

Shelby Stanger: Remember Chris McDougall, the author of Born to Run, who put bare foot running on the map, and who I once treated self lessons for barefoot running lessons with? Well, Chris has a new book, Running with Sherman, it's so entertaining. It's about adopting a neglected donkey, teaching it to run and so much more. On the show we talk about everything from what you can learn from animals, so if you have a pet or love animals, this is definitely a great listen. Why having a purpose is important not only for animals, but humans too, how to run with a donkey, which is actually a real sport, and so much more. If you love animals and pets, you're in for a treat.

Shelby Stanger: I'm a huge Chris McDougall fan, he's become a good friend. Let's jump right in. I'm Shelby Stanger and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living.

Chris McDougall: So here's what happened Shelby, my daughter got in her head when she was nine years old that she wanted a donkey. That's a pretty bizarre request for any nine year old anyway, but in our case, it made a slight amount of sense because we live way out in the countryside in Pennsylvania, Amish country, there literally is not a house within viewing distance of our home, and our closest neighbors are Amish and Mennonite farmers. So, we've adopted sheep and goats and some cats over the years, but a donkey was next level. I wasn't completely taking it seriously, but I wasn't ruling it out.

Chris McDougall: Then when one of our neighbors told us that there was a guy in his church who had a problem with animal hoarding, and he had a donkey and they wanted to get it out of that stall, I'm like, "Yeah, all right, we'll take this donkey." The problem was, when the donkey was finally extracted from the hoarder and dropped off at our house, I had no understanding of what kind of dire condition this thing was in. It's hooves were like a foot long, it couldn't walk, teeth were falling out of its mouth, it was just completely matted. So we immediately just swirled into this last ditch rescue operation to just try to keep it alive. That involved a lot of things like trimming the hooves with a hacksaw and pulling its teeth and shaving its fur.

Shelby Stanger: Chris McDougall is a repeat guest of the show and a big mentor of mine. Before becoming a New York Times bestselling author, Chris was a foreign correspondent for the Associated Press. His fascination with the limits of human potential led him to write his first book, Born to Run an international bestseller, which changed the running shoe industry forever. His second book, Natural Born Heroes started with this story about the Cretan heroes of World War II and took readers through Chris's own quest for ancient techniques for endurance, sustenance and movement. His current book, Running with Sherman is my favorite yet, it has a much more personal touch and story. As you heard him talk about in that introduction, Chris's family adopted a donkey a few years ago. Adopting a dog is a big choice for some, but a donkey is something else entirely. This donkey named Sherman needed serious rehab, not just for his hooves and fur, but for his mind as well.

Shelby Stanger: You told us a little bit about who Sherman was, he was from this hoarder, you had to clean him, you had to cut off his hooves with a saw, and then you decide the best way to save this donkey is to teach this donkey to run. How did you even figure out that there was such a thing as burro racing? Was this from your research with Born to Run and maybe your experience with Leadville?

Chris McDougall: Yes, so what happened was, you know when there's an emergency your brain just sends out tentacles in every direction for something you might've experienced, they could somehow be relevant and save the day. So what happened was, when Tanya, our friend Tanya was trying to keep this donkey alive, because the major problem with any equine is, if it can't walk it can't digest, and it gets colicky very quickly and its intestines block up. So the major problem with Sherman was if we couldn't get him moving really quickly, then we would have to put him down.

Chris McDougall: So Tanya said, "Now look, you just can't stick him out in a field with a bow on his tail like Eeyore, you got to give this donkey a job, it's got to move." I'm like, what job am I going to give a donkey? I'm not a pioneer, what am I going to do with this thing? And then I did remember that about 10 years earlier, I had first gone to Leadville, Colorado to research the Tarahumara Indians who had come to Leadville and had triumph magnificently in the Leadville trail 100 back in the 90s. I went there to investigate that whole story, but while I was there, I met the race director Ken Chlouber and he told me about this Leadville tradition of burro racing. That's what first hooked him on Leadville, he was there to visit from Oklahoma and he sees a bunch of rowdies running down the street hanging on the ropes attached to a bunch of stampeding donkeys. It turns out this was the annual Leadville burro race, a 22 mile race, where people, men and women, have donkeys and you have a 15 foot lead rope, and you and the donkey run side by side up into the mountain and back again. You can't ride the donkey, you and the donkey are essentially race partners. So Ken had told me about this, and I actually went back that year and tried my hand at burro racing and I was dismal. I was too bad to even be last place, I couldn't even get my donkey to go the full route. But 15 years later I'm back in Pennsylvania and I got this sick donkey that needs a job, and the wheels start spinning. I'm like, "I wonder if I can teach this donkey how to run?"

