

Ep #257: The Half Marathon That Changed My Life



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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.

Hello, runners. I'm so happy to be here with you today. I have missed it being just you and me here on the show over the past few weeks. So what are we doing together today? Are we running, driving, drinking coffee? Well, actually, full disclosure, I am in Alaska right now while you're listening to this.

So just imagine us running together on a gorgeous trail by a river with Denali in view, maybe some moose in the distance. It's cool, it's dry, and we're just in awe of how gorgeous this place is. Oh, and it's like 10pm and still full sunlight because, hey, we're almost in the Arctic Circle. And this is actually how I imagine Alaska in the summer. I do promise to talk about it on the podcast when I get back and let you know if it lived up to its amazing reputation.

So anyway, today, my friend, I want to talk about doing hard things. That's what she said. Oh my God, I'm so sorry that just slipped out. I just can't help myself. Seriously, I'm a flaming feminist and it is like my brain has the sensibilities of a 15 year old boy sometimes. Anyway, we're talking about doing challenging things.

So in 2012, 10 years ago, after doing a few sprint triathlons, I decided it was time for me to do a half marathon. And it just seemed so badass and I was really excited thinking about what it would feel like to cross that finish line. And the race was in November, I signed up in the spring of that year so that I would have plenty of time to train. And then I just didn't.

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I mean I was running all summer long, but not really following a training plan. Definitely not running the miles that I needed to feel confident about my first half marathon. And by late September, so I don't know, like six to eight weeks out from my race, my longest run was only about four miles and I knew I just didn't have the time to build the running mileage.

And I knew I could walk 13 miles if I had to. Although honestly at that point in time, maybe that was questionable. But really, I knew I could walk it, but I wanted to run it dammit. So I said fuck it, I'm going to drop out because it's not going to look the way I wanted it to, right? I was mad at myself, I don't know, I was just mad. Like I didn't pay this money to walk 13 miles, I'm going to run 13 miles or I'm not going to do it, that was what my brain was saying to me.

And I had actually told a lot of people that I was registered and so every time someone asked me how training was going, I was so fucking embarrassed. I would just change the subject, or I don't know, I'd tell them that, oh, now I've got a conflict on that day and I can't do the race. Right? So embarrassing.

And of course on race day itself, I woke up that morning, I knew that everyone else was running my race. I cried because this was the first time I'd ever just not shown up for a race. And I know now, 10 years later, that there are lots of reasons to drop out of a race. And I've actually done it on purpose a few times since. But at the time my brain was just filled with thoughts of failure. So that did not feel good.

And I don't even know, like the race was in November, I can't even think back to what I would, like the few days after the race I'm sure I just was like whatever moving on, right? I just pretended it didn't happen. But I know it didn't feel good.

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But later that year, so probably towards the end of the year, like maybe December, I actually learned about the mindset model that I now use to help my clients when they are struggling with their training. And I learned that model and I was like, whoa, this is huge. This is a game changer. And this explains exactly why I didn't train properly, why I dropped out.

And it was because I had so many doubtful thoughts about my ability to do that race. And I believed the thoughts. I had all these weird things popping up, like every time I had a run scheduled my brain would start thinking, "Are you sure you can do this? Who the fuck do you think you are training for a half marathon? You are way too fat. You're too slow. You don't have enough experience. Oh, and you're lazy as fuck."

So that's what would be going through my mind and instead of thinking like, "Okay, well, let's just go see what happens." I would just believe my thoughts, I would feel overwhelmed and discouraged. And then guess what? I would be paralyzed. I just could not take action. I would be laying in bed thinking, "You're supposed to get up and go for a run. Get up, go, go go." And I would just lay there feeling like I was unable to do any of it. And I skipped so many training runs because I didn't believe in myself, so I just didn't even try.

The weird thing is just nine years earlier I'd actually done the Broad Street Run, which is a 10 mile race. It was three miles less than a half marathon, it's embarrassing. And I still was like you have no business doing a half marathon, completely and conveniently forgetting that I had done a 10 mile race like in the not too distant past.

And that 10 mile race, here's how I trained for it. First of all, that was when I thought you had to run the whole time to be a real runner, that you weren't allowed to walk. So I just built myself up to being able to run seven miles without stopping. And that was my longest training run and that was about

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two months before the Broad Street Run. I was able to run seven miles without stopping.

And then I started to doubt myself, just like with the half marathon. I started to doubt myself, I started to skip training runs. And then on race day I showed up for the Broad Street Run thinking how the fuck am I going to do this? That was where my brain was at, you're not going to be able to do it.

Around mile six I took a walk break because I was all up in my head about oh, how you're not going to be able to do this. And immediately my brain went to, well, look at that, you stopped to walk, you failed, you're a terrible runner. The mean things that I said to myself.

And so I kind of ran/walk the rest of it, the last four miles. I think probably I ended up running about eight miles of it, walking about two miles of it. And of course they were out of medals because it was 2003 and medals weren't really a big thing. They were out of metals when I got to the end. And so I just had a whole story about what a failure I was. You know, being fat and doing a 10 mile race, somehow I couldn't come up with any sort of success story out of that.

