways, but it can also tear you down in ways you don't want it to tear you down if you get into it too soon." So I had some really cautious people around me who helped me kind of step it up and get the training and get the mental training and remind me to talk nice to myself when I was having a bad long run and that sort of stuff. So I was really graced with a fantastic community and if you were to talk to my coach, he would tell you, we were pretty strategic for two years. Really knowing I wanted to get to the 100-mile mark and trying to figure out exactly how to get there, and not be injured, not be hurt, and enjoy the experience.

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Jill: Because you're not sleeping during any of those 30 hours, and probably not much in the time leading up to the race.

Betsy: No.

Jill: So like, when you said your brain went to some dark places, I'm like, I can only imagine like, when you're sleep deprived your brain goes to some pretty crazy places, and when you're doing a long-distance race, your brain goes to some pretty crazy places. So combining those two things together has got to be - yeah, I love that you trained for two years physically and mentally.

Betsy: Oh yeah. So I would say - so first of all, I'm a back of the pack athlete. Proud of it, that's where I'm at. I'm always training to stay ahead of the cut offs. I'm not one of those people that's like, "I'd love to run a 7:07, oh dang, I ran a 7:08." I'm like, I've got one minute to the cut off, I've got to get through the aid station. It'd be really nice if I could go to the bathroom and change my shoes, but I don't have time. And so sleeping for me in a 100-miler was not an option because I didn't have the time. I didn't have the time luxury. Like, I just had a few minutes at each aid station but it was all about forward movement the entire time. There are people who can nap or sit down for 20 minutes and talk to their friends and change their shoes, and I've never had that luxury.

Even as I think I'm well trained, doing the best I can, I'm just not fast. The sleep deprivation does things like is that tree stump a bear? And you're trying to move out of the way but your body's got one speed, it's been going for 80 miles in one direction and to try to go sideways is like, all systems failure. Not happening, and I'm thinking, "Well, I wish there was somebody slower and more injured than me this bear could get," and as you get up to the bear you realize it's a tree. But you start really - you have to be ready

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with some really good self-talk because I started - mile 80, everybody's going to be embarrassed that the fat girl tried to take on a 100-miler and she can't do it, and I'm going to have to drop, and I'm not capable of doing this, and why did somebody let me do this, and you have to be very intentional about interrupting that and reminding yourself, "No, I trained. I deserve to be here. I can do this," and when I say dark, it's mentally dark.

I mean, you go into a pain cave and your brain is trying to get you to stop. And the training is all about making sure your body knows to go forward and to try to figure out how to get your brain to get the hell out of your head. To back off. But I mean, I literally remember saying, "Brain, shut up. You're not in charge. You don't get a say in this. You're just along for the ride," and I said that probably 100 times. Just keep going, keep going. But you go into some pretty dark spots on those ultras.

Jill: And I think that's kind of - that whole concept though is very applicable no matter what distance you're running. If it's a new distance for you or something that you haven't done before, that your brain is going to try to get you to stop because it's something new and it's going to have - like, your brain's job is to keep your body safe and so I can see how running 100 miles could be perceived by the brain as maybe not the best idea. So you kind of have to override it, but I think like, every new runner goes through that at some point in time.

Betsy: Yeah, absolutely.

Jill: So what was the recovery like from that?

Betsy: Probably three weeks of no running mostly because I had done some big damage to toenails. Big damage. Like, two years later I still - I just had to check. Two years later I still don't have normal toenails. But extreme

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fatigue, disrupted sleep, and all that stuff. It was like - I'd had a two to three-week period for me. There's other people you talk to who'd be like, "In three days I was back out running." No. Not me. I took about four to six weeks off doing yoga and swimming and biking and walking and hiking and like, small little runs just to kind of keep my legs moving but like, it was no joke. At least a month of like, just really having to be focused on recovery.

Jill: I love that though because I think like, that's part of the training process is knowing when to power down.

Betsy: Yeah, it is.

Jill: Let your body knit itself back together.

Betsy: People underestimate rest, and I'm a huge advocate for that.

Jill: So cool. Okay, so I have some more questions for you. Now, I know that you're writing a book, so can we talk about that a little bit?

Betsy: Yeah, so I started writing a blog because I was getting all these questions from people about I've been diagnosed with type two diabetes and I can't get into the dietician for three months, food is now poison, what do I do? Do I have to go to an endocrinologist? I have to lose 200 pounds and I don't know where to even start, I think I'd rather just die than try to figure out how to do this. They told me to start walking but I only have house slippers.

