

Ep #195: Pushing Your Mental Boundaries with NYAR Ambassador Elsbeth Thurston



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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 has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives, and now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey Rebels. So I am back this week with another fabulous Not Your Average Runner ambassador. Her name is Elsbeth Thurston and she has been a member of Run Your Best Life and the Rebel Runner Roadmap, for, gosh, how long? It's been a while.

Elsbeth: Yeah, it's been about a year and a half, almost two years.

Jill: Oh my gosh, this is amazing. So we're going to talk all things running with Elsbeth and find out like, what is her jam, what does she love, what has she struggled with, and you're going to get all your questions answered. So Elsbeth, thank you so much for joining me. Welcome to the show.

Elsbeth: Thanks. I'm super excited to be here. My son is actually jealous that I get to talk to you because we listen to you in the car. And so yeah, he's super jealous.

Jill: Oh, that's so fun. I love it. I love when I have the little fans. I feel like oh okay great, I'm getting in touch with them early so that they grow up to be humans who manage their minds and run. This is what I want for the whole world. So fun. So let's talk about you. How did you start running? How long have you been a runner? What's your story on how you got started?

Elsbeth: Funny, I was actually looking at this last night to prepare. I have Runkeeper data for 10 years, which I was surprised that I actually had that

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much data. So about 10 years ago I guess I was running just 5Ks really. And it wasn't until I think 2018 when some guys at work were like, hey, we're doing this half marathon, do you want to do it with us?

And I don't back down from a challenge so of course I said yes. No idea what I was doing but trained not so well and ran my first half in September of 2018. Had never done anything that far before.

Jill: And so what was that like for you? How did that race go?

Elsbeth: It was good. It's actually one of my funniest running stories. I got passed at mile 11 by a woman, we were going up a bridge, which is about the only hilliest part of where I'm at in Virginia Beach. So we were going up a bridge and I got passed by this woman and I look at her and she's smoking a cigarette while doing the race. And it was - so at mile 11...

Jill: I want to know, were they regular or menthol?

Elsbeth: Regular.

Jill: Because that makes a difference, right?

Elsbeth: And I just remember thinking, what in the world am I doing out here? This is ridiculous. But I finished and I cried, and I felt really good that I finished but then I didn't run for like, four months. You can see in my Runkeeper, it just stops after that.

Jill: And I think that's actually pretty common for people, especially after a first really big major effort like that is to just be like, alright, I'm going to take a couple days off. And next thing you know, it's three months later and

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you're like, oh shit, I better get started again. Okay, so you took four months off, but what got you back into running?

Elsbeth: I really think it just - it was peers. Now, they all run much faster than I do, but the running community is amazingly close-knit for anyone that wants to run. You see the same people at races all the time and nobody cares really once you're out there about your pace. It just doesn't.

So the guys at work, they're runners, and so they just asked me to come along all the time, so that really I think got me back into running. But it wasn't until I was facing turning 40 when I found you and I actually gifted myself Run Your Best Life for my 40th birthday. So that was the self-care I did for myself.

Jill: I love that. I love that so much. So I kind of want to dive into this topic that you brought up that - let me back it up. So I think a lot of times people think I can't go and do a group run, or I can't sign up for a race with people who are much faster than me because - first there's a thought that I'll be holding them back, which is silly because we don't hold anybody back.

People either decide to run our pace or they decide to move on, and that's on them, whatever they decide to do. But there's I'm going to hold people back, or they're not going to want to wait for me, or there's all kinds of drama I think that we come up with in our brains of why we shouldn't run with people who are faster than us. So can you address some of the ways that you've handled that with your running posse?

Elsbeth: Yeah. So I think one, just the fact that they kept asking me back really just validated to me that they didn't care what my pace was. So I would meet them and go run, and then it really is a lot of thought work. Once you're out there, you just have to run your own race. You can't worry

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about what anybody else is doing. And they are not looking at you and thinking, “Oh my gosh, she’s so slow.”

They’re in their own heads. So you just have to run your own race. So that’s really what I’ve found is - and it’s not always easy. I did a race weekend; this last weekend and I ran a five-miler on Saturday and a half marathon on Sunday. And my five-miler was awful because I was in my head. And my half marathon was the best that I’ve ever run, and it just was a difference in mindset.

