

Running Toward Life: Finding Community and Wisdom in the Distances We Run

John Trent

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Written by a passionate athlete, Running Toward Life is a fascinating memoir about the challenges and benefits of ultra running.

Athlete and journalist John Trent's memoir *Running Toward Life* shares lessons from the hardcore world of ultra running.

Trent, after running the taxing trails of the Sierra Nevada, developed an obsession with ultramarathons. He aspired to complete the Grand Slam of Ultrarunning—four 100-mile races through Virginia, California, Vermont, and Utah. To do so, he pursued grueling athletic feats and braved rugged terrains, steep heights, sweltering heat, and imposing distances. He also observed natural wonders like a “headwall of peach-colored rock that runs straight up from the green and beautiful valley floor, looming like an unnerving and unscalable rock barrier, marking the foot of civilization and what is comfortable and known to what is unknown and almost unimaginable”; these and other sights are captured in palpable terms. And in addition to his athletic endeavors, the book also covers Trent's childhood in Nevada, sharing how he got into running, covering the races that he ran, and discussing the appeal of the pastime. As he aged, he faced new limitations, but his mentality evolved at the same time.

Trent also chronicles the history of the Western States Endurance Run and ultra running, covering the people and personalities who shaped both, including the trailblazing women who organized the race. Incisive interviews with fellow runners show why they compete in “one of the world's most beautiful and challenging races,” too: a training schedule that helped many runners to cross the finish line “became their Bible,” morphing “from longhand legal-pad versions to PDFs that were circulated like cryptocurrency.” In this way, Trent brings to life a niche running subculture that treats running as a social activity that brings people together to accomplish a daunting goal.

But beyond its personal and sports-historical elements, the book also includes self-help elements for other athletes, with advice on finding mentors and overcoming challenges. Its chapters are topical, musing on subjects like “the magic of the golden hour” in an inspirational manner and sharing details about how ultra runners stay motivated to keep going through pain. Trent lays bare the mindsets of those who push themselves to physical extremes, musing on what motivates distance runners and about what affirmations ultra running provides.

Written by a passionate athlete who stuck to his dreams, *Running Toward Life* is a fascinating memoir about ultra running.

JOSEPH S. PETE (January 11, 2023)

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