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*Come What May, I Want to Run:
A Memoir of the Saving Grace of Ultrarunning in Overwhelming Times*
by Miriam Díaz-Gilbert
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New Title from Miriam Díaz-Gilbert
Come What May, I Want to Run:
A Memoir of the Saving Grace of Ultrarunning in Overwhelming Times

Growing up, Miriam is an average athlete who doesn't get much playing time. She never imagines becoming a runner. But a college breakup propels her to run to mend her broken heart. She begins running 5K races. These races morph into half-marathons and marathons. Years later, running helps her to cope with the workplace mistreatment she is enduring as an academic and the depression she suffers.



After watching Dean Karnazes and Pam Reed on 60 Minutes talk about ultrarunning, Miriam signs up for the JFK 50 ultra. With the love and support of her family, she runs an ultramarathon every year. A few years later, Miriam is unable to run normally until she is diagnosed with neurological B12 deficiency and gets her running legs back.

Three days after placing third female in a twenty-four-hour ultramarathon, Miriam's scheduled laparoscopic hysterectomy is only the beginning of her medical and surgical nightmare. When her husband Jon is diagnosed with stage four cancer, Miriam runs ultramarathons for his healing.

In *Come What May, I Want to Run*, the reader keeps pace with Miriam as she overcomes adversity, and her unrelenting faith, perseverance, resiliency, and running ultramarathons never waiver.

Miriam Díaz-Gilbert was born and raised in Connecticut. She is a graduate of Rutgers University and LaSalle University. She has taught ESL, first-year writing, and theology/religion studies. She has been running races since 1989 and ultramarathons since 2005. She is published in academic journals, *Huffington Post*, *Ultrarunning Magazine*, *Women's Running Magazine*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Running for Good*, and *Cancer Today*. Miriam and her husband Jon have two children and three grandchildren.



Interview with Miriam Díaz-Gilbert

Ultrarunning is the major theme that weaves throughout *Come What May, I Want to Run: A Memoir of the Saving Grace of Ultrarunning in Overwhelming Times*. For readers who may not know, what is ultrarunning?

Ultrarunning is running any distance beyond the standard 26.2-mile marathon. The races are called ultras or ultramarathons and consist of 50K (31.1 miles), 50 miles, 100K (62.2 miles), 100 mile races and beyond, and timed races such as 6-hr, 12-hr, 24-hr, 48-hr, 72-hr and longer multi-day running events.

What got you running ultras?

After running nine marathons and many shorter distance races, I ran my first 50 miler, the JFK 50, after watching elite ultrarunners Dean Karnazes and Pam Reed being interviewed on *60 Minutes*. I was in awe and couldn't believe anyone could run hundreds of miles at a time. After the interview was over, I searched the internet for an ultramarathon and JFK 50 popped up.

In *Come What May, I Want to Run*, you share your Catholic faith, another theme in your memoir. You also write about the strength you get from the saints and the Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers. You see a connection between Christian asceticism and modern day ultrarunning. Tell me more about that.

Like Christian ascetics, modern ultrarunners are a rare breed. What ultrarunners do to their bodies is the common denominator that connects us to ascetics. We both subject our body and mind to grueling physical pain and discomfort. We suffer thirst, hunger, sleep deprivation, a beaten body, a fatigued mind, and diminished cognitive functioning, along with our ability to practice+ endurance, perseverance, and to defy our limits.

Why did you want to write your memoir?

I never intended to write a memoir, but a few overwhelming life experiences and how I survived and overcame with my unrelenting faith and the power of ultrarunning, propelled me to write *Come What May, I Want to Run*. My memoir is a story that I hope will resonate with readers who are enduring adversities and who have overcome them. I want to give hope to others and show that we can overcome whatever challenges and obstacles are placed before us. My experience comes with tears, laughter, an abundance of faith, personal transformation, and overflows with hope and positivity. My memoir is sprinkled with silver linings in overwhelming times through the power of ultrarunning and the love of my family.

Your family is also key in your ultrarunning life. What role has your family played?

I could never have run thirty-four ultramarathons, to date, without God and my family. When my adult children were younger, they paced, crewed, and fed me, and changed my wet socks and shoes during my ultras, as did my husband. Now, it's only my husband. But they too suffered sleep deprivation during my hundred mile and multi-day ultras and they have never complained. It's unconditional love.

You have endured and survived medical and health challenges, and have suffered obstacles in your professional life. How has running ultramarathons helped you to cope during those difficult times and what lessons have they taught you?

Running has always been natural healing medicine for me in challenging times and my conversation with God. I've learned that I have great endurance, that I am resilient, and that tough times don't last; tough people do. Running, my faith, and God have never abandoned me in difficult times. All three have given me the strength to persevere and to carry on.

Your memoir has a diverse cast of characters. Who will benefit from reading *Come What May, I Want to Run*? Who's your intended audience?

You don't have to be a runner to appreciate my memoir. But runners, and anyone who has suffered a health and surgical nightmare, doctors, nurses, teachers, academics, patients, and cancer caregivers might see themselves in my story. They will benefit from my memoir because it's a story grounded in unrelenting faith, family, endurance, perseverance, positivity, hope, and resiliency, all universal themes of the human condition. My story of survival, healing, personal growth, and transformation in *Come What May, I Want to Run* is relatable and uplifting.