So as I was training for my half marathon I was kind of low key remembering the 10 miler that I'd done nine years earlier and using it as evidence that I was probably going to fail at this half marathon instead of using it as proof that I could actually cover 10 miles.

And honestly, it's no wonder that I didn't train properly, right? It is no wonder I quit on myself during that half marathon training period, I had the shittiest attitude the whole time.

Now, after learning about the mindset model I realized that the problem wasn't actually me being lazy, or unmotivated, or too fat, or too slow or any

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of those things. The problem was that I had no belief in myself. And the mindset model, I could see when I learned it that this is going to give me a way to believe and trust that I'm going to do it, that I'm going to come through.

So I signed up for the next year, 2013, and I worked on my brain hard. I literally changed how I thought about myself and how I thought about my abilities, and how I thought about what it meant to be a runner. By this time I was doing run/walk and I was really enjoying it. And so I kind of also worked on changing how I thought about what it meant to be a run/walker, and especially at a distance event.

So I did all of that mental work and I trained. And even on the days I didn't want to, I still got up and I'd do those runs. And some of those runs were terrible, my friend. Some of them were just things that I'd rather forget. But I did them and some of them were absolutely amazing. And also I found other runners that were doing intervals like me, so I had somebody to talk about doing it, right? So I didn't feel like I was the only person using this method.

Now, I spent those training runs thinking about race date, visualizing my race date, imagining myself being successful, I practiced being proud of myself. And yes, of course I had doubts along the way, but instead of wallowing in them like I did the year before, I did my mindset work, I turned it around and I kept going.

And so on race day I was so nervous. My whole family came into town for this event and I was so freaking nervous. I set a goal to finish in three hours and I just had all of these thoughts about whether I could do it or not. And to calm myself down I just said, "Look, girl, you're going to finish this race no matter what. It doesn't matter what your finish time is, but you trained and you know you can do it, and you're just going to do one mile at a time and you're going to have fun.

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You're going to look around, you're going to notice your surroundings, you're going to be in the moment, and you're going to have fun.” And it was hard. And at mile 10 I thought, “What the fuck? Am I ever going to be done with this stupid race?” My body was hurting, I was just like, oh my god, this is so hard. Because this is really the first time that I had actually done run/walk consistently for that type of distance, right?

I mean, I had done the training and everything, and my longest training run, I think, was about 10 miles. But this is the first time I'd really done run/walk for that kind of distance in a race and that I'd ever gone 13 miles. Race day was my first day going 13 miles. And I just had a lot of thoughts like this is hard, this hurts. But I also was like, but you can do it. It's okay if it's uncomfortable, right?

So I just kept putting one foot in front of the other. I remembered I was there to have fun, which I actually did have a lot of fun. And I crossed the finish line, my whole family was there. And, y'all, I was so fucking proud. I was proud of the person I became through that training. I was proud of myself for keeping my commitment to myself. I was proud of myself for following through.

I was just so proud. I was like, oh my God, I did that. Not just the race, I did the whole thing. I gave it my all, I didn't half-ass it, I showed the fuck up. And that felt so amazing. I finished the race in three hours and three minutes. I was like, yes, I hit my goal. I wore my medal for like the next 12 hours straight, I'm pretty sure I fell asleep with it.

And that's an awesome story, right? That's a story of failure to success. I love telling this story. But here's the real story behind that story, while I was training for that race I was also secretly writing my first book about being a fat runner. And I had a lot of thoughts about who the fuck am I to write a book about running? Especially writing a book specifically for fat women

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who want to run. Like I haven't even finished a half marathon yet, who do I think I am writing this book?

So I had a lot of doubts. I had a lot of beliefs that I couldn't do. I had a lot of beliefs that nobody would read this book. But I had this mindset work that I was using to get myself through the race, so I used it to get myself through writing the book. And I finished the first draft of the book a few days after I crossed the finish line of that race. And I don't think that's a coincidence because the work I did on myself while training for that race, enabled me to write that book.

And that book is what ultimately launched Not Your Average Runner. Seriously, this podcast you're listening to right now, the thousands of women that I've helped start running, the other two books I wrote after the first one. None of it would exist if I hadn't decided to do that race and really go all in on myself and use those mindset tools. Because those tools that I used to make it happen helped me create a book and a whole business that literally changed my entire life. I quit my corporate job, I started this business, and the rest is history.

So when I say that doing hard things will change your life, this is exactly what I mean. Like, yes, I finished a half marathon. It felt amazing and nobody can ever take that away from me. And of course there have been many finish lines since then. None of them have been quite as sweet as that first one, but they've all been pretty awesome.

But the actual half marathon kind of pales in comparison to how it changed my life. And guess what? If you started running because you read that book that I wrote, or because you found this podcast, it's all because I decided in 2013 that I was going to figure out a way to follow through on my own commitment to myself to do that race.

