

Ep #216: Bringing More Meaning to Running with Dean Karnazes



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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 here today with the one and only Dean Karnazes, who is a two time New York Times bestselling author and iconic superhuman endurance runner. He is definitely not your average runner. And some of his many accomplishments include running 135 miles nonstop across Death Valley, running a marathon to the south pole, and running 50 marathons in all 50 states in 50 consecutive days. I didn't even know that was possible.

So Dean just released his latest book, *A Runner's High: My Life in Motion*, in April. And in it he shares his stories and his hard won wisdom from three decades of running and competing across the globe.

So, Dean welcome to the show.

Dean: Hey Rebels, it's great to be here.

Jill: I'm fangirling a little bit because I have followed you for probably about 10 years. And I feel like this is my moment to tell you that we actually have something in common that you don't even know. We both used to work for the same company and we both quit that company to start a career in running. And I'm just like, "Oh yeah, Dean Karnazes used to work for the same company as me."

And I read about that in your first book, *Ultramarathon Man*, which I read about 10 years ago and was super inspired but I've been like waiting 10

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years to get that off my chest, to be like, “You don’t know me, but we both worked for GSK.”

Dean: I know your name and now it’s all coming back to me, yeah.

Jill: Right, exactly. So all right, I’m going to talk a little bit more because I have so many things I want to say. But I just have to tell you that I read your first book, Ultramarathon Man, like probably 10 years ago and I was a runner then, but I wasn’t gung ho about it, it was just kind of like, “Oh, it’s just this thing that I do three times a week for 30 minutes.” But your book really captivated me.

And I am not somebody who aspires to ever run an ultra, but it kind of inspired me to think about running differently, more as a practice, something I use to connect with myself. And it started to get me to question what might actually be possible for me. So even though I really have no desire to ever do an ultra, reading about your adventures, just they kind of like unlocked this new way of thinking in my own brain.

So I also want to thank you for that because I know that you have this effect on many, many people. But really, your book spoke to me deeply and I really appreciate that you wrote it.

Dean: Well, I mean, thank you. So many people think of running as kind of punishment.

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: And also very boring. You know, when you think of running you think of someone on a track just running around in circles and my book is not that at all. It’s kind of like viewing running as adventure and exploration.

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So it kind of shifted a lot of people's paradigms on what running meant. And I think as I did, and it sounds like you did the same, you experience more joy when you view running that way. It's almost like play, so it's no longer, "Oh, I got to go do my run today for half an hour." It becomes something bigger than that and I think more meaningful.

Jill: Yeah, 100%. So, before we dive into your current book, Runner's High, would you mind sharing a little bit about how you got into ultra running in the first place? I mean, is this something you've done your whole life or is it something you picked up along the way? Because I had that question for most ultra runners, but I think my listeners would love to know how this came to your life.

Dean: Well, I mean, I used to love to run home from school when I was a little boy. Literally, my earliest childhood recollections are from running home from kindergarten. And then I ran competitively when I was a freshman in high school and we won the cross country championships. And I decided at that point that I had taken running as far as I could go with it and running was boring. So I stopped when I was 15.

And then fast forward to my 30th birthday, when I was in a bar in San Francisco doing what a lot of people do on their 30th birthday, I was in there getting drunk with my buddies. And at midnight I told them I was leaving and they said, "But where are you going? The night is young, it's your 30th birthday, let's have another round of tequila to celebrate." And I said, "No, I'm going to go run 30 miles to celebrate instead."

And they looked at me and they said, "But you're not a runner, you're drunk." And I said, "I am, but I'm still going to do it." And I'll never forget this moment, I walked out of the bar, I didn't even own running gear but I had on these comfortable silk boxers, these silk underwear, so I just took off my

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pants and I just threw them down the alleyway and just started stumbling south into the night.

