

Ep #259: 100-Miler Training and Lessons Learned with Debby Hershberger



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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.

Hey, runners, so I'm here this week with a super fun guest. Her name is Debby Hershberger, she is a runner, she's a member of Run Your Best Life. She and I have actually had the opportunity to run together at many different races, which is delightful. She lives about, you're about what, four hours away? You live in Pittsburgh. But I don't know, she just loves to come to Philly for races. So I've gotten the chance to be at many races with her.

But she's got a really unique story and kind of a badass story. And I wanted to have her on the show today to tell her story and to just kind of share a lot of the learnings that she's had over the years. So, Debby, thank you so much for being here.

Debby: Thank you for having me, Jill.

Jill: I can't believe this is the first time you've been on the show.

Debby: I know, right?

Jill: Isn't that crazy?

Debby: Yeah.

Jill: It's crazy because we've known each other for many years. But I think like let's let everybody get to know you a little bit. And why don't you sort of

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tell the story of why you started running, how long you've been running, and we'll kind of go from there.

Debby: Okay. So back in 2004 my husband was diagnosed with cancer. And at that point life got really tough. I was raising three kids, I was working full-time. My kids were young, they were in elementary school. I was working full-time and it was a nighttime position, I worked overnight.

And so after his diagnosis we would go for treatments in the morning after I got the kids on the bus. We would come home, he would take a nap and I would get the kids off the bus, feed them supper, then I would take a nap and then I'd go to work and we'd do it all over again, because he had treatments five days a week in the beginning.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Debby: And it go to the point where I just wasn't sure how to manage and keep my mind sane, I guess you could say, keep my thoughts straight. And a friend of mine recommended that I go for a walk. She said 15 minutes a day, just find 15 minutes for yourself and go for a walk. So that's what I did.

And after a while I started thinking, hey, I wonder if I can jog to that pole up there, that telephone pole. And so I would. And that's how it started, 15 minutes a day I would walk down the country road and then walk back to my house. That's how it started.

And then I found you and then I realized intervals really were a thing. And I started following you on the old Facebook page from a long, long time ago when you first started.

Jill: Many years ago.

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Debby: Yeah, many years ago.

Jill: So what did that do for you, that 15 minutes a day? Like how did that help you manage what was going on in your life?

Debby: Things calmed down, it was also an outlet for me to get some of my frustration and anger out. I could cry where other people really didn't see me because I had to be strong for my kids. I mean, it's okay for them to see me cry, but I had to be strong. It was also an outlet for some of my anger. The faster I walked or the harder I walked, the less anger I felt. And it was just, exercise is just good for you.

Jill: Oh, I love that so much. And spoiler alert, husband is fine now, right?

Debby: Husband is fine, yes. He was told by his oncologist that he had nine months to live and it's 2022 and he's still alive.

Jill: I mean, that's almost 20 years later, so talk about beating the odds. That's kind of amazing.

Debby: Yeah.

Jill: All right, I just wanted to make sure we got that out there so everybody knows how the story ended. But I love how you started, you were just like 15 minutes of walking a day. And then maybe it was like maybe I can run to that pole. Because I think so many people when they first start running, they think they have to do all the things. And you've been a runner for almost 20 years now and I think part of that is probably because you just started with a very small habit.

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Debby: Yeah. And I started, like you said, very small. I didn't run a race until 2012.

Jill: Oh wow.

Debby: So I was running for eight years before I ever ran a race. And I don't know if I didn't know there were races, I don't know if I just thought this is something that feels good to my body and I just want to do it. But yeah, I didn't run a race for quite a few years.

Jill: Wow, that's amazing. And I think the first time we met, I want to say was like I 2014 or 15 maybe, because I remember we were, it was the hot chocolate in Philadelphia.

Debby: Yeah.

Jill: And you came up to me and you're like, "Hey, you kind of look familiar. Are you Jill Angie?" And I'm like, "Yeah." And you're like, "I recognize you from the cover of your book." And I was like, "Oh my God." That was like the strangest moment for me. I mean, it was amazing.