Shelby Stanger: Wow. So this is a process of getting this donkey to run, it doesn't happen overnight.

Chris McDougall: I learned something really, I guess, useful about myself, but really embarrassing and humbling about myself, which is that, I like to talk, I like to tell a good story, but I'm not really a good communicator. That means communication is looking somebody in the eye, thinking, noticing, observing, listening, before you open your mouth. And I ignore every one of those five steps up to the open your mouth part. The thing about a donkey is, if you're going to persuade a Donkey to do anything, you've got to let the donkey think it was his idea in the first place. He ain't going to do anything unless he wants to, and he thinks you're following him. So now the problem is how do you communicate to this donkey

that it wants to go out for a run if you can't use language? And he's extremely distrustful and traumatized, and has hooves which have not been useful for eight years of his life. How do you transmit into this donkey brain that he thinks that he wants to get up tomorrow morning, go for a five mile jog. That's what I was faced with.

Shelby Stanger: I mean, I don't know if that's true, because you've written a lot of really great books where you had to be observant of other people, but sounds like you've learned a whole new level of communication with the donkey, which is useful in life. Having to have someone think it's their idea has always been a good thing in business, and it's a great thing sometimes in relationships, not manipulative but in a teamwork sort of way.

Chris McDougall: Yeah, there's a lot to unpack there. But what happened over time was I got absolutely nowhere with Sherman for quite a while. Sherman was not down to clown even a little bit. And when things started to change was when we started to recruit other partners. So, where we live, there's an Amish running club called Vella Shpringa, which is a Pennsylvania Dutch phrase for "let's run", and so our local Amish running club does a monthly full moon run. So under the full moon bunch of people get together at someone's farm and we all go on a five or six or 10 mile run together in the darkness under moonlight, it's awesome.

Chris McDougall: So I started to think, "Hey man, these Amish dudes not only are sizzling fast runners, I mean they're all sub three hour marathoners, but they know horses, they've been raising horses since birth, so these guys might be pretty good." So they all came out for a moonlight run, and we took Sherman out and another donkey, our neighbor Tanya's donkey, and Sherman was just like hall of fame instantly. And I thought, what's going on here? Is it the Amish dudes? Is it the full moon? What is it? And I realized it was all that and none of that. It was the herd, the fact that when we took Sherman out, suddenly he's surrounded by like 15 bodies, it was me and Tanya and her donkey and the Amish dudes and our friend Lori Klein, who's a great runner. And it just finally clicked in my head, man, that donkeys are herd animals. He doesn't want to be broken away, he's been alone for eight years in a box, man, he's been in solitary. The last thing he wants to do is be by himself. But you surround him with lots of runners and suddenly it's like party time.

Chris McDougall: It really adjusted my like keyboard, like my soundboard of my brain to dial up a couple of things and dial down others where I use my eyes more, and then try to deal with each creature on its level by what it wants, what it's reacting to.

Shelby Stanger: What I found so interesting in reading this book is there's this underlying thread of purpose, and when you give the donkey a purpose, when you gave certain humans and characters in the book purpose, things fell into place. I mean you've done all these books about human performance and survival and how we can be better at everything. What did you learn about our need for purpose and how that's so eminent for survival?

