

Ep #204: Transformations of an Experienced Runner with NYAR Ambassador Cynthia Dils



Full Episode Transcript

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 Not Your Average Runner ambassador. Her name is Cynthia Dils, and she's kind of a badass. So we're going to dive into everything running with Cynthia, and it's going to be a great conversation.

So first of all, Cynthia, welcome to the show.

Cynthia: Thank you. Thank you, glad to be here.

Jill: I'm super excited that you're here because you've got some pretty epic stuff to share with us. But I just want to kind of set the scene because a lot of times people who work with me, they're not runners. Or they're kind of toying around with running and then they join the Rebel Runner Roadmap, they join Run Your Best Life, and we do amazing things together.

But you actually had done some pretty badass stuff before we even connected. So tell me a little bit about that. There's one I have in mind, of course.

Cynthia: Of course:

Jill: One really big bad ass thing. But set the scene for us. How did you start running? What kinds of things were you doing before you joined the Rebel Runner Roadmap?

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Cynthia: Okay. Well, I was actually an athlete in high school, I played soccer. I didn't run unless I was on the field. It was horrible, I hated running. And I say that with a passion that I hated it back in the day. And now I pay to do it all the time. It's crazy how we mature.

I finally decided to delve into running because my thought process was, "What, it's hard?" In May of 2012 I ran a 5k. And one of my colleagues is a para athlete. And my thought process was, "Well, if he can do it in his chair, I can easily run a 5k." Yeah, no, it wasn't easy. I hated it.

I went four years before I really invested in running again. And that was a half marathon. And at this point, I still didn't know about you and this was 2016. And I kind of half-assed train for it and was going to die. Didn't do anything again for another year.

And at that point I was about eight months out of running my big race. And I ran the Dopey in 2018. And I kind of half-assed trained a little more.

Jill: Well, let's just stop and tell people what Dopey is, if they don't know.

Cynthia: Yes, for those who don't know Dopey is in January at the Walt Disney Resort here in Orlando, Florida. And it's a four day event of running. Disney does one marathon at the Walt Disney World Resort and it's in January.

The days leading up to it they have on Thursday a 5k. On Friday a 10k. On Saturday a half marathon. And then Sunday is the full marathon. Those of us insane enough run all four of them and they call it the dopey challenge. And in some circles we joke, I'm going to be a little blunt, we say they call it Dopey because there's no dwarf called dumb ass.

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It's an insane thing, it's 48.6 miles over four days. So you're basically doubling your mileage every day. So there's no rest day. And there are people even crazier than me that go and spend the whole day at the park after they're done racing. I did it for the 5k, I spent a half day in the park for the 10. And I was like, "Oh no." After the half I was like, "Nope, tunnel vision. I have to finish; I've gotten this far. I've not been swept."

And for those who don't know Disney races have a 16 minute mile pace and they have these amazing three women that walk the courses. Now the 5 and the 10 they don't pull, but the halves and the full they do start pulling if you don't keep that minimum pace. And I was not about have some balloon lady pull me off the course at that point.

And I actually came close. I was at mile 20, almost 21 of the full. And the bike crew which ride up and down throughout the course telling you how far behind the balloon ladies are. They're like, "They're 20 seconds behind you." And I was like, "I have not come this far to quit. To have some stupid balloon lady." And they're really lovely ladies, but at that point you're like dying. It's hot, you just want to be over.

And I dug in on everything I had. And my AfterShokz that I was wearing at the time, the next song that came on my iPod was Highway to Hell. If that's not the most appropriate song for the next mile that I moved, but I doubled my distance. I went from 20 seconds ahead of them to 41 seconds ahead of them. And it was just enough to get me through.

And I can actually say I'm a Dopey finisher. And it's the most amazing race to date that I've probably ever done.

Jill: That's incredible. But let's kind of talk about this. So in 2012 you ran a 5k. And then you said, "Yeah, that sucks. I'm never going to do that again."

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And then four years later you somehow signed up for a half marathon and said, "Yeah, that sucks. I'm never going to do that again." And then two years after that you ended up at the Dopey challenge.

So where was your mind at when you were signing up for the Dopey?

Cynthia: That's actually a good question. Five years ago I actually started another workout activity and my dad had passed away. And my dad was a runner. My dad has never gotten to see me run. He's only been with me in spirit through all my running.

And trying to get fit, trying to lose weight. I was still in some of that early pre thought work stages of, "Oh, if I exercise I can lose all this weight." Yeah, no. But it was my way to not eat myself any bigger than I already was at that point. And I tried interval running, I won't name some of the other programs. But they all left me feeling defeated.

