

→ she explains. I love that, too.

I suppose all of this is less a revelation than a rediscovery. It's funny how, over enough time, even people in strong relationships can forget these fundamentals, or take them for granted. Eventually they just blend into the background, like picture frames hung up for so long the sun has stenciled their outlines onto the wall.

These runs have reminded me of something else, too—just how much of an escape running can be. Like most married couples—especially those with young children—Sarah and I lead fairly hectic lives. It's difficult to find time to really *talk*, in the same way I imagine it's difficult to find time to play chess in a rugby scrum.

Running is a magic portal away from all of that. It mutes the background noise and provides a literal change of scenery, almost instantly.

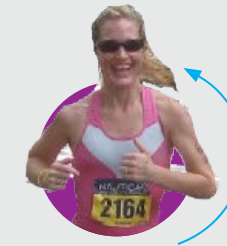
It's strange, feeling as if you're "catching up" with someone you live and work with. But that's what our runs feel like.

Moments after we break from a walk into a jog and then a run, the stress and the chaos recede. And then it's just Mark and Sarah, husband and wife, side by side and close enough to hold hands.

It's strange, feeling as if you're "catching up" with someone you live and work with. But that's what our runs feel like. They've become our time to reconnect. We talk about the usual mundane stuff—kids' birthday parties, errands we need to run, what we should do for dinner that night—as well as heavier things like work, family issues, even politics.

This is what we do in lieu of "date nights," I guess. (Though we *will* finally start scheduling those, really, any day now.) When you're married, dates with your spouse can seem contrived and laden with expectations. My runs with Sarah are →

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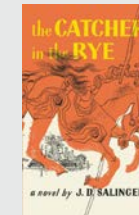


RUN IT BY ME

BOOK IT

Author and runner Kimberly McCreight picks novel running partners.

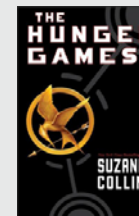
→ **For New York Times** best-selling author Kimberly McCreight, running and writing go well together. "So many of the lessons I've learned from running—how to develop endurance, the importance of having faith in the process, and the necessity of learning patience with yourself—I regularly apply in my writing," says McCreight, whose acclaimed *Reconstructing Amelia* will be adapted into an HBO film produced by and starring Nicole Kidman. McCreight, a mother of two who logs her miles in Brooklyn early before her family wakes up, ran the New York City Marathon in 1998 and again in 2015. Her latest work, *The Outliers*, the first in a teen trilogy, hits bookstores in May; its film rights have been acquired by Lionsgate. Here, McCreight picks young-adult characters whose company she'd most appreciate on the road. —CHRISTINE YU



SEEKING A VENT SESSION
RUN BUDDY Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger
"Whether I have an 18-mile training run planned or a quick three-mile loop, the beginning of any run is always the hardest. Knowing that this is just part of my process helps. So does complaining, a lot. For this, I'd pick Holden Caulfield because he would so not be bothered by my incessant complaining."



SEEKING A WISE ASS
RUN BUDDY Cath Avery from *Fangirl*, by Rainbow Rowell
"Runs have their ups and downs. 'This too shall pass' is my motto, but humor can also go a long way. For these times, I'd want Cath Avery by my side. Cath wouldn't be cracking annoying jokes, though. She'd help me view life through her sly, smart-funny lens—just the thing to get through the gnarliest wall."



SEEKING A BADASS
RUN BUDDY Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins
"Sometimes I need to be encouraged to move outside my comfort zone. I need a running partner who is tough and strong, one for whom there are no obstacles. The choice here is clear: Katniss Everdeen. She saved her sister, her people, and the fate of mankind. And she was a brave badass the entire time."



SEEKING AN OPTIMIST
RUN BUDDY Auden West from *Along for the Ride*, by Sarah Dessen
"Things can turn bleak when I'm pounding the pavement. When doubt is creeping in, I'd want to have Auden West with me. Auden is an optimist. It's precisely because her optimism is so genuinely hard-won that I know she'd help me find a prick of light even in the longest, darkest runner's tunnel."



SEEKING INSPIRATION
RUN BUDDY Wylie Lang from *The Outliers*, by me! Kimberly McCreight
"On the days my predawn alarm feels like a sick joke, I need a running partner to inspire me, like my own Wylie Lang. Wylie overcomes huge obstacles, courageously facing her fears to race off into the unknown and to try to save her best friend. If she can do that, I can haul my butt out of bed."