Like, so I started writing a blog to try to talk to the people I had been when I started, like, here's how you get started. This is how you advocate for yourself, these are the questions you should ask, and it is not a lost cause, and let's break things down. So I really wrote the blog because I was

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answering the same questions over and over and over again, and then the blog has kind of taken off and I've kind of added to it, and I finally decided with some encouragement from other folks that I wanted to write a book so that I could take kind of the blog information and put together this story about beating type two diabetes. Like, type two diabetes is epidemic. Millions - I don't remember the exact numbers in my brain since I thought I turned 50 today. I don't trust myself to quote numbers, but it's an epidemic and it's estimated that it could bankrupt the Medicare system, that diabetes alone could eventually bankrupt the Medicare system.

And the problem is that type two diabetes is a lifestyle disease. People could move more and eat less and control their blood sugar a little bit better on their own without medical intervention, we'd all be better off. And so I'm trying to convey that message in this book. If you find yourself here, here's what you can do, and here's what you can do when you are healthy. The world is now your oyster, but it's also written from the standpoint that like, type two diabetes does not have to be something you necessarily live with the rest of your life and it doesn't have to be a death sentence.

And again, there are people for whom this is - they've had a pancreatic insult or they genetically are dealing with it, but there are a ton of people for whom this is a lifestyle disease. And so that's where the book is written from, is that direction of like, I lost 200 pounds and I ran a 100-miler. But my biggest accomplishment is reversing type two diabetes. With one little footnote in there, they have told me that I am predisposed to developing it again, so I am on a little bit of a time clock. It is likely that I will get type two diabetes again because I've had it and my body - that's kind of how my body works. But every single day that I can buy myself healthy with regulated blood sugars and not on pharmaceuticals is days in the bank. So that's what I'm trying to do. Had I reversed this when it was pre-diabetes, it might never have gotten to this stage and I'd be fine. And so there's

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multiple messages in this book but mostly around pre-diabetes and type two diabetes.

Jill: And to take it very seriously. I know - when I was in my late 20s and early 30s, my mom was diagnosed with pre-diabetes and I just remember thinking like, oh, that's not a real disease because I was a kid and you know, cocky. But I just remember thinking like, that's not a real disease, like, you'll be fine. And she was really thin and so her doctor was always saying, "Well, if you could lose five more pounds, then you'll probably reverse this," and we all know that that probably had nothing to do with it. She really needed to change how she was eating and there were a lot of other lifestyle bad decisions - bad advice that her doctors had given her based on like, the whole low fat craze of the 80s. I mean, this was - we're talking 20 years ago, but I just remember thinking when she had pre-diabetes, none of us in our family really took it that seriously because we didn't think it was that big of a deal because it really - there wasn't the education out there that there is now. Now like, that diagnosis of pre-diabetes like, that's like, hey, this is your last chance, let's do something about it, and I don't think people really understand that.

Betsy: No. And I even wrote in the book, when they told me I was pre-diabetes, I thought that meant I had time, that this was just like, hey, by the way, this train could be coming for you at some point. And I was like, cool, it's not here, I'm good, I can keep doing what I'm doing. What they should have said was this is your warning shot to turn it around and from here on out you're going to be beholden to the medical community. And having said all of that to you that I just said now, I'm still not sure I was ready to make the lifestyle shift that I had to make. Like, I was - I loved eating McDonalds three times a day and eating unlimited candy and chocolate and ice cream. I had the most abominable diet imaginable and I didn't want to give it up. So when they say, "You're pre-diabetic and we'd like you to take this pill but

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you don't really have to change anything," it was like music to my ears. It was like, oh, well I'll let the medicine do the work and not worry about it.

Jill: Right, because you were on insulin and still didn't change for a while.

Betsy: No, for like, eight years. I mean, I made attempts at it around doctors appointments, kind of like when we floss before we go to the dentist. You know, I was like, I need to make an effort so that they don't catch on to the fact that I'm not really doing what they want me to do. And then at some point in time I was like, you're only killing yourself. This is the most ridiculous thing ever. But yeah, pre-diabetes is serious and should be - it is the point where change could have the biggest impact, and people don't realize that.

Jill: Well, and I think that you writing a book about that particular topic is so important because everybody is telling people, well, once you've got diabetes, this is what you need to do. I don't think I've ever seen a book that says, hey, here's your chance to turn it around before the Titanic hits the iceberg.

Betsy: One of my most favorite quotes is, "If you can't be a good example, be a horrible warning," and I've always felt like getting to 400 pounds and having to figure out how to lose weight and get my life back made me the horrible warning. I'm the person who did not do what needed to be done and so I had to have surgery to have skin removed, I've had all these things because I didn't pay attention to the pre-diagnosis. So I'm the horrible warning. Learn from me.

Jill: Alright. Well, we will. We will. But I have another question for you. You are involved with something called NovoVeritas, and I would love to have you explain what that is.