Chris McDougall: So I got to give a shout out right here to Alexandra Horowitz, she is this brilliant, first of all, she's an amazingly fluid and gifted writer, but she's also a psychologist who specializes in researching how dogs think. That's exactly, that's like the title of one of her books, How Dogs Think. So Alexandra Horowitz is probably the leading voice in dog psychology. She was giving a talk about an hour and a half drive from my house, and I knew she's going to be there that night. So I go racing over and I sent her an email and said, can I just get five minutes of your time? And she's addressing this auditorium with like 600 people in it, the last thing she needs is some sweaty, frantic dude researching donkeys to grab her in the lobby, "Let me just ask you a question real quick." I was Alexandra Horowitz's Wednesday night nightmare.

Chris McDougall: But she just took a second, took a beat, and she listened to my question, which was, now I've been told by Tanya that every animal needs a purpose, but I hadn't been told this by anybody else. And so I am doing everything possible to get Sherman to run, but in the back of my mind was this little nagging voice saying, "Maybe it doesn't want to do this, maybe he really wants to be standing in the field with a bow on his ass." And so I thought, okay, I'm just going to go up the chain of command and ask somebody who should know.

Chris McDougall: So I get Alexandra Horowitz in the lobby and said, "Look, here's the deal, we got this donkey, and my friend said, every animal needs a job. Do you think my donkey really needs a job, or should we just let him be, man, just chill and graze." And she said, "Yeah, listen, in the wild, when every creature wakes up in the morning and opens it's eyes and goes, okay, what now? What am I going to do to find shelter? What am I going to do to find food? How am I going to protect my kids? You wake up in the morning, and your first thought is, I got work to do, but now we domesticate animals, and we take away their jobs for them, or say we take away the jobs from them, or we provide the jobs for them. And so for cows or horses, we say, okay, listen, you know what? You're not a wandering bovine anymore, your job is just line up and then produce milk and then go out and have babies. So here's your job.

Chris McDougall: So for horses, you no longer tearing across the field, you're no longer, Spirit Stallion of the Cimarron, you're going to be like my jumping horse. But for a lot of animals, and particularly, you see people's dogs, they don't have any purpose at all, they have no job. So they wake up in the morning, they open their eyes, go, now what? And the answer is nothing. And so basically Alexandra Horowitz signed off, she's like, "Yeah, man, within the limits of what is humane and natural to the animal, if you give him a job and a purpose, you're doing him a huge favor."

Shelby Stanger: I mean, I think we're the same. When we wake up and we know what we're supposed to do or where we're supposed to go, we do a lot better than when we don't know.

Chris McDougall: I mean, I think that's the whole heartbeat of your podcast, man. That's exactly what Wild Ideas Worth Living is. It is this, not to degrade people who are doing

jobs that are nine to five-ish and indoors, but is definitely not a natural way of surviving for the human animal. To be inside a cube, staring at a diode screen, eating a salad out of a plastic shell over your desk, man, that is a far cry from skimming up a tree looking for coconuts. So I think that's it, is that you need that purpose and that purpose I think in its most beautiful state braids together the whole thing, man, it's your spirit, you know what makes you excited, it is your body, what makes the blood go through your veins, and it is the acuity of your brain that lets you strategize.

Shelby Stanger: All animals, including us humans, we need a purpose. When we come back, hear Chris talk about Sherman's purpose and how they went about training for this burro race. Plus hear him talk about the physical and emotional benefits animals can bring us.

Shelby Stanger: I'm a big base layer fan, especially when temperatures drop and I need to go for an early morning run. This is why I was excited Smartwool released new intraknit technology for base layers this season. The company basically took 25 years of knitting expertise and combined it with brand new technologies to create 3D knit garments, they're designed to give wears complete freedom in high intensity activities. What I like best is their specific ventilation and installation zones, which keep your body temp stable and articulated flex zone so you can basically move freely in areas like your elbows and knees without your base layers bunching up or restricting you. I also liked they're made with virtually zero waste production using the finest, responsibly sourced Merino wool that's super soft and feels good. They're ideal for high intensity activities where you move between extreme exertion and rest, activities like running, hiking and skiing, and even snowboarding. You can buy the new Smartwool Intraknit Base Layers exclusively at rei.com through October, just search Smartwool to find the product.

Shelby Stanger: Chris and his family were not the only ones impacted by Sherman's presence, a family friend Zeke Cook was having some serious issues with depression, he had to drop out of school and when Chris found out he was back home, Chris had an idea that might help Zeke and Sherman at the same time.

