

Move Like You Mean It

Training becomes a habit that starts before most people are awake.

I told you, at the end of the last chapter, that I would now show you what to do with the body. I meant it. This is the chapter where I tell you about how I moved. And I want to say up front that this is the chapter I am, in some ways, proudest of, because the lessons in it cost me more than the lessons in any other chapter of this book. They cost me about seven years.

You know already, from Chapter 5, that I came out of those seven years skinny-fat. You know the diagnosis. You do not yet know the story of how it happened. You know I had been walking, and that there had been a race, and that there had been a TIA, and that I had ended up at exactly my goal weight inside an ambulance, alive but humbled. What you do not yet know is what I'd done wrong between getting onto a walking track for the first time at the rec center and getting off my TRX for the last, doing things the wrong way. That is the territory of this chapter.

And I want to make a promise to you about how I am going to tell it. I am going to tell you about the mistakes first

because I think they are more useful than the wins. Anybody can talk about what worked. Fewer people will sit you down and walk you through what did not. I am going to do both. By the end of this chapter, you will know exactly how I move my body today, why I move it the way I do, what equipment I use, what I think you do not need to buy, and the schedule I keep. And you will know, just as importantly, what I did wrong for seven years and how I finally figured out what to do instead.

A note before we start. I am sixty-five years old as I write this. The things I do with my body today, I do at sixty-five, and I do them because they work for a man at sixty-five. Some of what I say will translate directly to a person younger than I am. Some of it will need adjustment, in the direction of being harder, not easier, because at twenty-five or thirty-five, your body can take more punishment from your training than I can at sixty-five. But the principles are still the same. The principles do not change with age. What changes is the recovery time.

Movement is not the same thing as exercise. Exercise is what most Americans do badly, in front of the television, with a jump box or a small pink dumbbell and a YouTube trainer. Movement is the way you use your body, every day, on purpose, with a plan that you mean to follow. The word I use for it now is training. The word matters.

Training is intentional. Exercise is often just whatever happens on a random weekday morning.

The Fear of My Own Heart

Before I tell you what I did, I want to explain why I almost didn't do it at all. Because I was frightened. I was scared of my own heart. And I want to be honest with you about why, because if you are heavy and afraid to start moving, you might be carrying some of the same fear, and you deserve to have it named for what it is. Most people will not name it. I am going to.

My grandfather, my father's father, was a man named Charlie. He died at fifty-five years old. I remember him only in pieces, because I was five or six when it happened, but I remember what he looked like. He was a small man, my size, about five-foot-six or seven. He was wiry. He was bald. He wore glasses. He smoked cigarettes, which was the world he lived in. And he was, by every account my father ever gave me, one of the strongest men anybody who knew him had ever met.

My grandfather was a house painter. Back in those days, a house painter's ladder was not aluminum or fiberglass. It was wood. And to keep the wood from drying out,

splintering, and becoming dangerous, they would be soaked in linseed oil, which kept the wood supple but made the ladder much, much heavier. A modern forty-foot aluminum ladder weighs about forty-five pounds. A linseed-soaked wooden ladder from my grandfather's day weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds. My grandfather, who weighed maybe one-forty himself, would haul that ladder up on his shoulder, walk it across a job site fully extended to its 40-foot length, set it down where he needed it, climb to the top, and paint a house. That was for a living. Every day. For decades.

And at fifty-five, driving home from work one afternoon, he had a massive heart attack at the wheel. He died in the car. The car drifted off the road and into a tree, and that is how they found him. A man who could carry a hundred and sixty pounds on one shoulder for hours each day dropped by his own heart in a moment.

I knew all of this. I knew the way you know a story you grew up in. And there was more. My father had a mild heart attack at fifty-nine years old. Fifty-nine. It did not kill him, but it should have. He had triple-bypass surgery in his sixties, when his weight was up around three-ten or three-twenty. My uncle Okie, who I told you about in Chapter 1, with the neck goiter - he ate himself, slowly, into a liver cancer that took him in the end. My family was,

on the men's side, a parade of bodies that could not carry themselves into their later years. And here I was at fifty-four years old, weighing 310 pounds, with a resting heart rate of 110 beats per minute, sitting still on the couch, and I knew - not feared, knew - that if I went out into the yard and started running, I would drop dead on the lawn.

That was the math in my head. Every step I might take past a casual walking pace was a step toward my grandfather's car. I did not want to find out what my heart could and could not do. I did not want Debbie to find me on the floor of the rec center. I did not want my children to bury me yet; I was far too young in my mind. So, for the better part of the year, after I had already started losing weight on the diet side, I did not move beyond walking. I would not. I was afraid.