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Betsy: Thank you for asking about that. So I am in a business with a gentleman named Spencer Newell, and he is actually also my running coach and he is a recovering addict and alcoholic and I am - have reversed type two diabetes and I'm battling binge eating disorder. And between the two of us, we own a health and wellness coaching business and we work with people who are in recovery and who want to learn how to get active. This is not about a timestamp on a running race. This is about how do you change core behaviors to get to where you feel like getting up and going for a run. And so he and I work with clients who are obese, unhealthy, and looking to - and any category of looking to make substantial lifestyle changes.

And so we use running and activity, if that's what they want to do, that's great, but like, one of my clients just wanted to be able to get up and off the floor after playing with her grandkids. So we devised a plan to help her figure out how to get healthy enough to be able to get onto the ground, play with her grandkids, and get up off the ground and still feel like going about her day. And so we designed a business to be the coaches to people with the idea that we wanted to be who we needed when we were in this completely by ourselves. Like, when I started losing weight and trying to reverse type two diabetes and I started reaching out through social media for help, it was crickets. There was nobody who was doing it the way I was trying to do it. They were doing bariatric surgery or like, really radical fasts, or they were doing stuff that I wasn't willing to do. I was trying to change core behaviors.

So we started this business with the whole idea that we wanted to be the people we needed when we were making really big changes. We want to be the support, we want to be the advice, we want to be in partnership with whoever they're working with on their healthcare, to help them cement these lifestyle changes because making lifestyle changes is extremely difficult work. And there's no shortcut and a lot of times, society, especially

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right now with everything pumpkin spice, like, society's kind of against you if you've got anything going on with food. And so we started a business to coach people who needed help changing lifestyle behaviors and we're in our - I think we're in our fourth year and it's like, we've got some great clients.

We've got some new clients coming on board and I just got an additional certification through health and wellness to deal with - work with people with morbid obesity and figuring out how to get them moving. And I already knew because I was one, but now I actually have the piece of paper that says I'm allowed to do that and so Spencer tends to work with people that are a little more athletic and I tend to work with people that are entering into the athletic realm and are struggling with body image or acceptance, or they've been bullied at the gym or they don't know how to grocery shop or they just need some really basic help to gain some confidence to make big changes. So that's what we do and I love what we do.

Jill: I love what you do too. I think it's so important because there are so many people out there that see the message like, that you don't have to be thin to be an athlete, but there's that disconnect of like, okay, I don't have to be thin to be an athlete, but how do I start? How do I get started? I go to my gym and everybody's looking at me funny, and the trainers don't want to work with me. There's all of this - our society is not set up for somebody who weighs 300 pounds or 400 pounds to go to the gym and start working out. It's just not.

Betsy: And there's - I've worked with a gal very recently for whom she very carefully figured out that her gym, all of the weight requirements on the gym equipment, like, she was heavier than the weight requirements on the gym equipment. So then what do you do? And she can't get up and down off the floor and so we work with those folks to help them gain confidence and gain skills and to adapt to whatever their surroundings are until they can

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adapt to new surroundings. And so I needed somebody when I was starting this who said, "I believe in you and you can do this and yes, it's 200 pounds," I was one of the very lucky ones who pretty quickly found a handful of people who dove in, leaned in, helped me and didn't shy away when I had really odd requests about how do you compress 10 pounds of belly skin that's beating you to death when you run? Like, what do I do? I don't know what to do, and it was like, "Well, let's go to the store and find something," instead of, "Wow, that's a gross problem and I wish I didn't know. Thanks for telling me." That's awesome. I was really lucky, but I realized like, I had to look for those people and then I have found other people that are in lifestyle journeys who don't have that support and the support makes a world of difference.

Jill: The support can be the difference between quitting or getting to where you want to be.

Betsy: One of the comments that I'll make to people often is, are you looking for me to validate your excuse or do you want me to help you find a way around a boundary? Because if it's an excuse, you're on your own. Not buying into it. If we're trying to find our way around an obstacle or a boundary, I'm all in. let's try to figure this out. And I needed those people, and I didn't necessarily have them. And Spencer would tell you the same about parts of his journey, and so we're very dedicated to working with people that maybe nobody else really wants to work with and they really need us. And so we're in a good spot of getting to make a difference every day and being reaffirmed that our life decisions and healthy choices matter too.

Jill: I love that so much.

Betsy: It is so cool.

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Jill: So Novo Veritas means - does that mean new life?

Betsy: We took the Latin interpretation of honest change because part of it is based on the fact that I didn't do gastric bypass. I worked on the core issues. And so nothing was easy and there were no shortcuts and that was the closest Latin we could get to no shortcuts, you have to do the hard work was Novo Veritas. And so we do have a website that's novo-veritas.com. We're on Facebook, we're on Instagram.