And I knew that the town of Half Moon Bay was 30 miles away so I said, "Set your sites on Half Moon Bay soldier and keep moving forward." And somehow I made it. I mean, I ran straight through the night. It took close to eight hours and it almost killed me. But it just felt like it was the right thing to do and at that point it changed the course of my life. I decided I was going to be a runner.

Jill: So that's fascinating to me, like you just thought it was the right thing to do. How many times in your life do you think you've had that thought that has led you to do some really epic stuff?

Dean: That was one of the more profound instances, I mean, I'll never forget when I started sobering up it was like 2 in the morning and I was out in the middle of nowhere, up in the hills above the Bay area. And I was looking down at the runway lights of SFO, San Francisco International. And then I looked up and the stars were out and it was just a surreal night, it was beautiful.

And for the first time in my life I felt like that was where I was meant to be at that time. I don't know if God spoke to me or what, but I just felt like I'm meant to be standing here doing what I'm doing right at this instant. Maybe it was the tequila, I don't know. But it shook me and I just said, "You know what? You've just got to follow your heart and become a runner, it's what you really love."

Jill: And so did you like immediately sign up for an ultra after that? Because you are, obviously, 30 miles is a pretty significant distance for somebody to run, period. Not to mention somebody who is drunk and hasn't been a

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runner for the past so many years. So where did you go from that? When you said, “Okay, you need to become a runner,” what was your vision for that in your brain?

Dean: Well, I mean, first of all I couldn't walk for about two weeks. And once I was able to walk I took up running. So I remember I would run out to the Golden Gate Bridge, I'd run like four or five miles almost every night. And I thought, “Wow, I'm in really great shape. I'm amazing.”

And then one day I was running home, and to get home in San Francisco, if you know San Francisco you always have to run up a hill because there's hills everywhere. So I was running up a hill and these two guys just blew past me. I mean, they were like next level, they were almost like a different species. And I thought, “Who are these guys? And how the heck are they so fit?”

And I tried to catch them, I couldn't catch them. And they disappeared over the horizon of the of the hill. And I thought, “Wow, I wonder what their story is?” And I got up to the top of the hill and they were there doing pushups. So not only had they run past me they're doing pushups.

And I finally got out of them, they are training for a 50 mile race. And I said, “Hold it, 50 miles? Where are the hotels or the campgrounds or, you know, where do you stop along the way?” And the guy was like, “No, buddy, the gun goes off and you stop when you cross the finish line. You know, if you cross the finish line, if you can make it.” And then they ran off.

And I thought that is the most absurd, crazy thing anyone could ever do is run 50 miles, I got to try it. So I signed up for this race and I somehow made it 50 miles. And it was the toughest thing I'd ever done. And I'll never forget I was in the medic tent at the finish, wrapped in a mylar blanket, just

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like a ghost of a human, just shivering. And I saw those same two guys, and they were high fiving each other and they said, “We qualified! We qualified!” And I thought, “Qualified for what, the insane asylum?”

And they said, “No, we qualified for the western states 100 mile endurance run.” And I said, “Hold on 100 miles?” He's like, “Yeah, it starts in this place called Squaw Valley or Olympic Village, at a ski resort, and you run through the mountains. You cross a river in the middle of the night and it's 100 miles.”

And I couldn't wrap my head around it. I mean, I just thought that's impossible. And as they were leaving, the last thing they said to me is, “Hey, buddy, you qualified as well.” And I'll never forget those words.

Once I heard that I thought “You will never live down this moment unless you try. You cannot escape this moment, you will forever hear that voice in your head for the rest of your life, like you qualified as well, if you don't do it.”

So I signed up for the western states 100 mile endurance run. And that was about eight months later after running 30 miles and I ran 100 miles.

Jill: That's just mind blowing, right? Like, did you kind of blow your own mind thinking, “I couldn't even have predicted this nine months ago that this is where it would be in my life”?

Dean: Absolutely. I mean, even just hearing that a human ran 100 miles, and at first, I thought there's trickery. Like they get in a car, right? Or there's a bike hiding around the corner and they ride a bike. But just even wrapping my head around it, I don't like driving 100 miles level let alone

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running 100 miles. Let alone through the mountains on a wilderness trail, crossing a river, running at night with a headlamp on.

