

ENDURANCE



SPORTS & FITNESS

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THE FITNESS ISSUE:

PUTTING FITNESS FIRST

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ANDREW HEDGMAN

GETTING HEALTHY

From Failing Health to Fabulous at 59!

By Alix J. Shutello



Author and IT Systems Engineer, Bill Watts, began running because of poor health and unruly weight gain in 2001. A friend and mentor introduced him to running, and now Watts is an established endurance athlete. Read more about his journey at <https://flowh.com/#/event/134435>

Bill Watts grew up in Chadron, a small farming community in northwestern Nebraska. The endurance athlete, age 59, and author of *Running for the Average Joe* now lives in Littleton, Colo. Watts says he ran off and on since high school, but never ran distances longer than four or five miles. When he turned 44, however, he got serious about turning his life around when over the course of 9 short months, he gained over 30 pounds and had trouble climbing the stairs. He describes his health deterioration in the prologue of *Running for the Average Joe*.

“Back in 2002, my LDL (bad) cholesterol had

climbed to 212 and should have been below 100. My blood pressure was 154 over 110 when I woke up in the morning and my heart rate was around 90 beats per minute. I was barely able to walk the four flights of stairs at my job without feeling dizzy. And I was just 44 years old. Every health indicator and blood level I had seemed to be threatening and uncontrolled. I was weighing in at nearly 200 pounds, on a frame that was meant to hold significantly less. People said that I looked great as I was able to hide my weight with the clothes I wore, but I certainly didn't feel great. On the inside was a growing beast that was taking over my body – and my life.”

Over the last 16 years, Watts has completed numerous 5k and 10k races, and in his estimation, at least 100 half marathons, more than 90 marathons, 12 ultra marathons and several solo expeditions ranging from 100 to 500 miles.

“I run to balance my health and stress levels,” Watts comments. “Running keeps me charged up and focused, and gives me a great sense of accomplishment.”

Back when he started training, Watts' original goal was to lose the 35 pounds he'd gained in the fall of 2001. Once he discovered he actually liked running, it became an integral part of his life.

“Running became part of my day. My goals were extended to longer distances, more frequent races and quality in my training programs,” Watts said.

Running did so much more than help Watts lose weight. It allowed him to establish goals and strive to complete them. In 2009, Watts broke the 3-hour barrier in the marathon twice in two weeks. Considering he ran 4- and sometimes 5-hour marathons, that was a huge personal accomplishment.

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GETTING HEALTHY

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Aside from his success in the marathon, the highlight of Watts' running career was his run of the entire Colorado Trail in 13 days in the summer of 2017.

"Originally, I had planned on running it unsupported in 11 days straight through, but became ill on day three," Watts explained. "I ended up going back over the course of several weekends, but the total time was 13 days to cover 516 miles and 92,000' of elevation gain. Without a doubt, being part of nature on such an expedition was the highlight of my running career."

With success came disappointment as well, as Watts fell victim to over-training and injury like many endurance athletes. Although he'd heal over time, he needed to take breaks from running.

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"Over the years, I've had just about all of the injuries that runners can expect – plantar fasciitis, runner's knee, ITB issues, sprains, bruises, cuts. I've also had cervical fusion in my neck (C4, C5, C6) and I seem to bounce back. Currently, however, I have suspended my running because of bone spur removal in my heel. Recovery time is eight to nine months, but I can't wait to get back on the trails again!"

Overall, Watts believes his success as an endurance runner is attributed to hard work. He claims he's not gifted, just determined, and that he's learned from past mistakes.

"I try to adapt to each circumstance as they occur. There's almost always a solution to a problem, and I strive to find it," Watts said. "I have no more talent than the next person, but I always try to finish what I start and grow from each experience – not only with my running, but with life itself."

In terms of training, Watts prefers to run alone at a pace that is comfortable for that day. He found training with others was counterproductive if he couldn't keep the pace of his training partners, and he didn't want to slow others down.

"I like to push my limits," Watts said. "I don't need to compete against others, but I do like to challenge myself with different distances and disciplines."

Watts, who is a Systems Engineer for local government, has been employed there for 30 years. He wrote a book called, "Running For the Average Joe," which was released in March, 2017. The book is about lifestyle change through proper fitness and nutrition. The book targets runners of all skill levels, and the foreword was written by Marshall Ulrich; one of the original forefathers of endurance running in America.

Read more about Watts:

Website Page: www.wattsrunning.com

About: www.wattsrunning.com/company

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