

## **Solitary Nation with Matt Duhamel**

### **The Running Man: Charlie Engle's Redemption (Episode #3)**

<http://solitarynation.metamorafilms.org>

[music plays]

[recording] Charlie: We have a sixth team member with this and the amazing thing is she's having absolutely no problem keeping up with us without any \$100 shoes or anything else. I think she's right behind me.

[music plays]

Matt: Well, thanks for joining me. My name is Matt Duhamel with [Solitary Nation](#). Another great episode this Tuesday. We are talking with ultramarathon runner [Charlie Engle](#). Charlie, thanks for joining us.

Charlie: It's my pleasure, Matt. Thanks for having me.

Matt: You're welcome. A lot of interesting things throughout your life, and I basically just want to start off by having you just introduce yourself and kind of, if people are not familiar with your story, just give us a summary.

Charlie: Sure. I'll keep it pretty brief. I grew up in North Carolina, an only child of very young parents, and they were perpetual students themselves, and so I grew up in this very adult world. My mother was a writer and so a lot of people over to the house all the time, and during that phase of my life I started to actually drink a little bit and discovered very early on that I liked that. And when I went to college years later and had the freedom to do as I pleased, one of the things that I pleased to do was to drink and to party, and I spent the next ten or twelve years of my life trying to dig out of that hole, usually just making it deeper. At 29 I found a way to finally get myself clean and sober through a recovery program and I put on my running shoes. I had been a runner as a kid, and I started running at 29 and I ran 30 marathons in the first three years of my sobriety. And then I just started to do longer and more difficult things and since then I'm happy to say I'm 24 years clean and sober at this point. And as I always say -- and I'll finish up -- is that sobriety doesn't guarantee an easy life. So just being sober didn't stop good or bad things from happening to me in life just like everybody else, but being sober actually really helped me through those things.

Matt: Running. I tried that. I am not a good runner. I do not like running for some reason.

Charlie: You don't have to be good.

Matt: I love hiking. I love hiking in the mountains and getting out in nature, but running is a challenge for me. It's always been that way. On your website you wrote on a blog recently and it says "For me, writing is a lot like running," because we are going to talk about your memoir that came out here in a second. You said "Writing is a lot like running. I need to put words together the same way to get in some miles." So what did you mean by that?

Charlie: Writing has become something in my life, and I came in to writing -- I mean, I've always been a writer, but I started writing [Runner's World Magazine](#) and now I've written a memoir, and what I've discovered during the process was this cathartic activity. So when I sat down and I was able to actually connect enough to dump all of my feelings, if you will, and thoughts on paper -- or on paper, as the case may be -- and it gave me a cleansing of sorts, and running did that same thing for me. I knew how to do it with running. If I was having a good day, bad day, having a lot on my mind, whatever, I could go out for a run. A 30 minute or hour-long run would just clear all the fog and my mind would get in order and what I would learn was to do that same thing with running. And when I can sit down for a couple hours and just write and get it all out, it feels like I've made space for something else.

Matt: Yeah, so it's like an emotional release. The running, a natural high. The writing, expressing yourself -- getting your emotions out, really.

Charlie: As an addict all I did was hide all of that, so for a lot of years in my 20s I spent an incredible amount of effort, money and time trying to squash all these emotions, and now my goal today is to be as in touch with those things as I can be. Both running and writing allow me to do that.

[recording] Charlie: 24 years ago, I was a drug addict and an alcoholic. I was born into that pain. I didn't choose it. Today I'm a runner.

Matt: I do want to, of course, talk more about your writing and running because that's why we're here, but we do need to mention some things that happened, and I just want to get your opinion, your thoughts, on what occurred. I believe this happened in 2009 where you did spend, according to this article, sixteen months at a federal prison for -- you were found guilty of twelve counts of bank and bank and mail fraud, wire fraud, in connection with the real estate scam. So you have this experience from prison. How did you make it through that time? How did you get through it?