Debby: I think I found your book on Amazon maybe, I'm not sure, maybe. And I found your Facebook group and, yeah.

Jill: Yeah, and then we got to talk a little bit and, yeah, the rest is history. Okay, so were you running the 15K or were you doing the 5K for that one? I can't remember which race we were doing.

Debby: I think we did the 15K.

Jill: Was it the 15? Okay.

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Debby: It was, yes.

Jill: Okay, so by 2014, 15 or so you were doing nine miles. And that was maybe 10 years after you started. But now here we are seven years later and do you want to share with everybody what you're training for now?

Debby: I am training for a 100 miler in Burns, Tennessee and it is on a one mile loop, 100 times.

Jill: So you're like literally 100 times, I love this.

Debby: Going around that loop, yeah.

Jill: So I want to take a moment and let the magnitude of that set in, that like 100 miles, it's literally 10 times more, it's more than 10 times more than a 15K. And like what led you to say, yes, that is a thing I want to do, I want to train for 100 mile race?

Debby: Well, that would be your fault too.

Jill: Damn it.

Debby: So I love your podcast, of course, I listen to every episode. And there are so many, so many little nuggets that you can pull out of each and every one of them. But back in, I think it was 2018 sometime you did a podcast about our goals and are they really big enough? And something about that podcast was like, hmm, I wonder if I can do more. Or I wonder if I can go farther.

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And pace is all relative, but I see myself as a slower runner. But I love to go further. It's like I have that endurance. And I decided I just wanted to see how far I could go.

Jill: And you had already done a marathon by that point. You had done multiple marathons.

Debby: No. I had done a walking marathon in Wisconsin. I did walk a marathon in Wisconsin.

Jill: You know that counts, right?

Debby: It does count, you're right. It wasn't timed, but you're right, I did. I did, you're right. You were right. But up until that time I had done, I've done mostly half marathons. And I actually did a 50K before I did it. Yeah, I did a 50K on a trail. That's right. You're right, I did. Forgot about that one. I did a 50K, yeah.

Jill: Yeah. So, I mean, you had already done some pretty bad ass stuff. But even that, like a marathon, it's like a 100 miler is still four times more. So you had this thought, I wonder if I could do more, I'd like to try doing more. Like kind of a little seedling of a thought. And when did that coalesce into this is the 100 mile race that I'm going to do?

Debby: Well, I had done a half marathon with this company. This company is out of Tennessee and they are very back of the pack friendly. This 100 miler has a 55 hour cut off time, so they have a very long cut off time. And if you look at their website, it actually says if you are still moving forward and you're not quite at 100 miles, we'll let you finish and we'll stay there with you.

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So I can't do 100 miles in 24 hours or 36 hours, like a lot of elite people can. I know that my body right now is not able to do that. And so in order to set myself up for success I picked one that had a very long cut off time. This actually gives me a chance to probably sleep a couple hours too.

Jill: Yeah, I love that. And what's the name of the race again?

Debby: Mo' Bell.

Jill: Mo' Bell, okay.

Debby: Yeah, it's in Montgomery Bell State Forest in Tennessee.

Jill: There we go, that's a great name. And this is, coincidentally, I think there's going to be, not coincidentally, it's on purpose. There is a whole bunch of Run Your Best Life members that are going to be down there for that race.

Debby: Yes, there are.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: And I had to do a lot of thoughts about that because I was supposed to do this race last year. My husband lovingly brought Covid into our house and so I got sick the week before. We were supposed to leave on Wednesday to go to Tennessee, and on Sunday he tested positive for Covid. And so Monday I tested positive for Covid so that was it.

I mean, I couldn't go. I mean, even if I would have felt okay. I mean by Wednesday I felt like crap. So I couldn't go. So my first 100 miler was

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deferred. And thankfully they let me defer very close to the race. I'm very thankful they let me do that.