Jill: Fascinating. Can you speak more to that? Because you know that I’m all about that, but what were the differences in your mindset?

Elsbeth: So the course that we were running was an out and back. So as a slower a runner, for my five-miler, I really felt like I was at the back of the pack and everybody was way ahead of me. And it’s hard when you’re just going out and back. And there were really no spectators, so you’re just out there by yourself, going straight.

And it wasn’t until I turned, made the turn to come back and realized there were in fact people behind me that my mindset changed and I was like, oh, I’m not last, and it actually got a little bit better from there. But I wanted it to be this easy prep run for my half marathon and it just felt hard. And really, I think it was just because I was in my head about being the last one, and there was no reason to be.

Jill: Right. It’s so funny, did you ever just turn around and look?

Elsbeth: No. Why I didn’t turn around I don’t know.

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Jill: So fun. You're like, clearly, I'm last because I can't see anybody behind me but I'm not going to look and see. That's so funny. But yeah, I think that's the one thing I love about out and backs is how you actually get to see all of the other people, and if you're last, you get a little escort. You get somebody making sure you're okay.

Because I've been in that place before where I literally had a police escort for about a mile and I'm like, talking to them, I'm like hey, thanks for coming out, we're just shooting the shit back and forth. And I'm like, this is not the worst thing. Okay, so you did your five-miler and you were kind of all up in your head. What was the change for the half marathon?

Elsbeth: So for the half marathon, I really just started - I listened to some of your things and I started just thinking about you know you can run a half, you know you're going to finish in the timeframe, it doesn't matter where you finish. It is what it is.

And I think in - maybe selfishly, they were doing a marathon and a half marathon at the same time, and so I was thinking in my head, well I know I'm not the last one across the finish line because of marathoners. There's for sure marathoners that are going to finish later than I finish my half.

So for sure, there's going to be somebody else running with me at some point. And so it really was just this change in perspective that okay, let's take that five-miler off the radar and let's just focus on getting your half done and doing it the way you want it.

And I think a lot of things happened. I think in my five-miler it was the first real in-person race in a while. And so I started out too fast, then I felt bad, and all of that. So my half marathon I decided okay, I'm just going to run my pace and I started out slower and I felt much better the entire time.

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Jill: Right. That does make a difference. Pacing yourself - we're always so tempted to just in the beginning we're like, I've got all this energy, I'm just going to run as fast as I can. And literally always a mistake. I cannot think of one time when that's not a big mistake because it always comes and bites you afterwards. But I love that you were able to break down what happened during the five-miler and turn it around before the half marathon. That's a very powerful skill to have.

Elsbeth: Honestly, without Run Your Best Life, there is no way I would have been able to do that. I probably would have been like, no, half marathon, not happening. Because it really was, it was just such a bad run that I was like, ugh. And that thought crossed my mind and then I was like, no, because everybody in Run Your Best Life knows I'm doing a half marathon so I got to do it now.

Jill: Right, that's the problem in our community. Because they'll be like, hey, how did it go? And you don't want to have to say my inner mean girl won and I didn't show up. So I absolutely love that story because I do think it really speaks to the power of our thinking and how much that influences the quality of our experience.

And I know that there's a lot of people out there that like to do the multi-day runs and can you imagine, say you're doing - what is the Dopey challenge where it's like, five, 10, half, and full? And yeah, so say you have a bad 10K, you've got to turn that around or you're going to show up the next day and have a bad half marathon and then a bad marathon. So that's a really, really important skill to have. Do you think a Dopey is in your future?

Elsbeth: I don't know. Maybe. Maybe.

Jill: I just don't know why I just - I can see it in your eyes.

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Elsbeth: I have some big goals this year so we'll see. We'll see. Maybe next year.

Jill: Well, let's talk about those big goals. What's on the 2021 schedule for you now that we're actually having live races again?

Elsbeth: So I actually have already done three half marathons this year, which seems kind of crazy to me that I mean, I never would have imagined myself having been like, yeah, I've done three. So those are done and then I have a 50K coming up in June, which I am super stoked about. It's a 10-hour loop run, and so my goal for myself is 50K. And then Ragnar...