Charlie: Well, I mean, in a lot of ways it's the same as what we just discussed. I was clean and sober for nineteen years. It was 2010 when I got arrested. I'd just come out with a second film called [Running America](#) about a run across the United States that I had done, and literally the next day I get arrested and charged basically with overstating my income on a home loan application. So that's the specific thing that I was charged with doing. And I went to trial and fought it and not many people went against the feds and I was not one of them. And I didn't

know any better. I just knew I didn't do it and I knew it was being blown way out of proportion. I knew I needed to fight. But sobriety and running actually taught me how to deal with really difficult circumstances, and compared to my years of addiction even going through this nightmare was nothing. So once I knew for sure that I was going to prison, I wrapped my mind around that the same way as not drinking and doing drugs and I accepted it. And I decided, as much as I was allowed to, that I would find a way to make the most of it, and I knew that running would be part of it. I knew that writing would be part of it. I read more than a hundred books. I went there and I just did what I always do, and interestingly what I found was a lot of other inmates that didn't have the kind of opportunities I've had in life were really attracted to the running. So I ended up getting this incredible gift of having people who'd been incarcerated for 20 or 25 years come up to me and say "Hey, can you teach me how to run? Can you tell me how to do that?"

Matt: I guess I'm wondering -- you're a huge success. Matt Damon produced a documentary called [Running the Sahara](#) before your arrest, so you're very well known in this industry, I guess you could call it. And then you were arrested and it was all over the news. Do you ever get angry and are you worried about what other people think of you, that they don't see the real you? They just see that snippet of the arrest and they don't see what you accomplished, and the true you and the father that you are because you've got sons. How did that work for you?

Charlie: That's a great question because I certainly was angry when it happened. I was shocked at the swiftness of judgement from people. In general, friends stuck by me but even they were like "You know, everybody does it." This and that. "This is so unfair," and I'm like going, "Look, that's all well and good, but I've done some crappy things in my life. This wasn't actually one of them. And that as much as we as a country like to call ourselves fair from a criminal justice system and innocent until proven guilty, it is the exact opposite -- guilty until proven innocent. If you are accused, if you are arrested and indicted, you are treated like a guilty person, and if you dare to fight the feds as I did, if you dare to go to trial, they will double and triple down and try their hardest to make whatever punishment you get even worse. So it took me a while to wrap my mind around all of that and to try to get an understanding of how this happened.

Matt: You're still running a lot. You're doing these marathon runs. How has it been since?

Charlie: It's been hard. Anybody that comes out of federal or state prison, or whatever it might be, understands that it's really difficult to get work and it's difficult -- people look at you differently. And I certainly understand that I have a great advantage over a lot of guys, so I tried not to feel sorry for myself ever when I got out because I knew I had the ability to make a comeback and what I did was start running. I kept my shoes on. I started doing races again. I started just living my life.

[recording] Charlie: And I choose to feel every step that I take and to appreciate with incredible gratitude any pain that I might be feeling, knowing how lucky I am to be feeling anything at all.

Matt: It seems like that's the hardest thing, is worrying about what society and other people think of you, and that's something that needs to come from within the person and to move forward with that and say hey, I made a mistake. Forget about it. I mean, I'm not going to forget about it, but let's move on. And I can do positive things.

Charlie: Well, that's up to society too, right, because the people, me included, whether I made a mistake or not -- I've gotten past actually having that debate anymore. The reality is what happened to me happened and I spent this time in prison, and when I got finished, when it was over, it should be over. You should be allowed to get on with your life. People should be allowed to pick themselves up the way they talk about in this country and be able to go on about their lives. And for me I did that and I doggedly stick to the fact that this is my life and it doesn't matter what happens to you, all that matters is what you do with what happens. People need to remember that.

Matt: That's completely true, and you are doing a lot of things and positive things. Tell me about this, the latest -- I don't know if it's your latest -- but one of your runs. The ice breaker run. What did that involve?

Charlie: It was a relay, so there's six of us, but each of us ran about a marathon per day for 24 straight days. But the whole purpose of the run was for mental health services because addiction -- and this really applies to guys and girls getting out of prison because [PTSD](#) is a huge issue coming out of prison and obviously you hear about PTSD as it relates to military service members coming home, but it happens to firefighters and policemen and people who have been in prison, and these are the kind of services that need to be offered and more available for people so that they can get past these mental health issues.