Jill: I think a lot of races are doing that now. I mean how could they not?

Debby: Yeah. So then I had to really think, okay, do I really want to train for 100 again? Because it takes a lot of time.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: There's a lot of time and a lot of dedication into training for a 100 mile race. And I had to think, do I really want to do that again this year? And I did, so I'm trying again.

And yeah, there are a lot of Run Your Best Life people that are going to be there and I'm excited. At first I was nervous because what if I don't cross the finish line and they're all there? But it's all good, I'm excited to see everybody. And if I don't finish, that's just all the more people to be there to give me hugs.

Jill: Right. If you're going to not finish a race, I feel like those are the people you want around you.

Debby: Yes, that is very true.

Jill: But also I think you're probably more likely to finish when you have all those people around you because they are a pretty amazing bunch of women.

Debby: And you can have pacers after a while. And if you're running part of the race you can pace somebody. So there's going to be times I'm going to

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say, “Hey, can you come walk this loop with me?” And somebody will come walk with me, you know what I mean?

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: Yeah, there's always going to be somebody there. And if I want to be by myself, I'm going to be like, “Hey, can you just leave me alone? I'm going to walk this by myself.”

Jill: And because it's a one mile loop it's not like you're out 20 miles into the wilderness. And you're just like, “All right, pacer, I'm done. Can you walk 10 steps behind me?” Right?

Debby: Right, yeah.

Jill: That would be awkward. So let's talk about the planning and the training that goes into this 100 miler, right? Because you trained for it last year, you were like literally all the training, ready to go, packed up, and then fucking Covid comes along.

Debby: So what I did after last year is I sat down with my notebook and I thought, okay, how can I make this training better? How can I improve upon what I did? What do I want to learn? All the things. And so I came up with a plan and I decided to have some shorter races as part of my training.

And one of the races that I did with just a couple of weeks ago, it was a 50 miler and it was a loop. It was a five mile loop. So it wasn't quite one mile, but it was a five mile loop. And I decided to use that as a training run. I wanted to know what it's like to run for a couple hours and then sleep, and then get back up and run again.

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Because that's what I'm going to be doing. I'm going to take a break when I'm out there. I'm not going to be awake for all 55 hours. So I wanted to know what it's like to do that.

Jill: And what was it like to do that?

Debby: So we tent camped. Well, so I made it to, I think it was mile 40. My husband was my crew person, bless his heart, he came along. And I made it to 40 miles, I sat down in the chair and I looked at him and I said, I'm done. I can't do this anymore. And he just kind of looked at me like he wasn't quite sure what to say. He wanted to say get up off your rear end and go do it. But I think he also felt bad because he knew I was in pain.

And so eventually I said, I just need to lay down, take a nap. So I laid down probably for an hour maybe. Got up, had to go to the bathroom. I took my poles with me just in case because I figured if I'm going to walk the whole way to the Porta Potty I may as well walk the loop. So I did, I ended up finishing the 50 miles.

It was hard, but a lot of things in life are hard. And when you really want it, you can do it. One thing I learned in my very last loop from 45 to 50 is you can be in pain but you can go someplace in your mind. And I can't explain it, but you can go someplace in your mind that the pain is there, but it's not.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: And I don't even know how to describe that to somebody who hasn't felt it. But it's like this empty box where you just go and you just move your body. You just move your body and that's all you think about. You don't think about anything else because it's too complicated. It takes too much energy to think about other things.

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And you just think about putting one step in front of the other, one step in front of the other and drink, you know? One step in front and then drink. And that's all you think about. And it's kind of cool to go there. But it's also kind of scary, you know?

Jill: Why do you think it's scary?

Debby: Because it's so unknown. I had never been there before, I'd never been to that place in my mind. And when it happened, I'm like, what is this? This is kind of weird. It's kind of cool, but it's kind of weird.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: But it's nice to know that there is a place you can go in your mind that just empty, if that makes sense.