And I'll tell you that at the starting line I'll never forget what the race director said. He said, "Look around you," there's 350 of us at the start. He said, "Half of you will not finish." And he said, "I applaud you for having the courage to try."

And he's like, "Those of you that do finish, you'll cross the finish line as a different person than the one that's standing here right now." And he was right, when I crossed that finish line, I was a different person than the guy standing at the starting line.

Jill: I can't even comprehend the kind of evolution, personal evolution you must have to go through through that time that you're out running. And you've done that particular race, how many times? Like at least 10 times, right?

Dean: 13.

Jill: 13, oh my God.

Dean: But who's counting?

Jill: But who's counting, right? So, I guess, what I'm wondering is when you think back to the first time you ran that race and you kind of evolved into a different version of yourself, has every single race been the same level of change? Or have there been some that have been much more epic than others, that have changed you more than others?

Dean: Yeah, well, you know, I've now run on all seven continents twice.

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Jill: Oh my gosh.

Dean: So I've raced and competed, I mean, literally I just got back from this 1,000 mile run in Australia. So I've run across the US from San Francisco to New York. So I've done a lot of different things and I have this motto, "never stop exploring."

So I'm constantly trying to up the ante because I'm 100% Greek and the Oracle at Delphi said, "Know thyself." And how do you get to know yourself? And that's just by pushing yourself to new uncomfortable levels where you learn and you peel back additional layers, and you find out more about yourself.

And certainly getting older is exploration in its own right because doing that same race, you're right, that I did two and a half decades ago when I'm closer to 60 now than 50 it had a whole new perspective to it. There was whole new meaning to this older version of myself trying to still run 100 miles

Jill: Yeah, well and I think because most of the listeners of my show are kind of in that age range 40s, 50s, and 60s, and I think mostly women. We kind of struggle with that, "Okay, I'm getting older and what does that mean?"

And I think what what I took from your book is that you've actually used your running recently to explore within yourself what it means to be getting older. Okay, I'm going to check my notes here because you had this really awesome quote, which now I'm probably not going to be able to find because I wrote down so many of them.

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Oh, darn it, I can't find it. Oh no, no, here it is. You said in the book that age has slowed you but it has also toughened you. And I was kind of like super intrigued by that. I get it, right, but I'd love to hear in your words what that means to you.

Dean: Well, I mean, there's another quote in there, "endurance comes from enduring." And certainly anyone that's made it to their 50s has endured. Whether you like it or not, I mean, baby you've done it, you're still standing and you've taken some hard knocks along the way. I mean, life doesn't really get that much easier, does it?

It seems like you don't get out of bed as fresh as you used to, as we all know. The knees creak a little. Everything gets a little more difficult and you're facing more headwind. So if you're still around and you're still moving forward, that took some perseverance.

And what I found is that I really struggled with getting older, I didn't like it. I mean, I work out like a fiend because I want to have that young man's body. I want to be strong. I want to feel like I can take on any challenge. And finding that I really can't and that the same races that used to be kind of easy for me, not that running 100 miles is ever easy, but now it's like really a struggle. It's really tough.

And kind of shifting, as you spoke, about me now viewing it as a challenge of aging. Like can you be the best you at your age? And that's kind of where my head is at now.

I want to be the guy that has got a gray beard and is in his 90s at the start of a marathon and somehow still getting to the finish line. I'm sure I'm not going to win, but it doesn't matter anymore. To me now just having the

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courage to be at the starting line and the strength to cross the finish line is all that matters.

Jill: Yeah, I love that. And I mean, honestly, I've been passed by that guy multiple times.

Dean: I have too. There's some tough old men and let's face it, women.

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: There are some incredibly strong women in their 70s and 80s that are amazing.