Shelby Stanger: So there's this character in your book that I became really fond of, Zeke. So Zeke's a college kid and he has really bad depression, but he becomes your training partner when you want to race Sherman. From what I know, Zeke was a swimmer all through high school as a kid swimming like four hours a day or more. And then when all that stopped when he's in college, he goes into a really bad depression. His sister who also swam that same pretty grueling schedule for a kid also experienced depression. The third sibling did not swim, doesn't experience it. And you find a lot of studies, I mean there's tons of studies that talk about why so many high caliber athletes get depression after they stop training for a huge event or they stop their training regimen or they get injured. We can talk about how animals help with this, but so much of your books are on performance. And I relate to this just there's been times when I've injured and it's really hard for me.

Chris McDougall: Yeah, again, it's one of these things that is such a ball of spaghetti of factors that... I think the most frustrating thing about it, is I just wish they would call depression something else.

Shelby Stanger: I agree.

Chris McDougall: And it is so aggravating because it is so hard for lots of people to distinguish between a potentially lethal medical condition and feeling bummed, because your boyfriend didn't call, and the medical condition is so dangerous and so little understood that it just aggravates me. You've got to call it something else, this is not the blues, this is something that can kill you and you don't know what to do about it, and that's a scary thing about it. You're looking at Anthony Bourdain, Dave Chappelle has this whole thing, man, if Anthony Bourdain had depression, what hope is there for me? But clearly Anthony Bourdain was one like the gifted children on earth, nobody's more charming, better looking has like the greatest freaking job in the world. And for him to succumb to depression, it was not about Anthony Bourdain had a bad week, it's Anthony Bourdain had a bad chemical imbalance.

Chris McDougall: So with Zeke and his family, it was a similar thing. You meet the Cook family, they're better looking than everybody, they're cooler, they're funnier, and yet they really struggle with depression. And I'm not saying that to be actually facetious only that I really love the Cooks because they are that, they're the best friends, they're so kind, they're always the life of the party. Zeke's mom, Andrea Cook was the nurse at our kids' preschool, and her two kids, Zeke and Ashley, the two oldest kids were really, really like national caliber competitive swimmers. After they stopped, then suddenly became this nosedive into serious mental health and behavioral issues leading to both of them having very life threatening episodes, and everyone's like bewildered, like why? You guys especially are so young and you have so much to live for, and that's when on a personal level, it finally sank in for me that man, this is a scary mystery that needs extremely careful care in order to save people's lives. And we're just super lucky that Zeke came to us when he was struggling and had the good fortune that at that time we are really struggling with Sherman, and Zeke shows up and with the kind of brain he has, man, it's like a super neuroscientist, he just graduated college, I think he actually developed a machine to go to a different time warp or something, because the kid is unbelievably smart. But he looked at Sherman and is like, alright, that's it, this one's mine. And he just took Sherman on as his own personal project.

Shelby Stanger: So there's this other thing about the book that I really liked, and it's this history of how humans have really relied on animals to help us not only physically, but there's this big emotional component as well. So we all know that there's equine therapy and if we go on an airplane now, there's a lot more animals as emotional support animals, but there's this line in your book and I think it's where you end up and I don't want to give too much away, but you end up at a Cracker Barrel and you have your donkeys and people come up to them and pet them and you just say animals bring out the best in people. But there's this

history that you figured out, that's really interesting. Can you just share just a little bit about it?

Chris McDougall: I just start to make the connections, like there's this uptick in security animals, therapy animals. I've read stories about bizarre improvements in the health of cancer patients when they bring cats in for them to pet for some reason, people get better and they respond better to medication and they bring dogs into classes with kids who have autism, and all of a sudden the behavioral changes are amazing in the kids.

Shelby Stanger: Oh yeah, my sister's, I have a niece who is on the spectrum, and she was crying the night, she was staying at my parents house, so grandpa's house, and she was crying that she missed her mommy and her brothers and they just sent these little Labradoodles that they've trained so well that are adorable up to the room, she stopped crying, and she just was totally out of her own head and laughing and smiling. So yes.