Jill: I mean, I've heard the Dean Karnazes say something similar, that like on his really, really extended runs that it's literally he's only on that footstep. And then it's like it's literally just take one more step, take one more step and there's no room for anything else in his brain other than one more step, one more step. And it sounds like that's kind of what I'm hearing you describing?

Debby: Yeah, it is. It's like you have to think about right then and you don't think, like oftentimes when you're out on a run you're thinking about the cows over there. What am I making for supper? What are my mom and dad...? You know, you're thinking all of these things. But sometimes there's not enough energy. It takes too much energy to think of something else and you just think about putting one step in front of the other.

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Jill: Yeah, I love that. I love that. So this is the first time that you've experienced that, on your 50 miler?

Debby: It is.

Jill: Interesting.

Debby: It is, yeah. It was at mile 40, 40 or 45 where I was just like, and my feet hurt. And when I took my shoes off I had blisters that I didn't know I had. I knew my feet hurt, but I didn't know I had blisters. But yeah, it was kind of fun.

Jill: I love that you're just like, "Oh my god, I pushed my body beyond anything I ever thought it could do and it was kind of fun." Right?

Debby: Yeah, I wasn't thinking that at four o'clock in the morning. But the next day I was like, that was kind of fun.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: But when I crossed that finish line I was finished. I made it to the finish line and all of a sudden I was like, ah. And my body just completely relaxed, I don't even know how I walked back to my tent. But I was just like, ah.

Jill: And that's the farthest you've run. Is that your farthest distance?

Debby: Yes.

Jill: Yeah.

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Debby: Yeah, 50 miles is my farthest, yeah. Another thing I learned is I have to give up control. If I'm going to have somebody else be my crew person, I have to give up control. I mean I need to let them know what I need. But I'm a very organized person and, okay, in the top drawer is my blister kit, in the next drawer is my hydration, and have everything like that.

But my husband is the one who was my crew person, so it needs to be organized the way he's going to know where it is, you know? So I had to give up control and I had to trust that he was going to have what I needed. So like when I got, it was a five mile loop and when I got to probably mile four and a half I would text him and I would say, "Okay, I want an Uncrustable, I want two pretzels," you know, whatever.

By the time I got to mile 30 or 35 I wasn't thinking any more, I couldn't tell him what I wanted. But he knew that every single loop when I came around I had to have four of my SaltStick tablets and I had to have one of my electrolyte bottles. And I needed to have my hydration pack refilled. He knew that that was the minimum that I had to have so he always had that ready.

He told me, you know, whatever I want just let him know and he'll pick it up. But once you get to that point where your body is so tired, it's just hard to think. You just can't. It's hard to make decisions, you know? So I had to trust that my crew people had the best for me in mind. And it's sometimes hard to give up control when you like control.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, that's a very interesting perspective because I guess I always imagined that your crew would be there waiting for instructions. But really you're saying it's the other way around, that like you're basically saying, listen, this is probably what I'm going to need, you

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figure it out, make sure I'm okay so that I don't have to do the mental work to figure out what I need.

Debby: Right. In the beginning it was easy for me to boss him around. But towards the end I was like, "You need to tell me what I need because I can't think anymore." And I had things in baggies, like this is how many calories I need to take each loop. And so I had things in baggies and I had things written down.

And it got to the point where I'm like, "I can't eat any more cheese crackers. I can't eat any more goldfish. You need to hide them. I don't want them anymore there, it's too dry, I can't eat them." So they weren't offered again. But then there were other times he'd say, "Here take this," and I'm like, "I don't think I can eat that." But halfway around the loop it tasted really good. So, yeah.

Jill: Oh, that's so interesting. It sounds like he turned out to be kind of an excellent crew person.

Debby: Actually, he did.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: I was a little concerned, I'm not going to lie. But he actually did. Yeah, he actually did. I mean, and we learned some things. We didn't fight, nobody killed each other. We're still married.

Jill: And will he be crewing for you at Mo' Bell or will it be a Run Your Best Lifer?