Jill: Yeah, for sure. For sure. I love that. So, yeah, I think age is— I mean, in every runner's career, especially if you want to be a runner that's going to be running into their 70s, 80s, and 90s, there's going to come a point where you've run the fastest you will ever run. And then it's just going to kind of decline from there.

And so I think if you want to be a runner for life, you have to wrap your head around that and accept it instead of trying to chase it and beating yourself up because like, "Oh, I'm not as fast as I was 10 years ago." Right? "Okay, well, what else can I do? What else is amazing about the body that I have right now?" And I just love that you're reframing what it means to be a runner at every age.

Dean: Well, let's face it, the older you get, the fewer competitors you have. Your time might be getting slower but you're winning your age group because there's no one left.

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Jill: You're like there's nobody else in the 100 to 110 year old age group, like you automatically win. That's awesome.

Okay, well speaking of competition, one thing that I really wanted to sort of dive into, you mentioned several times in the book that you don't actually consider yourself to be a competitive runner. And one of my favorite quotes is this one, "Beating others was never a primary motivation. Conversely, being beaten never troubled me much either. I ran ultras because I loved the game."

And that quote spoke deeply to me because I feel the same way about my own running. I know many of my listeners feel the same, we're all just there for the joy of the experience and not the competition. But I think that most people, especially non-runners, but a lot of newer runners, they assume that to have accomplished as much as you've accomplished that you actually have to be competitive.

But instead you've achieved things that very, very, very few people on the planet will ever do. So can you kind of address that? Because it seems like a, I can't think of the word, but it seems like a contradiction that you're not competitive and yet you've done all these amazing things. So I'd love to hear you just sort of speak more about that.

Dean: Yeah, I mean, I think there are two types of competitors. I mean, I know competitors who just, they win because they hate losing. I mean, that's all they care about is not losing. And I was never one of those guys, I just thought if I did the best that I could do and someone else is better than me, then so be it. Congratulations to them.

The only commitment I have at the starting line is that I'm going to be the best I can be today. I'm not going to leave anything on the course, today I

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will give it my all and let the cards fall where they will because you can't control what other people do.

And the other thing you can't do is beat yourself up about other people being better than you. I mean we're always going to find people that are better than us.

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: The only person that you need to answer to is the person you see in the mirror every morning, and that's yourself. So as long as I can look inward and say I did my best, I trained hard, I paid my dues, I gave it my all, I did my best, then that to me is winning.

Jill: Yeah, I absolutely love that. It's like literally the exact same philosophy I have to my own running. And I think it's very distracting when, as a runner, you get wrapped up in always having to run faster than before. It distracts you from the joy that you can experience, the adventuring that you can experience when you're tied up in the results or the data. And you just kind of miss so much of the beauty of the sport.

Dean: And that's why I love ultra running because a lot of that goes away. Certain races, especially like if you go to the Boston Marathon you see people you haven't seen in 10 years, and the first thing they ask you is, "What's your time goal?" I'm like, Jesus. Is that how I'm defined? Like, am I going to run a sub three at Boston or whatever? It seems kind of like all right, it's all about time there. And it kind of takes a lot of the joy out of the experience away.

Where when you go to run 50 or 100 miles no one asks you. Like when you say I just ran 100 miles they don't say, "What was your time?" They just

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kind of say, “Hold it, you did what? You ran 100?” I mean, they don't care if it took you four days or if you won the race. And that's why ultramarathoning, to me, is kind of beautiful in that regard is that you're really just trying to finish.

Jill: Right. Yeah, every race I show up to, that is literally my goal. I just want to finish feeling pretty good, that's it. I just want to finish and be like, “Yeah, I just did that.”

And so you you actually said something in your book, you wrote very eloquently in this book so I'm pulling a lot of quotes verbatim because I really enjoyed them. You said, “Running is the most democratic of sports, ultra running even more so.”

Dean: Well, I think, I mean, that speaks on a lot of levels. I think that when we run, we're all the same. There's so many things in this world that divide us, right? Be it the color of our skin, or the God we worship, or the language we speak, or our socioeconomic class. I mean, these things are dividers, where running is a great uniter.