But I still stuck with it because the one thing my dad taught me was never to give up. And I said, "You know what? As horrible as this is I'm committed to this." My daughter wanted to do the Dopey and she had just finished her senior year of college. And she went to a Military College so she's nice and athletic. And we kind of talked each other into it because we're like, "Oh, this sounds like fun."

But I still didn't have all that thought work. I wasn't quite listening to you. I just found out about you after Dopey. I wish I'd had you before Dopey, I really do.

Jill: What were some of the problems that you faced or some of the struggles that you had during your Dopey training?

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Cynthia: Learning about hydration and just hunting and pecking on fuel. Knowing that it was actually okay to be an interval runner. For our community, the Not Your Average Runner, the middle aged mom of three kids who's not the pencil thin, you know. And even those ladies have their own issues.

But understanding that it's okay to walk. That you don't have to run 48.6 miles over four days without a break, that was hard. That was the hardest mental game that I had to play. And I found myself, even in training, trying to build mileage. Trying to talk to myself. Hitting those low points. And feeling like a failure when I did meet a training run.

Because I didn't have the background. I just knew you put on shoes, you were really cool socks, and didn't wear much because you train in Florida and it's 9 million degrees at three in the morning no matter what time of year it is.

And I didn't have a community so I kind of had to feel it out myself. I tried different fuels. I had people going, "Well, hey, this is what I like." And I was in another running community, which is where actually tripped upon your name initially. And then I started learning a little bit more.

I carried a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with me the day of the full marathon that I made at my in law's house at two in the morning. Because for those of you who also don't know, Disney races start insanely early. And there's 10,000 of you at the big big races. And the joke is if you're not in like the first two or three corrals, yeah, I have to be at the starting line at four in the morning and my corral starts Tuesday afternoon.

I mean, they're massive and you're doing them sleep deprived. And there's all this excitement. And I will say that it was the race excitement and that

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sheer will to not give up that drove me. And had I not had that I probably would have completely stopped running and I would have been like, “Oh, forget this, no.”

But something clicked and I went, “You know what? I'm 48 years old, I need to get control of my life.” I knew that running is not the answer to the weight loss side of it. But it's an avenue for me to release work stress, family stress, and there's got to be something else to it. And here we are in 2021, proud member, ultra-member, loving life, and one of your ambassadors.

Jill: Yeah, I think you've had an interesting trajectory because you have already done what I think is sort of a race that many of the runners in our community aspire to. You had already done that before joining Run Your Best Life. Well, before joining the Roadmap, and then joining Run Your Best Life.

And you and I've chatted about this before, that a lot of people think like “Oh, what is the Roadmap going to give me? Or what is Run Your Best Life going to give me because I'm already a runner?” But you're like a perfect example of that.

So what has going through the Rebel Runner Roadmap done for you? What has being a Run Your Best Life Member given you as far as your running life or your life life? Your life outside of running too.

Cynthia: And that's a great point, the stuff that I've gotten when I was in the Rebel Runner Roadmap and now as a Run Your Best Life Member, even before becoming one of your ambassadors is the thought work.

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The thought work, we use it in our community here as, “Okay, the circumstances is it was 98 degrees when I went on my run. My thought is this, my feelings, my action.” We go through the model but taking that model and applying it to other things in my life, family issues, children issues. My children are older but they'll always be my children, no matter how old they get. The mom love sometimes has to stomp on the brake.

In my professional career I work with visually impaired children and children who are blind. And there are days, especially when the older children, like my upper elementary and middle school students, when they're frustrated, I go, “Okay. So hey, this is called a model. Let's take the circumstance and break it down.”

And that's something I really learned to use in the Run Your Best Life Group is that, well, yes, I can apply it to running. But I can apply it to my work life, my family life, my friends. I can apply it to my Taekwondo world, which is my other sport of choice. And it really helps me systematically break down and set goals.

And something else I've learned from you is, okay, I have a big race on my agenda in 15 weeks. First of all, I've got the 16 week marathon plan, but I have other things in life. It's like knowing now that I can rearrange a run week and it's not detrimental to the overall outcome of a race is the most mind blowing thing.

It's so simple, but having learned that, “Hey, I have a four miler today because it's Tuesday and that's what day my four miler is on.” If it's three and a half and I have to beat feet home because again, Florida summer, it's probably going to rain on me. Three and a half and not getting struck by lightning is perfectly fine.