Debby: He and my daughter are both going to be there.

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Jill: That's awesome.

Debby: So yeah.

Jill: So this is kind of full circle, because you were crewing for Sierra Swofford in Bryce Canyon, right? Where you in Bryce Canyon?

Debby: I was a pacer. I wasn't a crew, I was pacer.

Jill: Okay, but you were like on the wider crew, right?

Debby: Yes.

Jill: And so was that helpful in setting up your own needs? When did you, I can't remember the timing of like if you did the race before or after.

Debby: My 50 miler was before her race.

Jill: Got it, okay.

Debby: But it was so neat to see her hers and all the setup. And my setup was so much easier because I came back to the same aid station every time, where hers was a lot more technical. We had to have drop bags, and we had to take, you know, they were all different places.

And so I think logistically my race is easier to set up because I can have my own aid station. And I can have a table set up and I can come by and take what I want, and I can change, and they will also have food there.

Jill: Yeah.

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Debby: But I'll be able to have a lot of my own stuff right there.

Jill: That's perfect. So you've done a 50 miler, the 100 mile race isn't until October. So what does your training look like between now and then?

Debby: I have several three day weekends. I was doing a lot of two day weekends, like Saturday and Sunday back to back. Now I have a lot of Friday, Saturday, and Sundays coming up. And it's every other weekend because I do one long, and then I do a scale back. And then my next one is a long and then a scale back.

So the biggest one coming up before Mo' Bell is I have 20 Friday, 20 Saturday, and I can't remember if it's 10 or 20 on a Sunday. And then one Saturday I have a 30 miler on a Sunday by itself, I think.

Jill: Okay.

Debby: So most of mine are broken up into three days.

Jill: Which makes sense because that's how you're doing, yeah.

Debby: It does. But you know what? It took a lot of mind work to get past I'm only doing 60 miles, but yet I'm doing a 100 mile race, I'm 40 miles short.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: So I guess if you can do 60 miles over three days, you can do 100 over three and a half.

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Jill: I kind of think you can, right? It sounds like it takes about 40 miles to get you into the pain cave. And then once you're there, right?

Debby: Yeah.

Jill: And are you planning to do your 100 miler like eight hours on your feet and then what, sleep for two hours, sleep for six hours? Like what kind of schedule are you envisioning for yourself?

Debby: I am planning 10 hours. I am also planning on a 45 minute break for lunch and for supper. Other than that 10 hours and then resting for two. And then I will get back up for a little bit again. But then I really, I do best with running in the morning. And so I'm hoping to sleep from 12 midnight to 4am and then get up at four and go again.

That's my hope. Unless it's really raining, like if it happens to really be raining at five o'clock, I may go and take my four hour nap at five o'clock because I really can take it whenever I choose. There's no rule that says this is when you have to take your break.

Jill: And I'm sure your body is going to be ready to just like drop and nap at a moment's notice.

Debby: Yeah, I'm old and I can sleep pretty much anywhere, anytime.

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

Debby: Yeah.

Jill: So let's kind of talk about some of the challenges that you've had over the years with different races that are going to help you with this race.

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Because you've had like, I mean, you've showed up to the start line of quite a few marathons.

Debby: I've showed up for quite a few races that, I shouldn't say a lot. I've showed up for several that I hadn't finished. One was one that we both ran, the Philadelphia Marathon that we both ran. And I still will get that one, that one will be in 2024. Are you coming with me?

Jill: Yes.

Debby: Or 2023 maybe.

Jill: I'm in, let's do it.

Debby: Okay, all right. And I want to do it and I want to do it within the time limit that they set. You know, up until we did the Philadelphia Marathon I always knew that races have time limits and they have reasons for those and I understand that. You know, they have permits and stuff like that. But if I really wanted to do a race I kind of signed up for it anyway. And now I realize that probably wasn't the best. They have reasons for having time limits and stuff.

