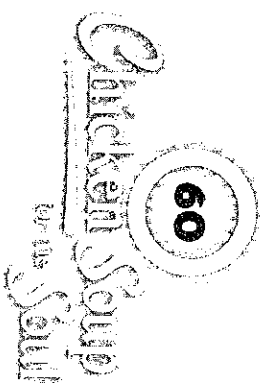


in the pursuit of those goals. As Ernest Hemingway stated, "It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end."

~Brian Teason



## How I Became a Muddy Girl

*Nourishing yourself in a way that helps you blossom in the direction you want to go is attainable, and you are worth the effort.*

~Deborah Day

**A**t thirty-six, you're supposed to be in the prime of your life. Boring, lazy, and antisocial should not be the words that describe you. But they were for me, along with unhealthy, overweight, and insecure. My weekends consisted of staying home, hanging out on the couch, watching TV, and of course, eating. Because you can't watch a twenty-four-hour marathon of *Law & Order* without stuffing your face, now can you?

As a child, I was shy and introverted. After years of bullying as a teen, I became an insecure adult who was too afraid to try new things for fear that I would fail. As soon as something got a little too difficult, I would cut and run. I became an expert at avoidance.

Now here I was, in my thirties, and life was passing me by. I decided to do something about it, starting with my weight. I was over 200 pounds and miserable. I never considered myself a gym person and I dreaded the idea of walking into an exercise class. So I searched for something that would get me active and help me shed the weight, but would also be fun. I'd loved running as a child, so I thought a 5K would give me a goal to shoot for and some motivation to start working out.

In my quest for a 5K, I stumbled upon something I had never heard of—a mud run. The specific one I came across called itself an adult playground.” Needless to say, this piqued my curiosity.

I learned that a mud run is an event at which participants not only run, but also crawl over and under obstacles—all in the mud. Lots and lots of mud.

I have no idea why I thought it was a good idea for an overweight and out-of-shape girl like myself to register for something like this. I was going to have to climb over walls, swing across monkey bars, walk balance beams, and crawl through mud, all for four miles.

But I thought it sounded like fun. Some women scurry in fear over just the mere thought of getting dirty. Not me. I grew up on a back road, surrounded by woods. Mud and dirt were a part of my childhood.

Through Facebook I met a lady who was doing the same event. She invited me to join her team. At least now I wasn't going to have to do this alone.

It was an experience that totally changed my life. I had to skip some obstacles because I had no upper body strength. My team and I walked the four miles instead of running them. As it turned out, most of them were also doing this for the very first time. I did what I could and had a blast. Not only did I have fun in the mud, but I made friendships that day with a group of women who were on similar journeys to get in shape.

In the year since, I have done four more mud run events, including one that was over six miles, in the mountains, and at night, with only a headlamp guiding my way. I went from skipping the walls to climbing over them all by myself. I have dropped more than forty pounds and my life has completely changed.

My self-esteem has skyrocketed. I've made so many new friends, all of whom have encouraged me to continue challenging myself. I have done things within the last year that I never imagined I would do. I started training in Mixed Martial Arts; I've gone zip lining, although I am deathly afraid of heights. I joined a gym and actually love it. I've done four 5Ks, and I am always on the lookout for the next crazy event

to sign up for. I no longer have cable television because there's no point to it. I seem to have something going on almost every weekend. No more time for TV!

I am no longer afraid to step out of my comfort zone. I no longer fear the opinions of others or worry about failing. Now, when I try something new and don't quite succeed, I want to try it again with only three words in mind: BRING IT ON.

~Maggi Normile