Chris McDougall: I love the fact that somewhere there's like the bat cave, there's like a bat cave full of Labradoodles waiting for the signal that just send them off.

Shelby Stanger: It was, it was pretty amazing. Just the Labradoodles, if she's with an animal, she's just so happy. It's wild. But there's this stat, I want you to keep going with the whole - all of the animals and how they bring out the best in people, but there was one stat that if you could help me remember, someone showed a study where a woman slept next to her husband, she had anxiety, and the anxiety was reduced.

Chris McDougall: Yes. I don't have the study in front of me, but there was a study about whether people slept better or worse with a partner beside them. And so this is the, I believe it came out of the Netherlands, I think it was a Dutch study, and basically canvas a thousand women and said, okay, so do you sleep better or worse with your husband or boyfriend or partner next to you? And like 40% of them or 35%, said, Oh yeah, I sleep a little bit better, I'm not as restless I report feeling more rested, I wake up fewer times in the night, but then they did the same thing with a thousand people who slept with someone other than human. And most cases it was a dog and it was like 85%, said they sleep way better with the creature, with the dog than with their own husbands, or partners or basically romantic interests.

Shelby Stanger: Yes.

Chris McDougall: And so, you could say, well, maybe it's because the dogs don't thrash around very much. Anybody's slept with a dog realize they're all over the freaking place, man, these things are not just lying there, they're living out their own best dog life in your bed at night. So it's not that they're inert. And again, this got the wheels turn is what I started to research was our anthropological history, and what becomes blindingly obvious when you think about it for a second is that

our greatest sense of security in the primitive world were our animal partners, the second we began to partner up with animals, then suddenly our greatest worries were relieved. So animals were our hunters, they were our early warning detection systems, they were our overhead guides if we were hunting with hawks, cats are super nocturnal creatures, so if you're sleeping in a cave, and you've domesticated a cat, that cat can see in the dark and can let you know if a predator is approaching. We could ride horses after prey to get food, and we could ride away from predators to protect ourselves, we could have animals grazing. So essentially, millions of years ago, when we began to domesticate animals, when animals were close at hand, our greatest survival fears were relieved. And so you knew that if you had your hands on your domesticated dogs fur, that you could close your eyes and rest well. And this became hardwired into our natural ecosystem, into our own psychology, we began to associate the presence of a domesticated creature with a sense of food, shelter, safety, nutrition, everything we need to stay alive. And so, one thing that's super important about how our brains work is that anything that is beneficial for our survival is going to be rewarded with a hormonal charge. So anything that your body wants you to keep doing, it'll give you a little treat to make sure you do it again. That's your whole idea of a runner's high comes from, when you exercise, it's good for your physical being, so your brain gives you a little bit of a giggle, a little dopamine charge, little dopamine, little serotonin to tell you, "Hey man, that one you just did make sure you do it again tomorrow." And we do essentially the same thing with our partnership with animals. Our bodies realized that having animals around was a really good way for us to survive. So our brains became wired, to give us a little charge, a little bit of dopamine, little happy hormone drug just to reinforce that behavior, so we keep doing it.

Shelby Stanger: How long ago did we start domesticating animals in history?

Chris McDougall: I forget the exact number, but it's been hundreds of thousands of years.

Shelby Stanger: So you did learn a little bit about animals and humans and how animals can help humans emotionally. We talked a little bit about, emotional support, but what else did you find in your research that people are doing with animals, that's pretty cutting edge?

Chris McDougall: It's across the board. So what I did when I started this project, I talked to Alexandra Horowitz, I was seeing it in action in our own home as my own temperament was starting to soften and change. I was seeing the benefits to Zeke, I was learning a lot from my Amish neighbors. It's funny, I'll go over some times to pick something up from a neighbor if I needed a tool or something, and I'd find them five o'clock in the morning, just leaning on the fence, just looking out at the cows, and I'd say, "Oh is something wrong? Has it given birth?" He's like, "Nah, nah, I'm just looking." And I thought, it's funny, we get up in the morning and what do we do? We grab for our phones, right? And we flip through our phones. This guy walks outside and looks at a bunch of cattle.