So we didn't finish the Philadelphia Marathon, we pulled out at mile 14 I think. There was snow, and ice, and rain, and I was really disappointed because I really wanted to finish that thing. But it was really miserable, I was starting to get blisters on my feet and I just decided that it's best for my body to not finish, you know?

And that was hard because people knew I was going to Philadelphia to do a marathon. And then when you tell them, well, I didn't finish, at first it's

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embarrassing. But then you know what? I've heard you say before you do what's best for your body.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: I just did a trail Ragnar this past weekend or two weekends ago in Michigan. On my first loop all of a sudden I realized, you know what? I'm not sweating anymore. It was hot, it was very hot. I realized I wasn't sweating about halfway through because I was trying to wipe myself and I was like all full of salt. And I'm like, why am I not sweating? I got back to camp and I was told I didn't look really good. I looked kind of awful.

And so I did everything I could to bring my core temperature back down. I went out on my second loop at night, and so it was cooler. But I started throwing up and I wasn't feeling good at all. So when I got back to the tent I'm like, this really isn't good. So I did not do my third loop. And I could have thought of it as a failure. But I didn't, I listened to my body. I was not going to hurt my body just to finish. It wasn't worth it.

I felt bad because I felt like I was leaving my team down. One of my teammates volunteered to do my loop, so it all worked out. But when I went up to talk with them about the rules and stuff, like if you have an injured runner, because we weren't competitive at all, you know, they would have just taken the loop off. But I felt like I didn't finish. But it's okay because I did not harm myself.

If I would have done the last loop, who knows what I would have done, you know? Heatstroke is serious. And I think about that in almost every race. There's a reason why we don't finish and we have to listen to our body because if we don't, we'll get hurt.

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Jill: Yeah.

Debby: Physically or mentally.

Jill: And if you listen to the stories of many of the professional ultra-runners, there are plenty of times when they, like that's a smart decision to say I need to take myself out of this event because I'm going to cause further harm to myself.

And I feel like we need to give ourselves credit when we make those smart decisions, instead of like the decision of letting your ego lead the way and saying like, well, I have to finish no matter what. And then next thing you know you've got like gangrene because you've got blisters on your feet that have gotten infected. Or you're in the hospital with heatstroke because you were like, no, no, it's more important to feed my ego.

I think it's more important to, like listening to your body and getting yourself through the thinking required to take that kind of action is a skill. And it's a necessary skill when you're going to be doing like 40, 50, 60 mile, 100 mile runs. Right? You're not going to survive without that sort of thought process.

Debby: Yeah. Right. Yes. Very, very true. Yeah, my body is worth more than any medal.

Jill: Yeah, exactly. I mean it's not like, and here's the thing too, right, you're doing this Ragnar, right? And you could have told yourself a whole story about it. But you just finished a 50 miler a few weeks before. So it's like clearly your body can go the distance.

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Debby: And my first thought was, “Oh my goodness, I can do 50 miles, but I can't do 13 in the hills of Michigan? What in the world?”

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: But that's not what I wanted to think. I had to reframe my thought that I'm proud of myself for pulling myself out, and for my teammates for saying, “Deb, you really need to stop.”

Jill: Yeah. And also for thinking of like, okay, yeah, I could push through this for sure. Or I could save my energy to make sure I'm ready for my next training run because my most important race this year is in October and I want to make sure I get there safely.

Debby: That's right, yes.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: Yeah, my goal race is October. So yeah, even a training run sometimes, you know, you're in the middle of a training run and sometimes it's just not there or your leg just really hurts.

And you have to be able to know the difference. You have to know your body well enough to know this is true pain, or this is true fatigue or exhaustion, rather than just an excuse. And if you train, you kind of learn that. You kind of learn to know your body. You have to really pay attention to your body. And it talks to you.

Jill: Let's go back to when you talked about you went into that space in your mind where you're like, I know my body is feeling pain, but I'm over here.