Your memoir begins with your husband's cancer diagnosis. You become a cancer caregiver. What advice do you have for cancer caregivers?

Caregiving is overwhelmingly lonely. It's an emotionally and physically exhausting journey you never anticipate or plan for. I would advise joining a local support group to be with others experiencing the same. Look for free counseling services for yourself at the hospital where your loved one is getting treatment. Make time for yourself and self-care - walk, run, knit, write, journal, paint and garden. Remain positive, prayerful, and hopeful.

In *Come What May, I Want to Run*, you weave ten incredible ultramarathon events and show what your mind, body, and spirit endure during these races. Which were your favorite events?

They are all my favorite for different reasons. The JFK 50 has a special place in my heart because it was my first ultra. Placing last in my first trail ultra and getting to the finish with my family, placing second female in my first 100 miler, placing third female in my first 24-hr , and collecting over eighty miles in my first 24-hr ultra for my husband's healing the day before his second cancer surgery are all special.

How is running an ultramarathon and writing a memoir similar? What advice do you have for anyone who wants to write a memoir?

Ultrarunning and writing require patience, discipline, endurance, pacing, and perseverance. These practices will get you to the finish line. Writing a memoir is not a sprint but an ultramarathon. It took over twenty years of journaling and about eight years of writing to finish *Come What May, I Want to Run*.

**Excerpt from *Come What May, I Want to Run:*
*A Memoir of the Saving Grace of Ultrarunning in Overwhelming Times***

Within a few minutes a nurse with natural curly red hair in a pony-tail resting on the back of her navy scrubs and wearing a gold crucifix around her neck, came in the room.

“Call us if you have any discomfort or any problems in the next twenty-four hours Mr. Gilbert. Here are the orders for the MRI and CT scan.” She handed them to me.

“What’s your name?” I asked as I reached for a tissue in my bag.

“I’m Patty.”

Feeling deep gratitude for her compassion and gentle demeanor as she escorted us out of the conference room, I thanked her. Patty gently rubbed my left arm with her right hand.

“Everything is going to be all right.”

“I know.” I wiped my tears and the clear mucus dripped from my nose.

“I will pray for you both,” she said.

“Thank you,” I whispered as my voice began to crack.

Jon stayed quiet. I stuffed all the papers Patty gave me in my bag somewhere between the yarn, knitting needles, and my laptop.

“Everything is going to be fine,” I said to my husband as we walked arm in arm to the car. It was bitterly cold. The gray sky on this dark day in March 2018, mirrored our mood. A snow storm was in the forecast.

As soon as we got home, I called the Diagnostic Radiology Center to schedule Jon’s MRI and CT scan. Jon made dinner. I don’t remember what we ate. We watched TV. I took a shower. My tears washed away in the hot shower as I prayed aloud—“Heavenly Father, watch over Jon and give me the strength to stay strong. I trust in you God. I leave it all in your hands.” We went to bed, foregoing our usual routine of falling asleep to the sound of the TV. That night the exhaustion from the bad news was a natural sedative.

The next morning we headed to the Diagnostic Radiology Center for Jon’s 10:00 a.m. appointment. The bright blue sky and blinding sun had begun to melt the bright white snow into glistening puddles on the black asphalt roads. The snowstorm that swept through the night before left roads strewn with fallen branches and trees. A fallen power line on the side of the road caused Jon to slow down. A big uprooted tree was blocking the road. He carefully navigated the car under the tree.

The sun and blue sky filled me with a sense of joy and pure hope. *Everything is going to be okay. There is no obstacle we can’t overcome.* And ultrarunning would now have a new purpose and meaning. I’d be running for Jon’s healing.

**Praise for *Come What May, I Want to Run*:
A Memoir of the Saving Grace of Ultrarunning in Overwhelming Times**

“*Come What May, I Want to Run* is a beautifully written story of triumph over seemingly insurmountable adversity. I laughed, I cried, I cheered, and I learned. Miriam Díaz-Gilbert shows us that with enough positivity and perseverance, anything is possible.”

—Dean Karnazes, author of *Ultramarathon Man*

“Honest, raw, and motivating! Miriam Díaz-Gilbert’s memoir tells of life-threatening fears, obstacles, and challenges, and how to deal with them with deep faith and a positive attitude. Her story speaks of overcoming insurmountable odds as she turns them into successes through long distance running. I encourage everyone to get inside the mind of this ultra-runner and recognize the fact that life is never easy, but great success awaits us all if we’re willing to work through the issues.”

—Bill Watts, author of *Running for the Average Joe*

“Miriam Díaz-Gilbert masterfully tells an inspiring story of personal growth, using running as both medicine and a launchpad to success. When life is good, she runs to celebrate. When life is hard, she runs to heal. The honest, unvarnished storytelling is fantastic, with just the right amount of humor mixed in to let us know that she is grateful for all of it. I loved this book.”

—Charlie Engle, author of *Running Man*

“Running inspires creativity, relieves stress, and gives us insight into ourselves and the world, making the human condition more tolerable. I felt an interconnection with Miriam Díaz-Gilbert in the ways running played to help her overcome lots of obstacles.”

—Bart Yasso, author of *Race Everything*