We all run the same way, we put one foot in front of the other. And, the effort I put forth to run 100 miles, for someone else that could be just running five miles. And that's what I love about running, that someone, especially someone new, running three or four miles continuously can be a huge, huge struggle and a huge accomplishment. And so what? I'm running 100 miles. We all experience those same emotions, right? We feel those same feelings.

Jill: Yeah.

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Dean: So I think running is democratic in that regard. The other thing that is something I always like to bring up, and you don't hear a whole lot about it. But in ultramarathoning, women routinely beat men. And I'm not talking about like they get a head start or anything. I'm talking about the same starting line and crossing the same finish line.

So it's not uncommon for women to beat men. And especially as the races get longer, the longer the race the odds are higher that a woman will win. So it's very democratic in that regard, as well.

Jill: Oh, I love that because I think women are definitely more physiologically wired for endurance versus short term sprinting. I think there's a genetic component there. But as a woman that always makes me happy when I see a woman has been the overall winner of an ultramarathon. So yeah.

Dean: Well, I mean, there's some actual theories around it. And one is that women, because of estrogen, that their pain tolerance is higher. That estrogen numbs some of the pain, for giving childbirth, I guess. Other is that women have a higher percentage of body fat. And when you run these long distances you burn fat for fuel. And then there's my wife's theory, and that is we're just more patient.

Jill: Yeah, well, it's probably a combination of all three, and I hadn't even really thought about the body fat thing. Because when I look at women ultra runners, most of them are actually already pretty, they don't have really a ton of body fat on them. Or at least the ones that I know. But yeah, that's interesting, because then they've just got like an extra storage of fuel.

Dean: Yeah, a lot of the super elite ultramarathoning women are pretty slender and they have low body fat. But if you go to an ultra marathon and

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you look around the crowd, there are people there you think, “I don't know, how's this person going to run 50 miles? I mean, they don't look like they're in that great of shape.” But it's not your body, it's up here.

Jill: Yes.

Dean: So a lot of folks that are running these ultramarathons, running and walking, I want to say running an ultra marathon is not all about running. It's like a lot of power hiking. Not everyone is in the best shape you would imagine but they still are out there and they still get to the finish line.

Jill: I'm so glad that you said that because I actually, as we discussed earlier, I work a lot with larger bodied women, and in their 40s and 50s who are running. And I have quite a few clients who are actually doing ultra marathons and they're not, you know, if you look at like the typical ultra marathoner, they don't have that body type.

And yet they they persevere because, first of all, they do, they take a run walk approach because they're kind of like “Hey, I'm just here to endure and finish.” And then also they do a lot of mental work to make sure that their brain can endure it, that they're thoughts can endure it.

Because you're right, it's like it's all mental. I think the human body is capable of so much more than we ever give it credit for because we quit in our minds before our body actually quits.

Dean: Well said. Yeah, well said.

Jill: So I have this really long list of things that I want to talk about and some of them are kind of funny because I was like reading your book and just laughing. So there are two examples, I'm totally switching gears here.

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There are two examples of trail food, I guess, or like running fuel that you use that made me go, “Oh my god.” And one was the raw ginger. You actually said, “Ginger is the magical elixir for gut issues, but most people will eat candy ginger.” And you're like, “No, no, I just want it.” I'm like, oh my god, like my stomach turned just thinking about that. So is that like your go-to, the ginger, if your stomach's upset?

Dean: It's amazing. I mean, it hits you like a slap in the face. I mean, your mouth, you think you're not going to be able to tolerate it.

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: And if you can get a piece of raw ginger into your belly, it cures everything.

Jill: Do you think it's because it's such a shock to your taste buds that your body just forgets about all of the previous discomfort? It's like, “What is this?”

Dean: I've never thought of it in those terms before, but maybe it is, yeah.