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How do you think that fits together with knowing the difference between pain that it's important that you stop, or fatigue, or discomfort that you're like, "This is a clear signal I need to stop." Versus no, I can just go to that place in my brain where I don't feel it anymore. Do you feel like you have that figured out yet or is that still an evolving skill for you?

Debby: Yeah, that's a really tough question because I gave myself permission to stop in my race if I got to the point where I did not think I could go. I thought about it ahead of time, if I can't finish, it's okay. And I would be proud of myself for what I did.

I don't know, Jill, that's a good question. I can't say that I can verbalize what the difference is.

Jill: Yeah. I mean, maybe you will be after a few more of these really long training runs.

Debby: Maybe.

Jill: And maybe that space in your brain is something that you can't necessarily access unless on some subconscious level you know like I'm safe, I can keep going.

Debby: Yeah, yeah. I'm okay and I know that it's okay. Yeah, I don't know. That's a good question.

Jill: All right. Well, we'll have to circle back after your 100 miler.

Debby: I was going to say, ask me in October, we'll see what happens.

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Jill: Oh my gosh. So what kinds of advice would you give to somebody, right? Because you're not 20 something years old, right? How old are you?

Debby: 54.

Jill: Oh my God, we're exactly the same age. When is your birthday?

Debby: Or 53, maybe I'm 53.

Jill: After a certain point it doesn't even matter, right?

Debby: Hold on, am I? I'm 54? I'm 53. My husband says I'm 53.

Jill: What year were you born?

Debby: 68.

Jill: Okay, you're 53. I love this. Oh my gosh. He's over there laughing. But, right, you're 53 years old and you came to running, I guess you were probably in your late 30s, mid 30s when you started running, right?

Debby: Yeah, I was.

Jill: And so you're not the typical runner, right? You're definitely not the typical ultra-marathoner by any stretch. But you are an ultra-marathoner, right? Like let's just take a little bit.

Debby: I am. Yeah, I am.

Jill: I mean, this is kind of amazing. One thing I think is fascinating about women and ultra-marathons is like the older, like we kind of start to hit our

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stride in our 40s as far as endurance and everything. So I feel like you're just getting started.

But that being said, imagine a plus size woman, late 40s, early 50s and maybe she's been doing some 10Ks, some half marathons, and she's thinking, "Wow, 50 miles, 100 miles, maybe that will be me someday." What kind of advice would you want to give her?

Debby: Have a good trainer and listen to what they have to say. Do a lot of journaling, a lot of mental preparation. I probably should not say this right now, but I have never had an injury. I have been so fortunate.

I know, I probably shouldn't have said that, but I have been very fortunate. Anytime I feel something that just isn't quite right, I get a massage, I stretch, I do strength training, I do bicycling. But I stop running until I don't feel that niggle. And so far the most I've had to take off running is three weeks. I have been so fortunate.

Jill: Okay, I just want to take a moment and really recognize what you're saying here because most people would be like, "Okay, I'm feeling a little discomfort. I'm just going to keep going and see if it goes away." And you're like, "Nope, that's not right. I'm going to stop running and go all in on massages and strength training and everything until it's gone." You take the exact opposite approach, which is probably why you've never had an injury.

Debby: Yeah, I do not want to be sidelined. I do not want to be hurt. I hear so many women talk about the aches and the pains and the frustrations, and I don't want to be there. And so I do whatever I can to not be there. I'm not saying it'll never happen. And I'm not saying people do something wrong when they go there. You know when injuries happen, I mean, they happen.

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I'm fortunate, I've never like fallen off a curb. I've fallen on trails many, many times. I'm just fortunate that I have not fallen the wrong way, you know, to really sprain an ankle or to twist a knee.

Jill: Stop saying those things right now.

Debby: I know.

Jill: Stop it. No, I know what you mean.

Debby: But I just decided a couple years ago that I really want to listen to my body and do what it's asking for because the body will tell you what it wants.