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Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: And I could go on forever about the things I've learned from you. I mean just knowing that my body size doesn't matter. That the most powerful thing I have is my mind and that thought work can take a really craptacular run and make me go, "Well, you know, you ran."

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: Huge. Absolutely a huge and profound thing. I was so confident in so many other areas of my life but my running. And my friends who know me know I am this big badass girl who just walks in, takes charge of things. But running was that area of my life where I was like this meek person, worried about people. But once I got around runners like me in your community it helped me relax and enjoy the process of running.

Jill: Oh, that's so fun. So I mean, if you were to train for Dopey today, what do you think would be different for you?

Cynthia: I would follow a true training plan. Not one that goes, "Okay, so this week this is this." And then be like, "Okay, it's Sunday. I have to plan my week." No, I would utilize your 5k plan, the 10k plan, the half plan, the marathon plan. I would reach out to whether it was LD, or Jen, or you, or any of the ambassadors and go, "Okay, so I got this race, I hit submit and I'm in. What do I do?"

Asking the community for help just to make sure that I'm on point. As I've learned through the process, I'd learn how to fuel better. Because that's the wonderful thing about Dopey, again, Florida, it can be 32 degrees.

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Which I know everybody that lives in the north and my friend Sarah, my Canadian buddy is probably laughing that I say 32 degrees is cold. But it's cold for us in Florida, it's damp, it's cold. And then by the time you're done with the half it's like 80 degrees. How do you process that?

And it's something I've learned through going through the process, is that I have to look at weather forecasts. I never thought about that. Again, something so simple that I just go, "I live in Florida, it's 90 degrees no matter what time of day it is. And it's heat training." There's a little bit more to it than that.

But I collect data now on all my runs. It's something that I heard in your group somewhere. And I was like, "Oh yeah. How about that?" It's really nice that the Garmin tracks the weather conditions, the humidity, because then I can look at my data and go, "Oh, hey, yeah, I was running a 14:45 mile. But it was 93 degrees with 90% humidity at six o'clock in the morning. Of course you were running a 14:45. Stop beating yourself up over it."

Jill: Yeah. And I think that's one thing that the model kind of gives us, is that ability to take all of the data and all of the circumstances and kind of line them up. And then decide how we want to think about them instead of saying, "Oh, I have to be disappointed because I was running slower today." That's helpful to nobody.

Cynthia: Right.

Jill: Yeah. So okay, so you're so you would kind of create a more structured plan for yourself and you'd approach your fueling differently. And also do the thought work that goes along with it. So do you think you'll ever run another Dopey challenge?

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Cynthia: Oh yes. I'm waiting for tomorrow. At the time of this recording runDisney is making a huge announcement in less than 24 hours. I want to run one in 2023. I'm really hoping they bring races back. I ran a Goofy challenge, which is only running and I shouldn't say the word only. Let me retract that word. Wait, I can't, it's out there.

But the Goofy challenge is the same weekend as Dopey. And Goofy is older, it's been around longer. And it's running the half and the full. And it was that injury that I was running on that made me decide I really needed to do your Rebel Runner Roadmap because even then- So that was just 2020, like a year and a half ago. I knew I still wasn't doing something right. And I needed to finally raise my hand, ask for help.

Which is something us women just don't like doing.

Jill: We don't, yeah.

Cynthia: Even when we say we don't mind asking for help, we mind asking for help. Because we're the nurturers, we're the knowledge base, we're supposed to be the end all be all to everything. In my case, it's not lost until mom can't find it. That's a lot of pressure to put on a woman.

Jill: Can you talk a little more about the injury and how you resolved that? Because I think a lot of our listeners have recurring injuries that feel very frustrating because it's like, "Oh, why can't I just fix this problem so that I can run?"

Cynthia: Yeah. Well, I messed up the inside tendons of my right knee. Combination of overuse, because I'm also that person that I've learned to not be through Run Your Best Life. I used to be that runner who went, "Oh,

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I'm doing 56 runs this year." Yes, races, absolutely insane. It's overuse of the body on top of Taekwondo.

I ran myself into an injury is what I did. And I was following along listening to your podcast by then about you going through your injury and going to see people and I was like, "Oh no, you're not operating on my knees. Nope, nope, I need to find a sports physical therapist who's going to tell me they can help get me through this."

And as I tell everyone, it wasn't even my knee that caused the issue. It was my glutes. So my ass was broken.

Jill: It is always the butt. I swear to God.

Cynthia: That stupid butt, I tell you.