Jill: And then the other one was pepperoncini juice instead of pickle juice. And I was like, “Oh, I never really thought of that.” But why do you prefer that instead of pickle juice?

Dean: Well, I think I go on to say that there are two kinds of people in this world, there are pickle people and non-pickle people.

Jill: I'm a non-pickle.

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Dean: Yeah. I have a hard time with pickles as well. And what I have a really hard time with is burping pickles.

Jill: Yes.

Dean: So if you drink pickle juice, which a lot of people prescribe for cramps, you've got that pickle flavor in your body for a long time. Where pepperoncinis, to me, it's more neutral. You're not burping pickles for 10 or 15 miles.

Jill: Right. And, I mean, if you're running 100 miles, I feel like that's a factor. Right? That's definitely something to think about.

Dean: I agree.

Jill: Okay, let's see, another funny story that I thought I'd love to kind of learn more about was— Actually it's not a funny story, you met Michelle Obama.

Dean: Well, I hope the story is a little bit funny.

Jill: I mean, it was amusing but also, I was like, "Oh my God, he met Michelle Obama." I was super excited about that. So I mean, I don't want to give away too much of what's in the book, but can you tell that story a little bit? Because it was a good one.

Dean: Yeah, no, I hope people pick up the book just for that chapter alone. Yeah, I was running, I told you I ran across America. So as I was running across America, I was getting close to Washington, DC. And when you run across the US from California to New York City, you basically pass right through Washington, DC.

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And I got a call from someone and she said, “Hey, when you're running past the White House would you mind stopping in? There's someone here that really wants to meet you.” And I thought it was a prank call, “Okay, who is this?”

She's like, “No, no, really, this is sincere.” And I said, “Well, who is the person that wants to meet me?” And she said, “Well, her name is Michelle.” And I thought, okay, you know, there's a sous chef at the White House named Michelle, or one of the security detail's name is Michelle. So I'm like, “Michelle? Michelle who?”

And she's like, “Well, her last name is Obama.” She's like, “Dean, do you know who Michelle Obama is?” And I'm like, “Yeah, I've been running across the country for 65 days, but I know who Michelle Obama is.”

So, literally, as I'm running past the White House, the gates open, and they wave me in and they say, “Run through the White House.” So I literally ran down the hallway of the White House. And it was surreal. And then her press secretary was standing there and she said, “Hang a left, she's out on the south garden waiting for you.”

So I run out to this— I'm literally running through the White House and I've been running for 65 days. I don't know the last time I showered, it could have been two weeks the last time I showered.

But I run out to the south lawn and there's Michelle Obama and I'm like, how do you greet this woman? Do you bow? Do you get on your knees? Do you kiss her hand? What do you say to the First Lady? And she just opens her arms and she said, “Oh, Dean, it's such an honor to meet you. Can I give you a hug?”

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And I'm like, "Really? I haven't showered in two weeks, but let's hug." So, literally, we hugged, that's how I met her.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Dean: Yeah. And then we had lunch together and she had a big reception. It was amazing, yeah.

Jill: I mean, that's just the memory of a lifetime, right? You're already doing this epic adventure of running across the country, one of many hundreds of epic adventures that you've had. But then to top it all off, oh, here's the First Lady, and not just any First Lady, but Michelle, freaking Obama, wanting to spend time with you. I probably would have been like, "That's it, like the pinnacle of my life."

Dean: I say in the book as well, as I'm hanging out with her for a couple hours, someone started pulling out my curtails like, "Hey, hey, you still got another 25 miles to cover today. Let's go." I'm like, jeez.

Jill: I would have been like, "Fuck that, I'm talking to the First Lady."

Dean: Like, hold it, hold, I'm having a moment here. And they just pulled me out and they said, "Okay, start running." Literally, a couple miles down the road runners are flipping me off, throwing shit out the window at me. And I'm like, "If you knew I was just hanging out with you'd be giving me some more respect. This is just wrong."

Jill: Right? That's just so wrong. You should have had a sign that was like, "Listen, I just hung out with the First Lady." I mean, that's just mind blowing.