Jill: So I think your willingness to listen to the whispers of your body and take rest, versus waiting until it's screaming and then having to take rehab time off is a very powerful way of being. Because so many of us are like, "Oh, I don't want to take any time off so I'm just going to wait until it's an emergency." Because we've got like this whole, you know, the identity of being a runner and I can't lose any time and this, that, and the other.

And what I think you're experiencing is you're willing to take a little bit of time off up front so that you protect your long-term training goals.

Debby: Yes, that is right. And I have not started several races because of that. Whether it be because I just didn't feel like my body could handle it at that point or if I was under trained.

I had signed up for a half marathon in New York and I had taken some time off, quite a bit of time off in that training. And I knew that I was not prepared for that half marathon. So I didn't go to New York. That was hard, I'm not

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going to lie. That took some mental work. But my thought work was, okay, you really want to be able to do another half marathon later in the year so let's not hurt yourself now and then hurt yourself in the middle of it and then not be able to run for even longer.

Jill: Yeah. So good. Okay, I feel like I'm learning so much about you that I did not know before and I am just loving all of this. Okay, so you've got a 50 miler coming up, I'm sorry, a 100 miler coming up in October. Then what? What's next after that?

Debby: I have not told a soul. I have not even told my husband this, I haven't told anybody this. So in New Jersey there is something called three days at the fair. And it's at a fairgrounds in New Jersey and it's five days, and you just run as many miles as you can around a loop in five days. I really want to do that.

Jill: Oh my Gosh,

Debby: I really want to do that.

Jill: You know he knows now. He just overheard you, didn't he?

Debby: I think probably. He's in the next room, but I think he did.

Jill: I love this.

Debby: But my goal for that is a marathon a day.

Jill: Oh my goodness. So that would be like about 130 miles in five days.

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Debby: I think I can do that. If I can do 100 miles in 55, surely I can do that, right?

Jill: You 100% can do that. I think you're actually going to exceed that, but I love this. Where in New Jersey is this magical race?

Debby: I'm not sure.

Jill: Is it like north, south, central?

Debby: I believe it's north.

Jill: Okay. Up like towards the mountains a little bit?

Debby: It's at a fairgrounds and I've looked into it a little bit, you can actually rent motor home. And a motor home company, they will come in and they will set up the motor home, you don't have to tent. And then you just pay to rent it and then they come and take it away and you're done.

Jill: Well, that sounds perfect. That's my kind of camping. That is my kind of camping.

Debby: I know, right?

Jill: Oh my gosh, I love this. Debby, you continue to amaze me with, I call your style of badassery, it's like very quiet badassery. You're just like, "Yeah, I'm just going to do this 100 mile thing." And you're just like so calm about it, there's no big fanfare, there's just like this is just a thing I'm going to do.

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And you just like continually amaze me with what you're able to accomplish and just the kind of the grace with which you approach all of your adventures in life. And so I'm excited to watch this 100 miler event unfold. I'm even more excited to see you do 130 miles at the fair. And for us to do the Philly Marathon next year. Let's put that bitch to bed.

Debby: I do, I want to conquer that one. I don't know why, but I want to conquer that one.

Jill: Yeah, it's a do-over.

Debby: That is one that I want to go back and do.

Jill: Yeah.

Debby: I really want to do that one again.

Jill: I'm all in. All right. Well, thank you so much for joining me today. How can people connect with you on social media? How can they follow your journey?

Debby: My Facebook is actually personal, so I don't actually publish that one. But on Instagram and on TikTok I'm Deb's Daily Life.

Jill: Okay, I love it. Deb's Daily Life, so we'll have links to that in the show notes. I love that you're on TikTok, I have not figured out the TikTok very well so far.

Debby: Well, I haven't either really but I'm trying.

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Jill: It's not intuitive, it's not intuitive. So anyway, all right, well thank you again for joining me today, Debby Hershberger, it's always a pleasure. And yeah, everybody go follow Deb at Deb's Daily Life on Instagram and TikTok and we'll hear back from you after your 100 miler.

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.