Jill: Right? A weak butt, it just sort of like radiates out. It'll cause problems in the hips, in the knees, in the ankles. Your joints are really the weak point in the chain. And so if your glutes are weak, it comes out at the weak point, which is very often the knees.

Cynthia: The whole kinesthetic chain gets damaged because of the butt.

Jill: Exactly. So, often people are like, "I just want them to operate and fix my knee." And it's like the knee is not the problem, it's the other stuff. So I'm glad that you that you found that out.

Okay, so did you get injured as part of your Dopey training?

Cynthia: No, this was little things along the way. I had my gallbladder out in October of 2019. Three and a half weeks later I ran my local race weekend

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because I wasn't going to give up not running my race. Again, I have been converted since then to know to wait longer. But I felt fine and my whole attitude was, "What? When it gets hard, I'll just slow down."

But because it was the gallbladder, I was compensating for the pain I was in. And doing intervals, and walking, and running. And that race weekend was a 10k and a 5K on a Saturday and then a half on a Sunday. Gosh darn it, I did it.

And actually the way I was carrying my body, my PT said, it started to pull on the interior of my leg that I push off on. I'm a lefty, but because of Taekwondo I do all my balancing on my right side. Well, that's the same side as your stupid gallbladder. And so here I am pushing harder on a side that I am injured on, but in a different part of my body.

And then five weeks after that I pretty much walked Honolulu because my daughter, her husband was stationed out there at the time. And I wasn't going to not go and not do the race I paid for. Yeah, 2020 showed us all that is not the case.

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: You pay for races and sometimes you don't do them. And I probably should not have done Honolulu. So it all culminated with me pulling myself in January 2020 in the full marathon and the Goofy challenge. And I spent eight weeks doing physical therapy working on making the glute muscles activate. Because apparently, that was the one part of my body it was still lazy. And learning how to properly foam roll.

And in the process, I'm listening to your podcast. I'm listening to everything I can get my hands on telling me that you can come back from an injury.

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Just because you're not “the perfect runner,” which perfect and normal are settings on a washing machine and dryer. We're all normal.

I just started diving in and as soon as you opened up Rebel Runner Roadmap I was like, sign up. And then I almost had a little buyer's remorse. I was like, “I don't know.” And LD was posting in the Facebook group. And I'm like, “Uh-huh.” And she's like, “Oh no, do it, do it.” And I went, “Okay, click.”

And just the knowledge base your team brings is just absolutely phenomenal. I tell everybody now, “Hey, listen to her podcast. And when you're ready, I'll talk to you more.” It's like try it, you'll like it.

Jill: Yeah, and because we have four coaches in the group now and everybody brings a different type of experience, which is amazing. But then we've got so many women in the group that are just like you, that have come back from injury.

And I think the thought work really helps with this because it's very tempting when you get injured to go immediately to that thought of, “Well, that's it. I guess I can't run anymore.”

Cynthia: Yes.

Jill: Versus what we teach, which is, “Okay, so I got injured. What do I need to do to fix this problem?” And then kind of come at it more from a research perspective, and reaching out to professionals, and reaching out to other people who have had the same injury. Because I mean, an injury is, it's like if you get a flat tire with your car you don't say like, “Oh, that's it. I guess I have to buy a new car, or I guess I just have to walk.” You're like, “No, I fix the flat so I can keep driving.”

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Cynthia: Exactly.

Jill: And so to me that's what injuries are. So I'm so glad that you did the work necessary. So this this coming weekend after this recording, so obviously the recording is going to be a few weeks out. But as we're recording this right now, you're coming up on your 100th race.

Cynthia: Yes.

Jill: You're training for your fifth marathon.

Cynthia: Yes, I am.

Jill: So, clearly, your injury recovery and prevention is working. So let's talk a little bit about this run that you have coming up this weekend, because it sounds super fun.

Cynthia: It is. Our local Kiwanis Club sponsors a race, it's called the midnight run. So it will start just a few minutes before midnight, rolling into the Fourth of July. So it's July 3rd at like 11:50,55 at night. The gun goes off. And I'm signed up for the 10k. And that will actually be my 23rd 10K I've ever done.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Cynthia: But as I told Jill before the recording started, I was like, "Oh, let me let me see how many races I've done." Because I'm a data geek. And so this race into the Fourth of July will be my 100th run I have done in the last nine years.

Jill: Wow.

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Cynthia: Yeah. And it's not even my favorite distance.

Jill: But also, you started racing nine years ago but you only did a few up until about three years ago. So this is like almost 100 runs in about three years, four years?

