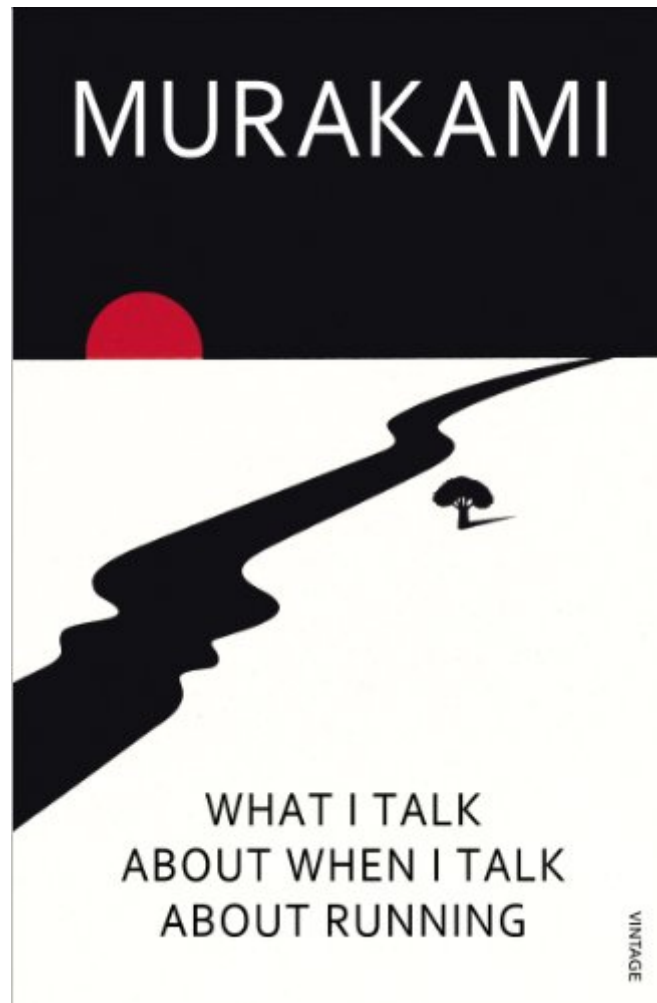


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# What I Talk About When I Talk About Running



## Synopsis

In 1982, having sold his jazz bar to devote himself to writing, Murakami began running to keep fit. A year later, he'd completed a solo course from Athens to Marathon, and now, after dozens of such races, he reflects upon the influence the sport has had on his life and on his writing. Equal parts travelogue, training log, and reminiscence, this revealing memoir covers his four-month preparation for the 2005 New York City Marathon and settings ranging from Tokyo's Jingu Gaien gardens, where he once shared the course with an Olympian, to the Charles River in Boston. By turns funny and sobering, playful and philosophical, this is a must-read for fans of this masterful yet private writer as well as for the exploding population of athletes who find similar satisfaction in distance running.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Murakami, 58, authored 15+ novels, many highly acclaimed. He has received many literary awards and honorary doctorates. I have read and thoroughly enjoyed most of his best selling works (including my favorites: Kafka on the Shore, Norwegian Wood and A Wild Sheep Chase). In reading this book, I had come to learn that Murakami had completed 25+ marathons, 1 ultra marathon (60+miles) and 5+ triathlons - this is a truly extraordinary accomplishment. Murakami is humble,

candid and straightforward exposing his mistakes, flaws and shortcomings - - one passage: "But this wretched story of feeling I had as I stood in front of the mirror at sixteen, listing all of my physical shortcomings, is still sort of touchstone for me even now. The sad spreadsheet of my life reveals how my debts outweigh my assets." You get into his mind and his incredible determination to complete marathons and triathlons - feeling the sun baking his skin and the water filling his lungs - yet he keeps his feet and arms moving despite his mind and body telling him to stop. You also learn about the impact that advancing middle age has on his performance times and that they are no longer improving despite a rigorous training regimen - "even if, seen from the outside, or from some higher vantage point, this sort of life looks pointless or futile, or even extremely efficient, it doesn't bother me. Maybe it's a pointless act like as I've said before, pouring water into an old pan that has a hole in the bottom, but at least the effort you put into it remains. Whether it's good for anything or not, cool or totally uncool, in the final analysis what's most important is what you can't see but can feel in your heart.

I have not read any of Murakami's novels (this may change soon), but in his short stories he often employs subtle nostalgia for his characters' pasts. Often this nostalgia blurs the line with philosophy, and after reading *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, it became apparent why Murakami enjoys crafting his fiction this way: his style of writing mirrors his perspective on life. After traveling the world, training for and participating in marathons and triathlons, Murakami wants to share his runner's experiences and how they have molded him and his perspective on life. He presents us with a thought-provoking and entertaining narrative (some of it culled from journal entries and old magazines articles he wrote years ago, but most of it original stuff). The book is 1/3 travelogue, 1/3 self-help, and 1/3 runners guide. We read about the running environments and typical weather patterns where Murakami has trained: New York, Boston, Japan, Greece. We read about the mental discipline and courage it takes to be a long-distance runner. But, most of all, subtly emerging on each page, we read about Murakami the philosopher. His favorite topic is the merciless and stubborn passage of time and its effects on the body and mind. He writes candidly about his thoughts on training as he grows older (Murakami was in his late 50s when he wrote much of the book). He writes about what he thinks about as he runs (usually nothing); he writes about discipline. To paraphrase one of Murakami's favorite quotes (I forget the source): "...pain is inevitable; suffering is optional." Murakami tells us that he was neither a natural novelist nor runner. He has had to work hard at both, but both are things which require a steady effort, skills with which Murakami prides himself.

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