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## MEET YOUR GUIDES

### PENGUIN PEARLS OF WISDOM

*The miracle isn't that I finished. The miracle is that I had the courage to start.*

Those two sentences changed my life—and the lives of thousands who have read them. They sum up for so many of us what is really in our hearts.

To prepare and finish is not a miracle. With patience and good humor, all of us can achieve our dreams.

The miracle is that we were able to reach down and find some part of ourselves that still believed our dreams were possible.

## MEET JOHN "THE PENGUIN" BINGHAM

I am probably the least likely person you can imagine to write a book about running. For most of my life, I thought runners were some crazy subset of humans. *Why, I wondered, would anyone willingly subject himself or herself to the pain of running?*

You see, my own running career—and I like to call it a running career—didn't begin until I was 43 years old. At 43, I was overweight (some 75 pounds more than I am right now), and I had smoked for 25 years and done more than my fair share of drinking.

I also grew up in a family in which overeating was a way of life. In my family, food was everywhere. Food was love. Food was celebration. Food was everything except food.

Whatever happened in our family, we ate. Sue and Mart got married? Let's eat. Betsy had a baby? Let's eat. In fact, there was nothing that was so horrible that you couldn't eat your way through it. Wakes and funerals were just occasions to set up the smorgasbord table.

I am asked all the time: What happened? How does a sedentary, middle-aged smoker/drinker/overeater suddenly decide to start moving, quit smoking, stop drinking, and change his eating habits? Well, the sad truth is that I don't have a great answer.

There wasn't some magical moment of epiphany and enlightenment when I realized that my life had gotten out of control. I had never been athletic, so it wasn't as if the "ghost of fitness past" visited me in the middle of the night and reminded me of how good I used to be.

And the additional truth is that when you have as many bad habits as I had, you can't always change all of them at the same time. Getting more active and changing my eating style was the easy part. The smoking and the drinking were habits that I had to sneak up on before I could make the changes stick.

It's not as if I had been living on the planet Xenon. I knew that my eating, drinking, and smoking—not to mention the complete absence of any kind of exercise—did not make the healthiest lifestyle. I knew all of that; I just didn't want to do anything about it.

Well, that's not completely true. I did—like so many others—get fired up from time to time and decide to lose weight. Some diet program would grab my attention, and I would be committed to following it to the letter.

I tried high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets and low-protein, high-carbohydrate diets ("the athlete's diet," I was told). I mixed up

drinks I could barely swallow and put foul-smelling powder on the worse-tasting yogurt, all in the name of slimming down.

Nothing worked for very long. But I did manage to create three wardrobes. I had my “fat” clothes, my “thin” clothes, and my uniforms from army infantry basic training that I knew I would never get back into.

I even tried running once or twice. And that was about it—once or twice. I hated it and I quit.

This time, though, I was determined to become a runner. As I stood in my driveway, the depth of my ignorance began to set in. I had no idea what to do. And why would I? They never show old fat men running on television—never. The only running I had ever seen on TV was at the Olympics, and those people were all young and skinny.

But I was there, and I had to do something. I figured runners must just run as fast as they can as far as they can every time they run. I stood there for a while, and then, with a primal scream, I headed down my driveway at full speed.

For about 8 seconds, my driveway, which was only about 50 yards long, suddenly looked like it stretched to the horizon. It took 8 seconds for me to end up bent over, gasping for air, hacking and coughing and wondering what in the world I had gotten myself into.

Looking back, I know that was my moment of truth. That was my moment of choice. Behind me was the life I knew. I owned nine motorcycles, two cars, a camper, a garden tractor, and a gas-powered Weedwacker. I had been in no danger of exerting myself.

Everything I knew about myself was behind me. The cigarettes, the booze, the indulgent lifestyle . . . All I had to do was turn around and end the folly.

Much to my surprise, I straightened up and went forward into the abyss. I ran a little, walked a lot, and stumbled as far as I thought I

could go. When I turned around to make sure I knew where I was, I could still see my house. I had given it my all—my very best effort—and I couldn't even get out of sight of my house!

But it was a beginning. It was *my* beginning. Strangely enough, it turns out that I had promise as a runner on that very first day. It was clear that I didn't have a runner's body, but I possessed a runner's mind. You see, when I returned home, I got into my car and measured how far I had run.

One quarter of a mile.

Every day or so I'd put on my way-too-small shoes and head out the door. Little by little, I made progress. I stopped wearing the jacket, wool cap, and ski gloves and ran just a little farther every time I went out.