Cynthia: Yeah.

Jill: That's insane.

Cynthia: Yes, it is. I agree.

Jill: All right, so you're doing a 10k at midnight this weekend. And then talk to me about the Chicago Marathon. What does your marathon training look like now versus what it might have looked like a couple years ago?

Cynthia: My runs are spaced out. Absolutely critical. Even though I've run Dopey and I've run race series where I run two, three races in a weekend, the training time on my legs is different. I'm following your plan.

So this is technically my second week. But I just did my first long run two days ago, and it was the 9 mile. And I did the first six without any hesitation. And I made it 9.3 because Garmin had a challenge for doing a 15k in June. And I was like, "Well, point three won't kill me."

But in that moment, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I could probably pull another 11." And I froze. I literally stopped, paused my watch. And I had a conversation with myself in that moment. I'm sure the neighbors thought I was nuts. But they can think whatever they want because I was talking myself out of pushing too hard.

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I'm like, "Girl, you are first week in, do not be stupid and push harder. Trust the plan. Use the plan as it is." And I was like, "Okay. All right. I'll walk home." That was my compromise. I was like, "Well, I got about a half mile until I'm home. I need a walk for the cool down anyway so I don't pass out when I get home. Okay, we'll walk."

And I was like, "Okay." I sat for a minute, neighbor brought me some water. She thought I was having an asthma attack. I'm like, "No, it's just really hot. But thanks." And I walked home and I just mentally went through that, "Okay, this was your first. We've got this, it was 9 miles. That's kind of awesome that you felt really good on a hot Sunday in Florida for 9 miles."

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: And my mind went first to, "Wow. Oh my gosh, glad next week is kind of a shorter long run." But then my mind went, "You need that, you have to have that recovery."

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: And that's something I've learned through being a member of Run Your Best Life, is that recovery is critical. Whether it's recovery from an injury, recovery from a long week of work, recovery from having a great weekend. It's okay to take a break.

Jill: Yeah, and recovery is part of your training plan. Rest is literally part of your training plan. It's not like, "Oh, I get to rest because I worked really hard." It's like, "No, no, you rest, it's tactical."

Cynthia: Yes, absolutely.

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Jill: Yeah, it's an important part of a training plan. It's was so funny, years ago I was working with a client. She had just come to me and she said, "I am training for a half marathon." I was like, "All right, great. What has your training been looking like?" And this is when I was just starting out as a running coach. And she said, "Well, I run 13 miles every other weekend. And my race is in like two months." And I'm like, "Wait, what?"

Cynthia: It wasn't me; I promise.

Jill: It definitely wasn't you. She knows who she is and if she's listening, she's going to laugh. But I was like, "What is happening?" And she did end up with a pretty significant hip injury after that race because she had ramped up from very little running to running 13 miles pretty much every other weekend. And so she had to kind of like back it way down.

And now she runs marathons no problem. She runs pretty much injury free most of the time. But it's funny because she was a brand new runner and she was like, "Oh, I thought that's what you did. If you're training for the race, you just run that distance every week." And I'm like, "That's fine for a 5k. But if you just started running six months ago, then running 13 miles every other weekend is basically asking for an injury."

So rest and recovery are not just nice to haves. They're critical parts of the process for sure.

Cynthia: Oh yes. And the other thing I had to do is because COVID world rocked the running universe, as we all know. My 24th half marathon, which is the distance I love and adore. Says the girl who wouldn't run three laps at soccer practice for her warmup when she was a teenager.

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I love the half. My 24th half marathon, because the race Gods rescheduled the world is the New Jersey Novo Nordisk the following week. And I hit a point where I was like, "Which do I want more?" And this is, again, where thought work came in. Because I'm still trying to find the love for the full marathon. I haven't given up on it because Good Lord, I'm training for my fifth.

But I've never properly trained for a full marathon. And I had to say to myself, Chicago is one of the world majors. I don't know, I used to say, "Oh, I'll never get into Boston." Now I'm going, "Well, you never know." But I won't know till I try and I won't know unless I truly follow a plan. Rest like it's put in there, eat properly.

Now, that doesn't mean I'm never having a hot fudge sundae ever again till after Chicago. No, because the Fourth of July is in there. I've got a Taekwondo World Tournament in a month. I've got life between now in Chicago. It's going to happen. But it's the thought work helped me go which do I want more?