Chris McDougall: So the wheels are turning, there's more beneficial going on. So I started to do this series for the New York Times where I just traveled around to find people that were partnering with animals. And I met Jenna Woginrich, who left her graphic design job to become her own one woman farmer, and she also hunts with hawks, she traps hawks and then trains them to hunt for her. And I met a woman up in Michigan who has been raising zebras now for half her life and raises and trains zebras. Talking about kids on the spectrum, I started to research this guy named Rupert Isaacson, who wrote this amazing book called *The Horse Boy*, about his acutely autistic son who responded dramatically to exposure to horses. And essentially, where I found was getting out of the lab and into the field, scientists will just crack their brains with all kinds of studies. But what I was finding was out in the field, people don't have time for this studies, they're just putting it into action and having amazing results.

Shelby Stanger: I think all this, I mean, they call it alternative medicine, alternative therapy, but it works. It's really interesting. But I think what's also fascinating me about your book is not only did you study animals, but you live in Amish country. So you're this guy from, aren't you from Philly?

Chris McDougall: Yeah, man, hardcore Philly.

Shelby Stanger: You're from the city, and you go to the Amish country where people are still driving horses and carriages and you've learned some interesting lessons from them.

Chris McDougall: This is a whole alien culture, man, this is like me being dropped off in the face of Jupiter. I didn't know anything about this culture, I never expected to be living anywhere near them. And I'm pretty aggressively anti-religion across the board, I just think it all should be just wiped out, just forget it's a pain in the ass and a joke and the cause of all human misery. So I'm showing up with a group that shares none of my background, none of my social customs and none of my religious beliefs. And yet really early on we started to get along very well. I think the reason why is I dig a good story, I like a good storyteller, I like someone who's willing to just tap the brakes and stop and just tell me something cool, and that's what the Amish are all about.

Chris McDougall: So the Amish, they don't have screens, so they're not watching TV, they're not talking on phones, they're not checking on Instagram, their entire entertainment complex is built around talking to each other. So if I stopped by a farmer's place to borrow a wrench and he's looking at the cows, I'll just hang out for half an hour and just find out what's going on. Then his brother will come out and his kids will come out, next thing you know like five of us, 10 of us having a little chat, and I'm on my way. Where we live too, it is an unbreakable social custom that you smile and wave to everybody you see, no matter how many times you see them and how far away they are. So there's one guy, Sam Messer, my closest farm neighbor, he drives by my house about 15 times a day in a tractor, and 15 times a day he's waving like he hadn't seen me in a year, and I'm waving back. It's funny, I go to New York and if I'm running in central park

and I see people, I'm like waving to them and they're like, Whoa, what the fuck do you want? So what I found with the Amish, essentially the key, the whole purpose of their faith is that the centerpiece of life is the family and the local community. And the reason why you have a horse and buggy isn't because God said so, no, it's because you have a vehicle which travels too far too fast, you get too far from your home, you get too far from your base. So a horse and buggy only goes 10 miles an hour, so you basically stay close to home. You don't take a job as far away, you don't go far away, you don't impulse just drive around.

Chris McDougall: The reason why a telephone is out in a box in the field is because if you decide you're going to make a phone call, it better be worth it because it's four degrees outside. If you want to walk across a cornfield and make a phone call, you better really want to make that phone call. There's no screens and no movies and no television, because you spend your time doing your crafts, your family, and then you rest. So I just find myself naturally really adopting a lot of what they do.

Shelby Stanger: It sounds like their food is really good too?

Chris McDougall: Well man, I'll tell you, if you're out at five o'clock in the morning milking cows, man, you're going to have a whopping breakfast. So yeah, everything is funny. Again when you think of everything that we feel like, Oh, it's a brand new discovery, kombucha, fermented foods, locally sourced grains, dude, Amish been doing that since 1700s, they've been fermenting stuff and thinking global and eating local. The other thing too, everything is seasonal, so you get super stoked, like when it's strawberry season, everybody's got strawberries and are amazing and then they're gone. So you just like chow and then you're done.

Shelby Stanger: So basically the Amish were hipster before hipster was hipster?

Chris McDougall: Uh-huh.