I ran in the morning or evening, when I felt most certain that I wouldn't be seen. In fact, if a car approached, I always pretended to be looking for something along the side of the road. I was convinced that the sight of this old fat man running in a sweat suit would be enough to send the driver into fits of laughter.

In those early days and weeks, I was fueled more by anger and frustration than anything else. I couldn't believe what I had done to myself. And I had done it to myself by myself.

But everything good that running has brought into my life started from those humble beginnings. Running the original marathon course in Athens; running in the heart of Florence, Italy, or on the stony ground of Antarctica—it all started with those first 8 seconds.

Without those first 8 seconds, there would be no New York City or Chicago Marathon. There would be no column in *Runner's World*, and there would be no books to write. Without those first 8 seconds, I would have sentenced myself to a life of sedentary confinement. I would have continued to eat, drink, and smoke until I couldn't move at all.

All we're asking for is those first 8 seconds of *your* life. And you can take my word for it that no matter what those first 8 seconds feel like, they are going to change your life forever.

## MEET COACH JENNY HADFIELD

I used to love to run. I ran after my friends while playing tag, kicked the can on the neighborhood streets, and played a mean game of “duck, duck, goose” in kindergarten. It wasn't until I grew into my body later in life that I developed a love/hate relationship with running. I loved the romance of running and wanted to be a runner, but I hated it every time I tried.

I was an active but chubby adolescent. I loved team sports like volleyball, softball, and basketball. Yet every time I tried to run, I failed. For me, running was a form of punishment I had to endure in sports. If we missed serves, we *had* to run laps. If we missed a layup, we *had* to run laps. We *had* to run laps to warm up for a softball game. It was something I *had* to do for a short period of time. I hated that it was so hard, but I wanted desperately to learn how to run.

My initial attempts at becoming a runner were short-lived. I would strap on my shoes, head out to run, and end up walking back before I even got to the end of the block. John would agree that I can be quite the stubborn one, but every time I tried to run, the end result was the same. I couldn't imagine myself as a runner.

It wasn't until after college that I finally conquered my mental block against running. I was an intern at a corporate fitness center—GE Medical Systems—teaching employees how to get and stay fit. The entire fitness center staff ran. They ran at lunch together, they ran on the weekends with a club, and they even ran races! I wanted in. I wanted to feel what they felt when they finished their runs. They glowed; they were high on life; they were real runners.

I shared my aspirations, and they took me under their wings and taught me how to get started. It wasn't 10 minutes into the first run-walk that they were asking me to run Al's Run, a local 8-K (5-mile) road race in Milwaukee. The idea scared the pants off me. I told them, "I can't run that far, and even if I did, I would be the last person out there." I told them, "At this point, I'll be lucky to make it to the end of this street."

It was during that run that they guided me gently into my running career. They talked to me about progression, how to train, how to rest. They took me shopping for running shoes and clothing so I looked the part. Week by week, my body adapted and my mind broke down the barriers. It took me several months to run 30 minutes straight, and although I was feeling a little more confident, the thought of running in a race was daunting.

On a crisp fall morning in Milwaukee, I lined up for my first race. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't believe I would finish. I worried that if I finished at all, I would finish last. I was completely out of my comfort zone but excited with anticipation. It took me well over an hour to finish the race, and I was beaten at the finish line by a 72-year-old man named Harry, but I finished. I felt like I'd won the lottery—like I'd opened a door I never knew was there. I learned to run, I ran a race, and I had a T-shirt to prove it!

I share that story with you because all too often I hear from people who think they can't run but want to try. I am living proof that you can. You can run for fun, to meet new people, or even to run a race. Running gave me the confidence to explore life and step out of my comfort zone. I went on to run more races and further challenge myself in other sports. Running is not just exercise; it is a lifestyle.

Join us on the journey into our world of running. Set your worries aside, and learn from our successes and failures. We will guide you through everything you need to know to get started, to improve, and

to become your own coach. Taking the first step is the most challenging part. It is that step that will lead you into a whole new world.

### **COACH JENNY'S TIPS AND TRICKS**

- ✓ Remember that it generally takes 20 days to create a new habit. Gather up your patience, read up on running, and give yourself a good month to start your running career.
- ✓ Begin to think like a runner. What will you look like running? Where are you going to run? Who will you run with? More important, what will you wear?
- ✓ Talk to runners you admire. Listen to their stories of how they got started. In most cases, their tales won't be far off from your story. Being a runner isn't based on distance or speed. You share the same strengths and weaknesses as the elite runners. A real runner is one who puts aside his or her fears and heads out the door.