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: And honestly, and I know all the Rebel Runners know, I said I wanted Chicago. And so like my whole world is focusing on Chicago right now. My support system knows I've got Chicago. And when I go to run in Jersey the following week, I'm hanging in the back of the pack. And I refuse to let any of those Rebels not finished that race.

Jill: Love that.

Cynthia: Because I will have just done my fifth marathon. And we've got a group of us going and some of them are doing their first half and they need

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that support. And it's kind of me paying it forward because I didn't have that support for my first half. And so and I've told them, I said, "I'm not going to let you quit. I don't care if they put us up on the sidewalk. Fight me, I'll drag you across the finish line but you're going to cross the finish line."

Jill: I love that.

Cynthia: And that's my way to give back to these ladies who are supporting me right now as I'm going, "Okay, I've got this coming up." And they're supporting me too, so it's the least I can do to help them back.

Jill: I think that's awesome. And I think that is what it means to be a Not Your Average Runner Ambassador, is that you lead by example. And then you're there to help people when they are struggling.

Because I mean I think back to my first half marathon, which I actually trained really hard for. But I was not prepared for the mental struggle. There are many times during that race that I wanted to give up. And I didn't, because I had the same thought that you did. I was like, "I'm not giving up. I'm not giving up. I'm just not going to."

But I know that if there had been somebody like you next to me saying, "Come on, one more interval. You've got this, you've got this." It would have been a lot less of a- I mean, I finished. I actually finished in the time that I wanted to, but I was beating myself up the whole time.

So I think that being a Not Your Average Runner Ambassador means helping people step out of their brain for a moment so that they can really take in their surroundings and appreciate what they're doing and keep going. So I love that you're doing that.

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And I'm so excited for that race because I think there's at least two dozen of our community that are going to be there. So it's going to be super fun.

Cynthia: And that's the beauty of it, you said it. Knowing that I can be that person keeping the time. So that that first half marathon runner that's running in Jersey in the middle of October, and again, I know that that could be any kind of weather. If I'm timekeeping, if I'm pacing their intervals for them, and all I have to do is look at them and go, "Run."

To take that out of that emotional bag that comes with running your first half marathon. Because you know what it is. And so many of the listeners they just know that there's so many things that go on in your brain on any given race day. To take that, something as simple as not having to focus on your interval pace, because somebody is going, "Okay, run. Okay, walk." For me, that's the bee's knees right there, for sure.

Jill: So good. So you also recently achieved a non-running achievement or like kind of a big fucking deal. So let's talk about that. Because it's non running, but it's physical. And I think a lot of people have this belief that if you're a runner, then you don't get to do anything else. You just have to run. But you're kind of pretty well versed in two sports. So talk to us about that.

Cynthia: Yes, I have been practicing for five years, the Ho-am form of Taekwondo. And I just recently earned and was promoted to the rank of third degree black belt.

Jill: Congratulations.

Cynthia: Thank you. I'm getting teary here because it is, it's such a huge, huge deal. I started it, my son has done it for, gosh, almost 12 years now.

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He outranks me, obviously. And I started in the summer, and I was like, “Okay, yeah.” The instructor, his daughter, and my oldest daughter went to high school together. There's a whole other separate backstory to it, but we were tight. And I was like, “Okay, fine Jeff. Fine Jeff, yeah, we'll sign up. Yeah.”

Four weeks later my dad passed away. And yeah, I know. It's like, “Oh.” So now he's been gone five years. And I initially kept going for it as, and I still call it this some days, impact therapy. I get to hit people and break things and I don't get arrested. I mean, what more could you want?

But it has since evolved. There are days where hitting grownups at work is frowned upon, absolutely. And I walk into my class and I look at my instructor and I go, “Are we sparring today? Because I need to hit something.” And she's like, “Yeah, we're sparring today.” And I'm like, “Yes!” And then she'll come up and she'll be like, “You're my partner.” I'm like, “I'm going to die. Yay.” But I feel so good afterwards.

But I've incorporated it as my strength training in my running. Because, and again, I've really started because of COVID focusing on my Taekwondo as my strength training because it's all about my own body weight. Gyms were closed. Oh my god, you couldn't get into a gym and I've never really been a weight junkie. I have some kettle bells and I have some free weights. But again, through Run Your Best Life I learned that I can use my body as its own resistance weight training.

And we've got some great, great videos of strength training. Oh my gosh, I just love the strength training. And it's great because it gives me an opportunity, I'm 51 years old, there's a lot of times I'm the elder stateswoman in the class. If not the oldest person in class. And it's great

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because to me, it shows I can still do things. And my teenager brain, when it thinks it's still 22 can act like it's 22 for about three minutes at a time.