Jill: Let's just stop and break that down a little bit. It's a 10-hour loop run, so can you explain a little more detail about that?

Elsbeth: Yeah. So it is a 2.8-mile loop on a trail near me. And it's - the course is open for 10 hours. And it really is just as much or as little as you want to do in those 10 hours. They do have some special medals if you get to the marathon or 50K or more level.

Jill: Nice. Clearly you can do a 50K in 10 hours. If it's a 2.8-mile loop, then 10 loops. That's 28 miles. So 11 loops would be - that would be your 50K. Oh my gosh, that's so exciting. Okay, so when is this one again?

Elsbeth: That is June 12th.

Jill: Okay, that's coming up soon. That's the week after my wedding. Okay, so we got 50K or more, depending, in June. So you said the next one you're doing is a Ragnar, so tell us all about the Ragnar.

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Elsbeth: So I'm doing Ragnar Michigan, which is two weeks after the 50K. So that'll be my recovery. That's what I'm telling myself. It's just recovery.

Jill: Now is it a trail or a road Ragnar?

Elsbeth: It's a trail.

Jill: Okay. Yeah, it kind of will be a recovery I think.

Elsbeth: And I'm actually doing it with all Run Your Best Life members, which is so much fun. We just put the group together, all of us, and so there's eight of us and we're going to have an awesome time, I have a feeling.

Jill: I love this so much. And so do you know what the loops are like for that race?

Elsbeth: Yeah. I think there's a - I believe there's a two and a half mile, a five, and a seven, I think.

Jill: That's good. After 50K, that's going to feel like a walk in the park.

Elsbeth: Right?

Jill: Right? Isn't that fun? And I think that's what's so exciting about when you become proficient at longer and longer distances, and you hear yourself say, "Oh, I only have to run seven miles today."

Elsbeth: Yeah, I've thought that a lot really this last training session. I've been like, oh, it's six miles, it's not a big deal. And when I was looking back at all that training data I had, there were many, many months for a very

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long time that I was running one mile, two miles. That was it ever in a week. And maybe twice a week I was running two miles, and now I'm running six miles like, four times a week.

Jill: Isn't that amazing?

Elsbeth: It is.

Jill: Okay, so that evolution has happened over the course of about 10 years. And it seems like most of that evolution has probably happened in the past three years, since you trained for that first half marathon.

Elsbeth: Yeah, it really has, in about a three-years' timeframe.

Jill: So when you first started out running, what kind of goals did you have for yourself then?

Elsbeth: I think in the very, very beginning, so 10 years ago when I was much younger and before I was married and all that, I had been a college athlete. I was on the rowing team, was active in elementary school, all the way through high school with different things.

And so I think it was just trying to maintain that fitness level once I got out of school. So that was sort of the beginning. But then after I had my son in 2013 and really for those next sort of five years, it was really about managing my anxiety.

I have really struggled with some depression and anxiety for a very long time and it is the one thing that brings me peace. And so I think it was just about trying to maintain a little bit of sanity after having a new baby. And so that was really where I started.

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And then I think just as he's gotten older, it's been easier to run further. And so it really - now it is definitely the one thing. And I think actually COVID has helped me a lot because so I was training for a half marathon when COVID hit. I was actually in Spain when COVID hit. That's a whole 'nother story.

But I was training for a half marathon and of course that didn't happen, but I didn't let it affect my training. I just kept training and ended up doing the half marathon a little bit later than scheduled but I did it. And I just kept running all the way through COVID. And so I feel like that's just - it's been my one place to get out and do something for myself.

Jill: I love that so much. I'm thinking about how there are so many different factors to our training that we do for various reasons. And a lot of people run because they like the feeling of accomplishment, so they have - their whole point for them to running is to set goals. But I think a lot of us run, myself included, I don't actually run because I want to do races.

If I never did another race again, I don't think it would be the end of the world for me. I'd be like, alright, I'm still going to run because of all of those other beautiful side effects of it. So I think the goals that we set with running, like doing the races and stuff is such a beautiful bonus but staying sane is the ultimate. The sanity and the maintaining the fitness is such a beautiful thing.