Shelby Stanger: So how do you actually train a donkey for a race? It's not like you can tell the donkey to, "Hey, increase your mileage by 10% this week and do some hill repeats on Mondays." It's not like they know when to push it or lay off on a race.

Shelby Stanger: How is training for a donkey race just so much different than that of an ultra marathon, just in terms of the actual training for yourself?

Chris McDougall: It was cool, so Solomon had two of its elite ultra runners, Max King and Ryan Sands, I mean these guys are just man eaters, dominant in ultra running. Had to come out to Colorado and they paired him up with a woman named Meredith Hodges, who is by far the preeminent mule and donkey trainer in the world, the best burro racers go to Meredith Hodges whenever they have a problem, and they teamed them up with two extremely streamlined experienced and fast burros. So you've got the two fastest ultra runners, their best trainer and the two best burros. And they put them in the world championship pack burro race

and they got their asses kicked. I mean there was Al Walker, like 60 years old, and he beat these dudes, there was a 16 year old girl who beat these dudes across the board. One guy finished dead last and one guy finished middle of the pack.

Chris McDougall: I saw this and I was watching it with a little bit of dread for the, Oh man, if these guys just go out and just cream the field, then everything I've been doing for the past year was worthless because I'm trying to train this donkey, all I had to do was just get a fast donkey. When I saw these guys suffer this humiliating loss, it made me feel good that the purpose was right, because it's not about anything that you want, it's about what the donkey wants, and if you can't tap into that dude you're in for a long day at the office.

Chris McDougall: What I learned from running with the donkeys is just that man, you've got to understand them where they respond to this, and make it the combination of factors where they're digging it. Ultimately, this never would have worked if - I never could have imposed my will on Sherman, that was a losing battle right from the start, no way it would have worked. So what I had to do instead was keep changing the factors and swapping things in and out until it all happened naturally. So we brought Zeke on board and then my wife Mika, and then Flower and Matilda, and we brought the Amish dudes over and our friend Ruby, and we just kept swapping things in and out until it just became this very natural thing where now if I'm not at the gate at nine o'clock in the morning, I hear the donkeys banging their heads against the gate, like, let's go dude, time to go. They're ready to do it.

Shelby Stanger: Makes you run too?

Chris McDougall: Yeah, exactly. That's the thing about it, they're into it, they're going for it. I think ultimately in the end, if I can take this global lesson from it all, it is that you can't just put your head down and bull forward in your job, relationships or whatever, at some point you just got to keep changing the factors around until it just feels good and it all flows. When you're training with a donkey, you're going the donkey's pace and you can learn to adjust that, you can get the donkey to go faster or slower over time. But essentially the donkey is going to do what it wants to do when it wants to do it, and it's going to stop when it wants to stop.

Chris McDougall: You can modify that over time, but what I found was really cool with the donkey training is that it was so much more relaxed, it was so much more rhythmic and there were so many unplanned stops along the way. If donkey gets to a creek, well, it's going to slow down, it's going to smell the creek, even five minutes of just dealing with the creek before you go into the water. And what I found was that over the course of two years of running with donkeys, I feel so much better, like more resilience and less sore and beat up from my running. And I think the thing that coaches always tell you, they always tell you, "Run below your anaerobic threshold, get your heart rate down, right?"

Shelby Stanger: That's so hard to do.

Chris McDougall: You never do it. You never do it. And I think Eric Horton told me this back in the Born to Run days, he's like, you're doing your easy days too hard and your hard days too easy. You're never where you think you are. Donkeys get it man, you run with a donkey, you're putting the same miles but you're going to feel so much better.

Shelby Stanger: Totally. Thank you because I've been injured all year, just training and then I get injured and then I run too hard and then I get injured and I really want to do at least a marathon, let alone an ultra marathon, and I know you went straight to just an ultra marathon, so there's still hope for me, I'm just always broken, and I run a pretty fast mile, so it's confusing. But what I was going to say is, I don't think that donkey burro racing is going to take off like crazy. I mean the barrier to entry for that sport is a lot different than the barrier to entry just for an ultra marathon. Getting a donkey to Colorado isn't easy.