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But, I mean, the places that your running has taken you and the things that you've seen and done is just kind of mind blowing. Like you just got back from Australia. And I don't know if you want to say a little bit about that, but it looked pretty epic from what I saw on Instagram.

Dean: Well, I was running with kangaroos. That was pretty cool.

Jill: Okay.

Dean: That says it all right, yeah. So I did a thousand mile run over 10 days with a team of four, and it was amazing. We raised about \$70,000 for an organization called Reach Out Australia that helps support teens and young Australians with mental health issues.

Jill: Oh wow.

Dean: Australia is really having a hard time right now with the lockdowns. They're not quite as far along in fighting the pandemic as we are in the US and they're just having a real hard time with teen suicides and mental issues.

So yeah, and we had almost 3,000 people join us virtually. So we had people around the world, not running the entire thousand miles, but running maybe a 5K with us. So that was pretty cool.

Jill: Oh that's so cool.

Dean: Yeah, and I'm heading to Greece in a couple of days. I'm heading to Greece for another event.

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Jill: Oh my gosh. So your life is literally just kind of going from event to event and just having the time of your life, basically. Does that sum it up?

Dean: Well, if running a thousand miles is having the time of your life. To me it is having the time of your life.

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: There's nothing else I'd rather be doing.

Jill: Oh, that's so cool.

Dean: I mean, in disclosing all, I mean, this past year has been really tough, the past year and a half. Because this is really the first time I've been able to travel internationally, it is the first time, that Australia trip. So Covid has really kind of shut down my lifestyle to a large extent, just because, you're right, I was traveling sometimes 250 days out of the year.

Jill: Wow. So how did you compensate for that, I guess, and keep yourself sane? Because it's been about a year, I mean, Covid has been about a year and a half. So how did you cope with that?

Dean: Through running.

Jill: I could have predicted that answer, I guess.

Dean: I'm not being ironic, either. I mean, I turned to running more for therapy. Because I always say to people running is therapy, and I was kind of just giving that lip service. It's almost cliché, but during the pandemic I was really using running as therapy. And thankfully, where I live I can just

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wander out the door and there's like trails everywhere where I can just go run for six or seven hours in nature.

And to a lot of people, that sort of isolation might not give them relief. But to me, I feel whole again when I come back from a long run when I'm just out in nature like that.

Jill: I love that, I feel whole again, that's just such a beautiful way to put it. Because, I mean, I don't know anybody that's regretted going for a run. I mean, whether it's for 30 minutes or for 30 hours or whatever. Nobody ever comes back and says, "Oh, I really wish I had not done that. I feel worse." It's just not a thing.

Dean: I mean, the trick is getting out the door, right?

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: The hardest thing is just getting yourself out the door. And if you can get your butt out the door, then you're right, it just builds on itself.

Jill: Well, do you ever have days where you think, "I just don't feel like going today? I'm just not into it."

Dean: Of course. I'm human, yeah.

Jill: Yeah. I mean, I'm glad that you said that because I think there's this perception that if you're somebody who runs all the time, it's because you can't stay away from it. But we all have those thoughts of like, "Yeah, I just don't feel like doing it today, but I'm going to go anyway."

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Dean: I think that's why we say we have a relationship with running. Like every relationship there are moments of love, there are moments of hate and disgust. And then there's moments where it's just okay, like it's just kind of platonic.

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: That's running to me. Some days I love it. Other days it's just so so, other days I'm like, "Oh, this is really going to suck."

Jill: Yeah.

Dean: But to your point, every time I've come back through the door, I've always felt better than when I left.

Jill: Yeah. I mean, really, I think that's the key. And that's what keeps everybody coming back, for sure, is knowing the evolution they're going to go through on each individual run.

All right, because I know we're running out of time, I have one last question for you. And then I want to make sure that you tell everybody where they can get your book and all of that good stuff.