And I also think for a lot of people, running starts out literally as a way to manage their thoughts and feelings and just kind of keep themselves feeling calm. And then later on they start setting goals. Because I've been doing that with my strength training and I know I've been sharing a lot of what I've been doing with my trainer in the Run Your Best Life group.

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But when I decided I'm going to get back into strength training and really dedicate myself to it, not kind of half-assing it the way I was before. It was strictly to support my running. And now it's kind of taken on a life of its own. And I'm setting all of these ancillary goals that actually have nothing to do with running because I'm like, oh, now that I've got the routine of the strength training and I've got that feeling really good, what else can I do with this?

So it sounds like you kind of had a similar journey with running. Now you've got this baseline. So what do you think has been your biggest hurdle as a runner? And it could be something right at the beginning, or something recently, but what are some of the biggest challenges that you've had?

Elsbeth: Yeah. I think one of the biggest challenges for me is really just managing that mindset that I am not 30 anymore and I am not as fast as I was. So I was looking back and I was like, oh, I was running a 15-minute mile 10 years ago. Not happening now.

And just being okay with being at that back of the pack level. And it's totally fine and when I think about it, I think, you know what, I have the same endurance level as someone that runs a marathon in three and a half hours. Yes, I'm going half the distance, but I'm still on my feet just as long as they are.

Jill: What a great way to look at that. Oh my gosh.

Elsbeth: So that's been my thought lately is I can be on my feet just as long as anybody else. So it doesn't really matter what my pace is. It's time on your feet.

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Jill: Yeah. And I think that's the biggest trip up for a lot of new runners is believing that they need to be working to get faster or believing that they need to be faster to consider themselves successful, and it's just not true.

Elsbeth: It's not. It's not true at all.

Jill: It's almost like we get to write our own story about what success means.

Elsbeth: Exactly.

Jill: So what do you think is - so you've been a runner for 10 years and obviously your views on running and your views on yourself have changed. So what do you think has been the biggest mental shift that you've made when you think about yourself as a result of being a runner?

Elsbeth: I think my - the biggest mental shift is that I can do hard things. And that I can set goals and I can complete them and that - also for myself, the biggest thing is I can complete them and it doesn't have to be perfect. Because I don't know that I have yet trained for a race and it's been 100% perfect.

I haven't made all of my training runs, and I haven't done all of my strength training. But I still finish the goal and I have set multiple PRs, so I'm still doing the things. And so that really has been the biggest shift for me is that it's okay not to be perfect.

Jill: Right. Can you think of examples of times when you haven't been perfect and it actually has been the perfect thing to not be perfect? Where you've made skipped a few training runs or something like that, and then through the process of accepting I did 80% or 90% of my training runs

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instead of 100%, I still finished the race. That's kind of a mind-blower for a lot of people. They think like, then where can I apply that elsewhere in my life?

Elsbeth: Yeah. I think the biggest example for that was - I don't know what year it was, I guess 2019. I was training for a half and I actually tore my hamstring the last long run before the half, which was - talk about devastating. That just is awful.

But it really gave me a time to reflect and really think about do I want to keep running? What do I want to do? And that was just - that was fairly shortly before I joined Run Your Best Life. And those next few months weren't perfect.

I mean, I struggled with an injury, I was in physical therapy for a while, and I got really frustrated with myself for a little bit because I wasn't able to perform the way I was, but I've come back and I've come back stronger and now stronger and longer distances and really, just kind of taught me that effort of perseverance and it doesn't have to be pretty all the time, and it's not going to be.

Jill: And I mean, personally, I have found that every injury I've had has made me stronger as a result. Overcoming that injury has turned into a stronger runner or a stronger person. So I'm kind of like, alright, get injured, you're like - my thoughts on injury are like, when I get injured, how is this going to make me stronger?

Because a lot of people are like, oh no, my body's betraying me, this isn't fair, it's not going right. And I'm just like, oh, god, I cannot wait to find out how much stronger I get as a result of this.

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Elsbeth: Well, and it made me - now I'm very cognizant about am I stretching the right way, am I doing the strength training the right way, because I know that that's what it was is I wasn't training necessarily the right way. And so having had that injury right before a race, now you're like, oh, let me make sure I'm doing all of the right things or as many as I can so that I don't injured before a race again.