Chris McDougall: Oh man, it is a total ass-ache, hauling that thing 3,200 miles. But what I'm seeing more though is that there's a thing called DogFit and Canicross in the UK. So Canicross is basically cross country with canines, but they're really systematizing methods for people to run with their dogs. So they have waist harnesses, so you put around your own waste instead of holding the leash in your hands. What people are trying to do is perfect ways for people to run with dogs. My friend Louis Escobar, he had this video which went super viral, he had like 20 million views immediately, because he took his high school cross country team to a rescue shelter and had the kids run with the dogs, and oh my God, it was just heart melting. This one kid, the dog got tired so the little boy, it's really like handsome young Latino kid, picks this little dog up in his arms, and at the end of the video, Louis reveals that that boy actually went back with his mom that afternoon and adopted that dog.

Shelby Stanger: That's so cute.

Chris McDougall: I know, right.

Shelby Stanger: Any advice to people who just want to have, I don't know, better relationship with their animals, themselves or get into burro racing?

Chris McDougall: Well, the funny thing was one of the people I interviewed is a controversial figure in animals, which is Cesar Millan.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah, the dog whisperer.

Chris McDougall: Yeah, man. So Cesar Millan has a huge following, but has also been a pushback. There are certain dog behaviorists who challenge his methods, they think he's too aggressive. As an amateur, I dig the guy and I went out to his dog psychology center and interviewed him and hung out with him and I was first was just blown away by his personal attention. I sent him that video of my friend Louis Escobar running with the rescue dogs and I said to Cesar Millan and

I said, "Hey, would you mind if I bring this friend of mine down?" And he's like, "Yeah, sure man, no problem." When we got there, he had that video memorized and as soon as he met Louis, he's like, "Hey coach, good to meet you. Let me tell you..." And he just started to break down what all the kids were doing with their dogs, and is like, this kid did this and he should've done that. And I was like, holy Christmas, this guy is serious about his profession.

Chris McDougall: But essentially you can boil all of Cesar Millan secrets, all the millions and millions of dollars he's earned, all the thousands of dogs he's trained, it all comes down to one thing, which is just walk your dog, man, just walk your dog. You watch his show, and I've watched dozens and dozens of episodes, he's amazing, but he'll be over at Jerry Seinfeld's house or Oprah's or Tony Robbin's house, and these are people who are masters of persuasion, and Cesar Millan is like, "Tony, you just got to walk your dog, man." "Jerry, you got to walk that dog."

Chris McDougall: So basically what he does, he just exercises and I think that's unfortunately the secret of life that a lot of us ignore, just get out and shake your ass for a couple hours.

Shelby Stanger: Get out and shake your ass for a couple of hours. Whether it's just breathing in fresh air on a break from work, or taking your pet on a run or even a walk, get outside, preferably with an animal by your side for some quality company. If you don't have your own pet, you can go to a local adoption center, but take the time to snuggle up with your furry friends for your own mental health. And remember, keeping them happy helps keep you happy.

Shelby Stanger: Thanks so much to Chris for coming back on the show. This book was so much fun, I laughed so hard during our conversation, Running with Sherman hits shelves this October, so grab a copy, it's out right now and go meet Chris at his book stops on the book tour, he'll be there for fun runs, videos, activities and more, and maybe even do a video call with Sherman. I'm definitely going to hit his event in San Diego, so look him up at [chrismcdougall.com](http://chrismcdougall.com) to find out where. We're also going to try to go for another surf session, and if we do, this time, I'll try to get pics and not lose my camera and post them on the Instagram account.

Shelby Stanger: To all of you writing reviews, thank you. It takes less time than making a cup of coffee and it fuels this podcast. So thank you so much to all of you for writing great reviews on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and wherever you're listening to this show. This podcast is produced by REI with help from Annie Fassler and Chelsea Davis. Tune in the week after next for an episode, all about recycling, common myths about it, how we can do it more mindfully, and other tips for your everyday life. As always, I appreciate when you tell a friend or 10 and you subscribe to this show wherever you're listening. And remember, some of the best adventures often happen when you follow your wildest ideas.