And I want to say this to anybody reading this who is heavy and afraid: fear is real. I am not going to be the guy who tells you to ignore it. Listen to it. But also - and here is the thing, fear will not tell you - fear is a wall, and on the other side of that wall is life. What I had to figure out, in that long first year of walking, was how to take the wall down one brick at a time, slowly enough that nothing inside my body would shatter, but fast enough that I would still have a life waiting on the other side. I had to find the smallest possible first move, and I had to do it before I lost my

nerve.

You are allowed to be afraid of your own body. The fear is a real warning, and you should respect it. But you are not allowed to stay on the couch forever. The smallest possible first move - a walk down the block, ten laps around a track, a stroll - is what takes the wall down. Move slower than you think you have to, but move every day. The fear shrinks the moment your heart figures out it is not going to die.

The First Step Was a Stroll

I want to tell you about the day I finally went to the rec center for the first time, because that is the day the wall came down by one brick. And it almost did not happen.

Debbie had been trying to get me into a gym, in one form or another, for nearly a year. She had a membership with a women's bootcamp group that met daily at the local rec center. She would invite me. She would mention it. She would tell me, casually, that there was a track inside, that you could walk it in the cold months, that the place was full of people my age and older just moving their bodies. I always had a reason not to go. The real reason - the one I would not have said out loud to her - was that I was

terrified of dying in front of her and her friends in the bootcamp group.

I was 310 pounds. I knew what I looked like walking into a place where people in shape were exercising. I was sure they would all look up. I was sure I would be the largest person in the room. And the deepest fear, underneath the vanity - because I will tell you about the vanity in a moment, but underneath it - was that I would walk in there, my heart, sitting at 110 a minute already, would object to the climb on the entry stairs, and I would be carried out on a gurney in front of Debbie's friends. That was the picture in my head. So, I did not go.

And then one morning, the power went out in our house. That is what cracked the door for me. No power meant no hot shower at home. Our house gets its water from a well, and it requires a well pump. Without power, no pump, no water, no shower. I needed a shower before work. The rec center, two miles down the road, had a locker room with showers. Debbie said, " Go shower at the rec center. They will let you in. You just walk in." So, I drove over there with my towel, fully intending to take a shower and walk back out. I had no plans to use the gym.

When I got there - and this is the part I think about a lot, because I still do not know what changed in me between

the lobby door and the locker-room door - I decided to do a little walk first. It was not a decision exactly. I was already there. I had paid the day-use fee anyway. I had the day off. And there was a track inside, an oval taped onto a wood floor on the second story, and a sign on the wall that said ten laps equals one mile. I will tell you a small honest thing: that sign was wrong. Ten laps were not a mile on that track. It was closer to three-quarters of a mile. But I did not know that, and the sign said what it said, so I set my goal for one mile, ten laps, and started walking.

And it was a stroll. I want you to hear the word "stroll," because that is exactly what it was. It was not a walk. It was not a quick pace. It was a stroll. I was moving slowly enough that any of Debbie's friends, had they been there, could have lapped me three times before I finished one. And that was on purpose. I was watching my own heart. I was checking every minute or so, wondering whether the next minute would be the one that put me on the floor. It was not. My heart did what hearts do. It went up a little. It came back down. It did not explode in my chest. It did not stop. And by the time I had finished ten laps, my one "mile" was, of all things, lightly sweaty and not at all dead.

I walked back down to the locker room. I took my shower. The next visit to the track, a couple of days later, I did the same thing, just ten laps, and this time I was able to return

home for my shower; the power had been restored by then, and on the drive home, I noticed that the seat of my car was getting wet from the back of my shirt. I had sweated more in those ten laps than I had thought. And the next time I went - the very next day - I brought a towel from the house and laid it over the driver's seat before I left for the rec center, so I would not soak the upholstery and then my work clothes. That towel, by the way, lived in the back seat of my car for the next nine years. I drove the same Hyundai for the entire weight-loss arc, and that towel never left it. It actually lived in a bag that I carried extra gym shorts, sweatpants, T-shirts, and walking shoes in.

Within a couple of weeks, I bought myself a thing on Amazon called a Tally Counter Hand Pitch Lap Counter. It is a little metal clicker you hold in your hand. You squeeze it for each pitch or, in my case, lap, and it counts up; you press a button on the side to reset it to zero. I wanted one because I kept losing track of my laps. I would be on lap eight, convince myself it was lap six, and walk twelve laps, thinking I had only done ten. The pitch counter solved that. I would set my phone's timer for sixty-one minutes - the extra minute was a safety buffer - reset the counter to zero, and put it in my pocket. Each time I passed the doorway of the track, I squeezed it. Click. And it would tally up one more lap. I still have that counter in my car's console

today. I've changed vehicles, but I still have my lap counter.

PREVIEW ENDS HERE

This free preview covers the first 10 pages of the chapter. The rest is in the book. To order Volume II - From 310 to Thriving, email metabojoe@gmail.com.

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