Jill: Yeah. So do you want to talk a little bit about your strength training routine? I'm sure people are wondering what you do to keep yourself injury-free.

Elsbeth: Yeah. So I try to get in two strength training sessions a week plus a recovery day of yoga but strength training for me is sort of my fun time. I look at it as my fun time. So I do a lot of online videos, and I just pick sort of okay, I know I'm going to do core and arms one day, so I just pick something that seems like fun and I'll do it.

So it is definitely - sometimes for leg day, I might do a 30-minute squat routine that's like a dance-based, that I know is going to have a lot of squats for fun. And then maybe add some weights. So it's definitely not as structured as my running, but it's also - I know that keeping myself strong will help.

Jill: I love that. Have you done - you use the Peloton app for strength training sometimes, right?

Elsbeth: Yup.

Jill: So there's a lower body routine that's Britney Spears themed. Have you done this one? Where they're like, okay, Britney Spears, she's sold like 100 million records in her career and so we're going to do 100 squats in honor

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of that throughout this 15 or 20-minute routine. And I love stuff like that and I cannot remember who leads it. I want to say it's Cody but I actually can't remember if it's Cody or not but it's a Britney Spears lower body strength training.

And I love that. At the beginning they're like, we're going to be doing 100 squats among other things. I'm like, alright, I'm all in because I know it's going to be fun. It's going to be...

Elsbeth: Exactly. So even the old school programs like hip-hop abs and some of those, those are fun for me.

Jill: That's so cool. I love that. And I think when your belief is strength training is my fun time, then you actually have fun doing it, versus when your belief is I hate strength training. I've had that belief in the past as well and when you think that thought, you feel very resistant, and chances are even if you do your strength training, you're not going to go all in on it.

Whereas if you're thinking this is fun, or you have other great things to say about it, you end up getting it done. I love my strength training time because it's my time to just unload all my shitty thoughts on my trainer and have her bounce them back to me.

Today she had me doing these seated leg raises where my legs are straight out in front of me, knees locked out, and then my body is in L shape and I'm trying to just raise my entire leg. And I was like, "My stomach is preventing me from doing this." And she's like, no, she's like, "Your pelvis is tilted and we need to work on that range of motion and then that's going to unlock that movement for you."

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And I'm like, "No, I'm pretty sure it's my stomach getting in the way." And she's like, we're talking about it and I realize that she was right and I'm like, come on, are you not going to join me in the body shaming? And she's like no, I'm not. I'm like, come on.

So we were joking about it but for me, it's almost therapy because I have somebody who literally uses my own body to prove to me that there's nothing wrong with my body and I'm fucking all in. It's the greatest time ever. Sorry, I got off on a little tangent there. But I think that you have incorporated thought work so deeply into your fitness life that it's kind of changed everything for you.

Elsbeth: Absolutely.

Jill: Have you incorporated it into the rest of your life? Into your life life?

Elsbeth: Yeah. So this is actually a funny story, so going back to my son, so we were listening to the episode when you were talking about don't pick up other people's poop bags. Of course to an almost eight-year-old boy, that is hilarious first of all.

So we were listening to it and all of a sudden, he goes, "Mom, this really applies to me." And I was like, really? And he said, yeah, he said - because he tends to run on the very small side so he's almost always the smallest boy in his class. And he goes, "Yeah, I think I need to not take other people's opinions on my size."

And it was just one of those moments that I was like, first of all, he's listening to a great wonderful story that he applied it to. So I think that's just one example of how we really do apply it - I applied it in my life and I make

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sure my son knows those kinds of lessons. So I never shy away from letting him listen because he finds things all the time.

And then he coaches me. If I start saying something, he will come right back at me with something you've said or one of the other podcasts have said. And I'm like, you do listen. It's hilarious.

Jill: You listen to Corinne Crabtree, don't you?

Elsbeth: I do. I do.

Jill: I can picture it. Your boy is going to grow up with such excellent cussing skills I feel like.

Elsbeth: That is true.

Jill: It's not just the mind management.