Matt: When you're running do you forget about prison? Do you forget about addiction? Do you forget about your problems and you're just there in the moment? Is that why you enjoy it so much?

Charlie: Yeah, I think that's a very good way to put it, but I also -- I forget maybe the wrong word -- put it in perspective because when I did drugs and I drank years ago that was all about forgetting. Running is all about being present, and so I may take that thing -- maybe I had an argument with my wife or my father or maybe I had a coworker say something. Whatever it might be, for me I get to go run it out. I go run and, yes, I'll replay the conversation, I'll sort things out. I'll probably sort it out where I win the conversation, but once I'm finished with the run I'm finished with the debate. I'm finished with prison. I'm finished with addiction. I use it almost as a meditation, in a way, to just be present in the moment and try to take things as they come and recognize when bad things happen you have a chance to make it right.

[recording] Charlie: We want to show others out there that they can fight through anything, they can become anything. They just have to keep moving along and appreciate the feeling of being alive.

Matt: Was your book just released a couple days ago?

Charlie: It was, so September 13th was the publication date. And Simon and Schuster -- actually Scribner, which is a print of Simon and Schuster -- published it. I feel incredibly lucky to have them.

Matt: Well, that's awesome. You get to tell the whole story, not just the stint in federal prison. And I think we need to hear more of your story, a success story, someone who goes to prison, made a mistake, gets over it. You're not a horrible person. Not all people who go to prison are horrible, dangerous, or crazy running around the streets hurting people. They can do their time and change things. And look what you've done. You've done fundraising, you do these marathons, you're a writer and you're a speaker, too. You're a public speaker, motivational speaker, so I think this is wonderful. We need to have more stories like this, don't you think? We hear always the negative stuff in media.

Charlie: The vast majority of people in prison are there for nonviolent crimes, and prisons were never meant for -- we built prisons in this country a long time ago to put people that we were afraid of and we've become a country putting people in prison just because of every little thing and it's not what it was ever intended for. So people need to have a real opportunity when they come out to prove themselves. That's all anybody wants, is just to have a chance.

Matt: Yeah, I agree. I agree with that. Any runs or any projects coming up that you want to mention?

Charlie: Yeah, man. I've always got some bad idea I've ruined. So I'm doing a 100 miler in China, rural China. In November I'm doing another 100 down in Daytona Beach, Florida and December. Then I'm going to go to Cuba in the spring and actually run across Cuba. I've always got a dream, and my dream right now is to put together -- it's called Dead Sea to Everest. It's lowest to highest because I think it's a great metaphor for my life and a lot of people. I want to go from the Dead Sea, which is the lowest place on Earth, all the way to the top of Mount Everest by human power. I think it's important for me and for other guys, especially who've been incarcerated, to keep dreaming and to keep going after those things. And there's lots of good people out there in the world that are willing to help people that want to do good things.

Matt: If people are interested in buying your book, where can they find it? And do you want to mention your website and blog?

Charlie: Absolutely. So kind of the one stop shop is my website, which is [charlieengle.com](http://charlieengle.com), but you can find the book. We're selling like crazy on Amazon. It's on the top of the bestseller list there at this point. Barnes and Noble, right now it should be on the second table when you walk into Barnes and Noble. Books-A-Million. It's just a story, though. It's just a simple story about the

complexities of life and of running and how anything is possible. It's very much a redemptive story, and everything is possible.

Matt: Well, thank you so much, Charlie Engle. I really appreciate it. You are an inspiration to many, many people and to myself, as well, and to I'm sure many of my viewers and listeners. Again, your book is called [The Running Man](#). Thank you again, and thanks for talking with us. My name is Matt Duhamel with Solitary Nation. I'll see you next Tuesday with another interview.

[recording] Charlie: The feeling of being alive, and stop hiding behind drugs and alcohol and mental illness and shine a bright spotlight on all of it. Trust me when I saw it gets better.

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