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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 16, 2018

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Mayor Emanuel Interviews Marathoner and Running Coach Denise Sauriol on “Chicago Stories”

With this year's Chicago Marathon just a few weeks away, Mayor Emanuel invited passionate marathoner and running coach Denise Sauriol to City Hall for this week's episode of “[Chicago Stories](#)” to hear about her journey of inspiration, along with some of her training tips, favorite playlists, and the near-fatal accident that almost took it all away.

To meet Denise today is to know the pure spirit of the marathon and the unbridled passion for running, but she didn't start out the way. Denise began running when she was in the fourth-grade—and loved it, even running in high school—but she wasn't very fast.

“I was the girl in the back of the pack,” as Denise told Mayor Emanuel.

Then a few years later after seeing her older sister run the Chicago Marathon, she decided to give it a shot. As it turned out, crossing the finish line for her meant more than covering 26.2 miles.

“It changed me,” Denise said. “It ignited an empowerment engine in me that led to other things that I didn't think I could do.”

From there, Denise was a woman obsessed. She started running 60 to 70 miles a week, taking on more and more races, and all the while getting faster and faster, eventually shrinking her marathon time from 4:28 to setting her personal record at 3:15.

But something wasn't right. “If I didn't get a PR in a race, I beat myself up, if I missed a workout, I'd beat myself up,” Denise said. “My whole focus was my times in my races.”

Then, suddenly, everything changed.

On August 16, 2009, while running to yet another race—“to set a PR, of course”—Denise was nearly killed after being hit by a car, shattering the windshield and breaking five vertebrae.

“Once I was mentally and physically stable, I knew I wanted to give back to running for what it had given to me,” Denise said.

As she told Mayor Emanuel, that meant becoming a running coach, and inspiring others to realize the untapped power within themselves just as she had. It also meant refocusing her outlook on the journey of the race, and not the destination—including even eating a few donuts along the way.

“I want to share what was given to me in that first finish line,” Denise told Mayor Emanuel.

In just a few weeks from now, Denise and over 44,000 others from Chicago and around the world will be gathering downtown for this year’s Chicago Marathon, to race, run, have fun, and ignite their own “empowerment engine.”

Be sure to listen to the rest of the episode as Denise and Mayor Emanuel also talk about what makes the Chicago Marathon so special, swap stories about open water swimming, and look forward to finding new challenges.

Listen and subscribe to Chicago Stories podcast on [Apple Podcasts](#), [SoundCloud](#), and [Spotify](#).

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