Jill: And we'll have all these links in the show notes as well.

Betsy: And then anybody can email me any time. I'm super receptive to people reaching out and saying I'm in a bad spot, what would you do? Because a lot of times we just need somebody to say you're not alone, I've been there. You're not alone. Those are really powerful words in this world nowadays.

Jill: I completely agree. So when does your book come out?

Betsy: So I'm in the final edit on the book and so I would have told you that it was going to be out last week and I have a feeling it's going to be out like, in January. And I've never done a book so I am at everybody's mercy. I don't have a clue. Sometime in January with any luck is kind of the new goal.

Jill: Okay, so people follow you on social media, they will find out.

Betsy: The book is called *All Bets Are Off*, which is the same as my blog. And I picked that name when I got off insulin, and my nickname for family and friends is Bets. And so, *All Bets Are Off*.

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Jill: I love this.

Betsy: Me too. It's pretty cool, huh?

Jill: Okay, so last question I have for you. What is one piece of advice that you'd give to somebody who's just starting out on a health and fitness journey, maybe to reverse diabetes, or maybe to start running, what's your golden wisdom?

Betsy: It's going to sound super cheesy but find your tribe. Like, find the people that are going to help you get there. First of all, there's not a lot of love in finishing - crossing a finish line and being completely by yourself. We do that. We all go and do that and run races but we still have people we want to tell and be around, and it's really important that you find people who are like-minded and healthy and headed in the right direction. We're no stronger than the last five conversations we've had. That's kind of a - I don't know, communication... And if your conversations were about, I'm fat, I'm worthless, I want pizza, I want ice cream, I want to eat, that's kind of where your thinking tends to go and be centered. If your last five thoughts were I want to run and I'm really excited about this and I want to meet my girlfriends to go for a trail run or whatever, your thinking fundamentally changes by the people you surround yourself with.

So it is really important to find that tribe of like-minded, healthy people that you can enjoy being active with or enjoy hitting those weight loss benchmarks or those health and fitness goals. Finding people that have the same kind of goals and ideas is super important when you're trying to change a fundamental behavior. That's probably not the advice - somebody who's listening to this and they're like, she could have probably said something a little bit better, but I'm telling you, the core of everything I've done, it comes back time and again to me being surrounded by people who

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believed in what I was doing and helped me make the right positive choice. It's so fundamentally important.

Jill: I couldn't agree more. I love the whole concept of the last five conversations, that that's the direction you're going to be going because it's so true. When you're talking to somebody about how miserable you are or whatever, that's what your brain is focusing on. When you're talking to somebody about how excited you are about the positive changes that you're making or where you want to go with them, that's what your brain gets to work focusing. So you just give your brain something useful to do rather than something like shitty to do.

Betsy: I mean, it's going to do the work and you get to choose whether it's five conversations about I'm not worthy, I can't do this, I don't belong, I'm too fat, this won't happen. Or it can be five conversations about wouldn't this be amazing, I'm going to do it, I'm going to try. It's all about how we talk to ourselves. It really is. But it's really important to be around people that catch that and support and promote things in the direction you want to go. It's really important.

Jill: Like a coach. Here's the thing about coaches. They're not your best friend. They don't have to be nice. They can just tell you what they see and I think that's so valuable to have that objective influence in your life that's going to say like, look, I know this isn't what you want to hear but you're giving me an excuse right now. Like you said before, if you want me to help you get around the obstacles and the boundaries, I'm all in. If you want me to buy into your excuses, that's not the right - that's not what I'm about. And so I just think that's so powerful. I don't think people realize how their friends buy into their excuses. Their coach will help them get past their obstacles.

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Betsy: Yeah, I've always said my coach, and he's also my business partner, but he believes in me even when I don't believe in myself, and so sometimes I borrow his belief in myself just to get myself to the next level, and I think with coaching our job is to believe in them even when they don't believe in themselves. But it also means we have to call them on their shit and remind them that they're worth believing in. And so we're not - it's almost like parenting. We're not their best friend. We're trying to get them somewhere that maybe they have never gone, and it's not always comfortable. And so yeah, coaching's hard work. I love it but it's hard work.

Jill: So good. Alright, well thank you so much for joining me today, Betsy, and I feel like if my life is the sum of the last five conversations I had, I'm in really good shape now because this is a really good conversation.

Betsy: This was really good. Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Jill: My pleasure.

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Hey rebels, I hope you enjoyed my chat with Betsy. If you want to connect with her, all the links to do that will be in the show notes at notyouraveragerunner.com/68. Until next week.

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