The belt buckles, what is the significance of the belt buckles that you get for ultra races?

Dean: This is a good story. So, when you run an ultramarathon, the prize you get is a belt buckle. And here's the evolution of ultramarathoning, it started as a horse race.

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So it's it was 100 mile horse race and in 1974 a gentleman, Gordy Ainsleigh, had trained all year to ride this 100 mile horse race. And a couple days before the race, his horse came up lame. And he was in really good shape and he trained so hard, and he said, "I'm still going to do the race." And they said, "But Gordy, you don't have a horse, how you can do the race?" And he said, "I'm just going to run." And they thought he was crazy, but they let him enter.

And somehow, he ran 100 miles and he made it to the finish line. And they didn't have traditional race medals because it was a horse race, but for all the finishers of the horse race they were giving you a rodeo buckle. So they said we've got to give him something, let's just give him one of these rodeo buckles. So they gave him a rodeo buckle and that theme just stuck ever since.

Jill: That is such a fun story, I've never heard that before. Oh my gosh. Because I've seen people with these beautiful collections of buckles from everything and I'm like, "What? Do you wear those? What do you do with them?" How many belts do you people have? But that's just such a fun story, I love that so much.

Dean: Some of them are comical, like they're the size of dinner plates. I'm like, "Do I really wear this thing?"

Jill: Have you worn every single one of your belt buckles at least once? Or are they more like for display only?

Dean: Yeah, no, literally some of them are like this big. So I've never—

Jill: Oh my goodness.

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Dean: Yeah.

Jill: And the irony of giving a belt buckle to a runner who very rarely wears pants that need a belt, right?

Dean: I don't even put on pants, that's a good point.

Jill: Right? Exactly. Oh, that's so fun. Okay, well, let's talk a little bit about where people can find your book or how they can kind of follow your ongoing adventures, which are ever evolving.

Dean: So the book, A Runner's High, with a nice little picture of me on the cover.

Jill: Yes, it's a very nice picture. It's a very intimidating picture, actually.

Dean: Well, I hope I'm not intimidating. I mean, I think a lot of people, they hear about this guy who's run hundreds of miles and he must be antisocial and just really mean and gruff. And I'm not those things. So I hope I've come off as not those things in the interview. But I'm very approachable and I love supporting fellow runners.

And when I say fellow runners, that's the whole gamut. You know, that's the couch to five potato, I mean, couch to five— I almost said couch potato.

Jill: I'm going to start calling it couch to five potatoes.

Dean: A quick joke that I came up with in Australia. What do you call a lazy baby kangaroo?

Jill: I don't know.

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Dean: A pouch potato.

Jill: That's awesome.

Dean: So I love runners from the couch to 5K runners all the way up to the 100 mile ultramarathoners. I just love supporting fellow runners.

But if you want to learn more about me, just Google Dean. Someone said if you Google Dean, I'm the first Dean that comes up. Just Google my name. I'm on social media, I've got a website. And you can learn more about A Runner's High either on my website or just visit Amazon or a local independent bookseller.

Jill: I love this. And, I mean, actually your Instagram name is just ultramarathon.

Dean: I think I was like the first person on Instagram, I just took that name. I'm like, "Yeah, that'll work."

Jill: Hey, well done. Well done. So thank you so much for joining me today. It's been my pleasure. I mean, like I said, I've followed you for at least a decade. So, for me, this was a great moment to kind of get to meet you.

But I just appreciate your stories and your book. I really, really enjoyed it, so everyone go read A Runner's High. And then after that, go get Ultramarathon Man because it's also an amazing book and it's going to inspire you like no other. So go read all of Dean's books, follow him. And I don't know, if people see you at a race, can they come up and be like, "Hey."

Dean: I want a hug. I want a hug.

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Jill: Okay.

Dean: Michelle Obama gave me a hug, so you better give me a hug.

Jill: I love that. I love that so much. Well, thank you very much and enjoy your trip to Greece.

Dean: I'll see you in a few miles.

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.