But I also get to be that role model to the teens that are in my class. To the young ladies. And to the new moms that are just coming in because their kids have convinced them to sign up. And it's actually empowered me in my running because I feel safe when I run.

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: And I have self-defense techniques. And runner safety is something that is so important to any runner. Definitely women since we are a female-based community. It's just knowing that something as simple as changing my routes. Again, something I didn't think of until I became a Rebel.

And then my Taekwondo instructor, she's like, "Why are you running the same route?" And I was like, "Because it's familiar." She goes, "Yeah, but your race isn't that way A. B, even though you live in a safe area, you could still be being watched because people go into safe areas." And I was like, "Oh my gosh, I never even thought of that."

And so my Taekwondo ninja skills have really morphed into helping keep me aware of where I am. And having my safety net in place during my runs, especially my longer runs. My son is wonderful. If I run anything more than four miles, he's like, we call it the mom locator, we're both iPhone users. So I turn on the mom tracker so he knows where I am. And if it's raining and there's bad electrical storm, I'm like, "Okay, here I am. Come get me because I can't get home."

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And I love the Taekwondo. Like I said, it's my strength training, it helps center me. And I can then take those skills of being centered and when I'm having that freak out moment because a big dog is coming at me, I can stand tall, stand firm, shoulders back, relax. All those things that we should do as runners, but we get in those uncomfortable situations, everything tenses up.

It's not always the runner brain that kicks in a lot of times. It's the Taekwondo thing that goes, "Nope. Stand your ground. I don't care that you're in the middle of interval. Stop, walk. Don't let the big dog scare you. He's probably more scared of you than you are of him."

And it's great. And I'm teaching other women, slowly but surely, how to defend themselves on a run. Which is a whole other topic.

Jill: I absolutely love that. And I think Taekwondo is a great compliment to running for so many of the reasons you just stated. But in particular, that confidence about running by yourself and being able to defend yourself. Because I think that keeps a lot of women from running.

Cynthia: Yes.

Jill: It's just a big unknown and they think, "I don't know what I would do if somebody attacked me." And you're like, "Yeah, I know exactly what I would do. I know all the techniques; I've practiced them over and over again." And you've got that sort of calm brain that you get from practicing the mental aspects of Taekwondo.

And all of the martial arts are just so important for like building your glutes, right? Like they're very glute centric activities, because you have to be able

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to shift your weight back onto one leg. And running is a single leg exercise as well.

Cynthia: Keep that chain all in alignment. Because if I need to go throw a number two round kick and I'm not throwing it the right way, my body's off kilter. And then I'm not executing. So it works on stabilizing my core. Well, what do I need is a runner? I need a stabilized core.

So it really is amazing. And as I tell other women who are in my Taekwondo community who are looking at running and they give me the excuse, "Oh, well, I'm worried." I'm like, "As a runner?" You carry the two strongest things you could ever have to protect yourself and they're your legs.

Jill: Yeah.

Cynthia: Because as I tell, and here's my free little self-defense tip. If you watch football, if a player gets hit and their knee goes in the opposite direction of the direction it's supposed to do, they're not getting back up. In that moment, if somebody is coming at you, take their knee out, throw a kick. As long as that knee goes in a direction it's not supposed to, that attacker is not going to get up. The odds are in your favor at that point to run because then adrenaline will kick in. I don't care how tired you are.

And it's just knowing a little tip like that that can make the difference in a runner's understanding and perception of their own safety. And knowing that it's okay to go out a half hour before the sun comes up and not feel, and justifiably so in today's world, afraid of the dark.

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Jill: Yeah, I love that. Okay, so what else would you like people to know about you and your running? Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you want to mention?

Cynthia: Oh yes, I, a month ago picked up my RRCA running level one certification.

Jill: Yay! That's so fun.

Cynthia: But I didn't think about it until I saw other runners like me in the Run Your Best Life Community, in the Rebel Runner Roadmap. And being given that little taste that, "Hey, this is possible." I know when I was first looking at putting my plan together for Chicago, on a call I think I asked you. It was one of the marathon calls. I was like, "Is it okay to rearrange my time?" And you were like, "Yeah, you can rearrange anything. Just make sure you get your long run in. If it's a long run or it's not, go for that longer run. Let a 3 miler slide."

And literally, the week I'm supposed to be in my Taekwondo world competition that's the 12 mile weekend. And I've had to rearrange that week to make both things work in my life. Because right now I have a goal for World competition.