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So imagine, what if you picked a huge goal like that and really went all in and really committed and did all of the mindset work on yourself? What are the byproducts of that? Yes, finishing a half marathon, getting that medal, totally. But what are the other byproducts? Who else is going to benefit from the work that you've done on yourself? What is the impact you will have on the world by showing up for yourself in a whole new way?

So picking a hard goal is actually easy, right? It feels kind of good, kind of exciting, you're imagining having achieved it. You're thinking, oh my God, it's going to be so awesome to finish this race. You feel like this little thrill of anticipation, which leads you to research training plans, and maybe buy new shoes, and set up your calendar and all the things because the goal is pretty exciting.

But you know what's not exciting? Getting up at 5am in the dark to go for a training run when you would much rather sleep. It's that like going to bed at 9pm the night before your long run when all your friends are going out for margaritas. Going for a run in the rain because it's your run day and you know you need to practice running in all weathers in case it rains on race day. Or it's doing strength training when you'd much rather be running because you know it's critical to keeping you injury free.

None of that stuff is fun, but that's where the rubber hits the road because you cannot rely on the excitement of signing up for a race to carry you through the months of training, the months of doubtful thoughts and hard choices. And that is why people don't succeed at half marathons, okay?

It's not because you're too fat or too old or too slow, it is because you're not prepared mentally for all the thoughts you're going to have about the training. The fear, the worry, the anxiety, the doubt. And if you're not prepared and you don't know how to handle them, they will get the best of you.

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So if you're like me and you've tried to do a half marathon and didn't make it through the training, your thoughts have something to do with it, okay? And this is not the greatest news for some people. People are like, "No, I'm just unmotivated and if I could find the secret to being motivated, then it'd be better. If I could just figure out how to be disciplined." No, it's none of that.

And I'm also not talking about like if you broke your ankle during training, or you got Covid real bad and missed six weeks or something, that's a different story. I'm talking about when you are struggling to stay motivated, or you keep making excuses, or doubting yourself and then just believing it. Because running is 80% mental, your legs will do what you tell them to do.

And if you get your mind right, your legs are going to follow. But if you spend every run whining about how hard it is, or how you're never going to make it to race day, you're not going to. So mindset is a skill, my friends. It is something we're not taught in school.

The skill of managing your thinking so that you stay focused on your goal takes practice. And it's not intuitive, okay? So fortunately though, half marathon training takes about four months, which is plenty of time to get that practice in.

And next week on the podcast I'm actually going to teach you my process for how to manage your thinking during marathon training and the process that I'm going to be using with my Big Fat Half Marathon students. So make sure you come back for that episode.

And speaking of Big Fat Half Marathon, let me tell you about this amazing class. So it is a semi-private program where I'm going to be working in depth with no more than eight women. It is very small group coaching with a lot of personal attention.

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We will be meeting three times a month over Zoom. I'm going to be in daily contact with everyone. And this is a combination of accountability, and thought work, and training that is specifically created for fat women who have struggled in the past with making it happen.

I created this program for the woman who wants to run a half marathon but has either been afraid to try, or maybe did try and failed, or tried and succeeded but rode the struggle bus the whole way and really wants a do over and she can't stop thinking about it. She wants it really badly, but she cannot figure out how to make it happen.

If that's you, this Big Fat Marathon program, it's your jam, okay? And the reason I'm calling it Big Fat Half Marathon is because, first of all, the program is perfect for you if you're fat, even if you don't use that word to describe yourself. Because you could think of it as big fluffy half marathon or big thick half marathon or big girls half marathon, whatever word you use to describe yourself. It's a half marathon training experience that is built specifically for you, okay?

Now the goal race is the Philly half marathon on November 19th and there is a four and a half hour time limit for that race. It is a relatively flat course, it's absolutely gorgeous. And Philadelphia, I mean, it runs through all of this historic scenery. Like you'll run by where the Declaration of Independence was signed, it's good stuff. And also November in Philly is not hot, it's nice and cool so it's my favorite time, honestly, to run. It's like the perfect weather.

Now, if you can't make it to Philly, that's not a big deal because I'm going to help you find a race near you. Or we can figure out a virtual race for you to do and we'll give you all kinds of help setting up a virtual race.

So I've trained literally hundreds of women to do their first half marathon, like quite literally hundreds. And I know what it takes to do one when you're

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fat and when you have a lot of doubt. I literally wrote the book on it. Now, if you're interested in this program you can find all the details bigfathalfmarathon.com There are still a few spots left right now but it will sell out. Class starts the first week in August.

And if you have ever dreamed of having me all up in your business when you're training, this is it. This is your opportunity because I don't normally work with my clients in this intimate of a setting. It's a very special occurrence, so go to bigfathalfmarathon.com to check it out. All right? Bigfathalfmarathon.com.

Okay, my friends, I hope today was helpful for you. And of course, if you loved it, please share it on Instagram. And as always, I love you, stay safe and get your ass out there and run.

Hey, real quick before you go, if you enjoyed listening to this episode you have got to check out Up And Running. It's my 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrunning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.