Elsbeth: I do have to remind him we don't say those things at school. But he will every once in a while, come up with things. It's pretty funny. And I've incorporated all kinds of things. I think - I know you as well, I've been on sort of a weight loss journey a little bit but it's sort of come second to my running.

I know that if I was in a maybe smaller body, I might get a little bit faster. But the running is more important to me. I can still do it in the body I'm in, which is huge too. I don't have to wait to be in a smaller body to run. And that has been a big mindset shift for me as well. I can do it at the size I am and it's okay.

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Jill: Don't you just want to go around and tell everybody? Because there's this belief out there that you got to be - when people come to me and they're like, I want to be a runner but I'm kind of overweight. And I'm like okay, and they're like, I need to lose - I got to weigh 160 pounds.

And I'm just like, oh, no, you just start running now. I think if somebody came to me and they said - and they were like, 600 pounds or something, then I'd be like, actually, maybe that's not the best idea for you because I think it's going to be pretty hard on your joints. But if you're like, 250, 300, even 350 pounds, I think that there is - I don't think that's an issue. I don't think that's a problem to be a runner at those weights. If you can walk two miles or three miles, you can start throwing running intervals in there.

Elsbeth: Absolutely.

Jill: So yeah, that's a thing that I want - I just want the whole world to start running.

Elsbeth: Me too.

Jill: This is my goal. So what is your favorite distance to run now that you've done multiple long-distance events?

Elsbeth: I actually really am loving the half marathon. There's something about it where it's just enough of a push to make me feel like I'm doing a hard thing and accomplishing it, but it's not so far that I'm like, oh my gosh, this is scary.

So I've really I feel like gotten into my groove with the half marathon, which is why I'm pushing my goals now further. Because now I'm like, oh okay, I

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know I can do this, but I want to try - let's really try to push for that next level up.

Jill: That's so fun. I feel like always pushing the edges of your mental boundaries is going to push your physical boundaries, but it's like, really, it's the edges of where your brain is willing to go that we need to be pushing on. And your 50K is going to do exactly that. That's so fun.

So let's close out with this. What is one piece of advice that you would give to a new runner? Somebody who's listening to this thinking okay, that's all fine and good for you guys, but none of it applies to me.

Elsbeth: Yeah. I mean, I think it's really about just getting started. There was lots of years - I have lots of data where I was running a mile or less. And I know thinking back that at that point, that was all I could do, and that was okay for that. And you just get started and just get out there. And whatever you can do, whether it's five minutes or five miles, just get out and do it. You'll thank yourself later.

Jill: Yeah. And we're watching the Rebel Runner Roadmap just started up again for the spring session for those of you that are listening and we're watching people do exactly what you said and getting past their own brains. We've had people that are like, okay, I haven't done my first run yet because I'm so scared, and then they go out and they do it and they're like, oh my god, I did it.

And their whole mind just sort of explodes because they're like, I did it, I did a run, I'm a runner. I think that first run is just such a game-changer for everyone so I love that you said that.

Elsbeth: It is. Just don't wait. Just start.

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Jill: Yes. Alright, well thank you so much. Is there anything that you want to make sure people know about you before we close out today?

Elsbeth: I don't think so.

Jill: Okay. She's letting you know everything you need to know. Where can people find you if they want to follow your running journey? Especially if they want to follow your 50K antic?

Elsbeth: Yeah, on Instagram I'm @genx_runner on Instagram. And @genxrunner on TikTok.

Jill: I love this.

Elsbeth: I'm just getting into the TikTok group.

Jill: Oh my gosh, I know. I'm on TikTok but I haven't made a TikTok yet but kind of fun. I'm obsessed with Instagram reels. But I love @genxrunner because I'm Gen X too and I'm just like, it's the best generation clearly.

Elsbeth: It is. And it's funny, it's like I finally settled on that because I mean, I really - I was 40 when I really said okay, this is the thing I'm doing, I'm going to do this.

Jill: Alright, I love it. Well thank you so much Elsbeth for joining me today. This has been an absolute delight as expected.

Oh, and one last thing. If you enjoyed listening to this episode, you have to check out the Rebel Runner Roadmap. It's a 30-day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the

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runner you've always wanted to be. Head on over to rebelrunnerroadmap.com to join. I'd love to be a part of your journey.