Jill: Yay!

Cynthia: But I love it. I can't say enough about this program. If I could tell anyone who's hesitant about joining, sign up for the Rebel Runner Roadmap. First of all, the unlimited access to it, the getting to do it over again, which I have done every time, is so great as a seasoned veteran to running. Because it helps reset me when I don't think I need to reset.

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Because the world is so busy every once in a while, we need to be reminded, “Hey, these are the things you need to work on. Step one, step two, step three.” Go through the pillars. But give it a shot.

Because running, and I joke about it, but very seriously I would not run three laps at soccer practice. And now the half marathon is my favorite distance. And that just blows my mind every time I say that. But I wouldn't run three quarters of a mile for a warmup and I run 13.1 because I think it's fun.

Jill: Well, and just so people know, what is the ratio of running to walking that you use? What are the intervals that you use for your race?

Cynthia: Right now, because I live six inches from the surface of the sun, I am currently training at about a minute and 20 second run to a 30 second walk. And honestly, I could probably dial down to 25 second walk. Because about 25 seconds I go, “Okay, it's got to be close.” And I'll take a step or two and my- I wear a Gym Boss, not spokesman for the company, but it clips right here and it beeps in my ear, and my interval goes off.

And so I could probably dial down to about 25 seconds. But I'm respecting myself and keeping it at that 30. Because I know I need to train for that 30 seconds on the walk because as the miles progress for Chicago I will need all 30 seconds. Starting at about mile 18 I'm going to probably want more than 30 seconds.

So I'm looking at when it's not so hot I run about a two and a half to a 35. So two and a half minute run to a 35 second walk when I have ideal conditions. Which are like three times a year in Florida.

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Jill: Okay, so I just think it's good for people to know, because I think there may be this conception out there that if you're going to run a marathon maybe you run a mile and walk a minute and run a mile. And that's not the case, right?

Cynthia: Nope, not at all.

Jill: And everyone's running intervals are different. We figure out what works best for us. But it's not unacceptable and it's not actually even unusual to do what you're doing, which is run a minute and a half or two minutes and then take the walk break.

Cynthia: Absolutely.

Jill: So I love that you shared that.

Cynthia: And it helps prevent injury. It helps you take that breath. Which even in the best of a run, you get so lost in the method of hitting my stride right, making sure I'm- And I start going through all those lists. And that walk is just enough for me to go, "Oh, okay. Wait. All right, stand up straight. Oh, you were leaning a little too far forward. Fix your posture."

It's just a quick mental reset. And it's the difference between honestly going, "Oh my god, I am never doing this again" to, "Oh, hey, 9.3 miles was not so bad." And I tell people all the time there's like three runners in the world who do distance running who don't do intervals. The rest of them, they're interval runners. We can't all be Kipchoge or Meb. As much as I would like, I know that unless something drastically changes, I'm probably never going to run a two hour marathon. But I'm training. I have my A, B, and C goals for Chicago.

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Jill: I love it. I love that so much. So okay, how can people follow along with your adventures? Do you have an Instagram that the people can follow you?

Cynthia: I'm on Instagram, and I'm Cynd70. So C-Y-N-D70 is my Insta handle. I'm on Facebook, follow me there. I'm getting better about using Instagram.

Jill: Awesome.

Cynthia: So my challenge to everybody is to just try running. Give it a good shift, follow a legit training plan that works for you. Ask questions. Rebels, those of you listening, ask. Feel free to ask, there is no stupid question. The only stupid question is the one you never asked.

And a year and a half into being a Rebel I have yet to see anyone go, "Oh my God, why did you ask that question? It's been asked like 80 million times." Not to say that I've seen that said in other running communities. But I will say in Rebel Runner Roadmap and Run Your Best Life not one of us is ever going to go, "Oh my god, we've heard this question seven times in the last three hours." No, because you never know.

And challenge yourself. Go one more interval, see how it feels. Be bold, try something different.

Jill: I love it. And if you guys really want to connect with Cynthia, of course you can just join the Rebel Runner Roadmap because she's on it.

Cynthia: Right, I'm everywhere.

Jill: She's everywhere.

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All right. Well, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate you sharing so much of your story. And I cannot wait to see how your marathon goes. And I know I'll be one of the first to hear about it.

Cynthia: Yes, you will.

Jill: And of course I'll see you in New Jersey in October for the Novo Nordisk half marathon. But yeah, thank you so much for joining me today. Thank you for having me. It's been fun. So I can't wait to see you again.

Jill: Yes. All right.

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