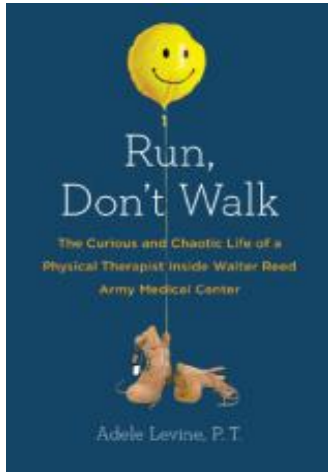


# Run, Don't Walk: The Curious and Chaotic Life of a Physical Therapist Inside Walter Reed Army Medical Center

by Adele Levine



## About the Book

From 1909 to 2011, Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., provided care for injured American soldiers. During the hospital's last ten years, intensified military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan combined with better body armor and trauma care made Walter Reed the world leader in amputee rehabilitation.

Adele Levine, P.T., worked as a physical therapist in the hospital's rehabilitation department from 2005 to 2011. She hadn't always wanted to be a physical therapist --- she had enrolled in physical therapy school mostly out of hopes it would lead to a reliable job, and had applied to Walter Reed because it was across the street from her apartment. Suddenly, Adele found herself on the front lines of the mostly unseen struggle to rehabilitate some of the most devastating battle injuries from the War on Terror.

From outside the glass walls of the hospital's physical therapy clinic, nicknamed the Fishbowl by Adele, politicians and celebrities peered in daily at the therapists and patients, often visibly taken aback by the sight of their missing limbs and painful recoveries (4,158).

Inside the Fishbowl, however, the physical therapists cracked jokes and helped sneak in cookies and cheerleaders, while the patients compared stumps and wore "I Had a Blast in Afghanistan" t-shirts (21). It is here that Adele, Jim, Darcy, and all the other physical therapists used exuberant cheers, playful teasing, \$5 plastic cones, and exercises pulled from *Men's Health* magazine to battle apathy and desolation and get patients back on their feet.

Hundreds of patients came to the Fishbowl every week, including soft-spoken, recent immigrant Kai who soothes his wounds with chocolate (23), brain-injured but good-natured Juan who was intent on perfecting his walk (167), and the combative Pigeon, who insisted on working out to the brink of exhaustion to help him feel like a soldier again (213).

However, it is Cosmo that makes the biggest impact on Adele. A young and foul-mouthed soldier, Cosmo comes to Adele missing one leg. His journey to rebuild his life leaves him a double amputee, but ultimately allows him to live on his own terms, and in peace. "Life was his again," writes Adele (156), and it's Cosmo's new life that makes her realize how far she's come in building her own.

Outlandish, honest, and ultimately uplifting, *RUN, DON'T WALK* chronicles Adele's work rehabilitating soldiers for their lives outside the historic walls of Walter Reed, and how her work helped Adele find her place within them.

## Discussion Guide

1. Many of the soldiers' injuries were described in great detail, such as the description of Cosmo's injuries (11-12). Did you find these descriptions upsetting? What does it say about Adele that she can describe them so casually?
2. Were you surprised by how any of the patients dealt with their life-changing injuries, from Kai's chocolate binge (23) to Pigeon's breakdown, not over his missing limbs but over the sudden appearance of love handles around his once-trim torso (214)?
3. Why do you think Adele decided to work so hard to earn her OCS certificate, even though she knew it wouldn't lead to a promotion or higher salary (156)? Have you ever undertaken a similar project?
4. Cosmo's antics often frustrated Adele, and he was frequently the subject of staff meetings focused on "bad boy" patients (165). Do you think Adele thought Cosmo was a "bad boy"? How did Cosmo feel about Adele? How can you tell?
5. To help "handle the chaos, we turned everything into an exaggerated joke," writes Adele of the amputee clinic. Have you ever used humor as a defensive mechanism like the therapists do? Is it ever inappropriate to do so?
6. Have you ever tried to help someone who has what Adele calls a victim mentality (192)? Do you agree that people who view themselves as victims cannot be helped by others?
7. In the chapter called "The Donor" (221), Adele describes her father's illness and death, and her role as the donor of the ultimately unsuccessful bone marrow transplant. Why do you think Adele chose to include this part of the story in the book? What insight does it give you into her character you wouldn't have had without it?
8. Adele says the pool employees who helped carry the soldiers up and down the stairs to the pool when the elevator was out were like heroes to her (219). What act of heroism or goodwill stands out the most to you in this book?
9. Following a bout of dreams filled with amputees, Adele believes working at Walter Reed "was changing me" (152). Do you think her time at Walter Reed changed Adele? How so? Were you surprised she decided to stay on as a physical

therapist at the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, after declaring at the start of the book it wasn't her calling (6)?

10. When Cosmo tells Adele about his trip to the White House, she notes that many people he encountered probably forgot the country was at war until they came face to face with Cosmo? (14). Do you feel you were aware of the human costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? How did coming face to face with the characters in this book alter your perceptions or opinions about the wars?

## Author Bio

Adele Levine is a physical therapist who holds both a masters and a doctorate in physical therapy from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, and is a board-certified Orthopedic Clinical Specialist. She worked at Walter Reed Army Medical from 2005 until its closure in 2011, and then continued to rehabilitate war amputees at the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. She lives in Wheaton, Maryland with her partner, Ashley, and their two sons.

## Critical Praise

"Adele has captured the unique, frenetic, protective world that was Walter Reed Army Medical Center from 2003 until its closure in 2011. Her dedication and the dedication of all who labored mightily there to save and rebuild our Wounded Warriors' broken bodies and detoured lives is an overlooked part of modern warfare. Reading this book brought me right back to the hours I spent on a treatment table surrounded by my fellow Wounded Warriors as we pushed each other, using grit, gallows humor and even bribes of cookies in order to face yet another day of pain on our road back to our new futures. Read this book to gain a window into an aspect of combat and a cost that our troops, their families and their caretakers must bear that is no less heroic than those of the battlefield. "

?Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth, Iraq War Veteran, former Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs

?RUN, DON'T WALK captures the essence of what it was like to be at Walter Reed during its darkest days. And it is told by one of the true un-sung heroes of the wounded from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: The Physical Therapist. It is heartbreaking and hilarious. Levine captures the disappointments, the heartache and the triumphs of the injured troops and the spirit of those determined to save them. Truly a remarkable book that tells a side of the war story very few ever witness or live to tell about.?

?Cami McCormick, CBS News Correspondent

"I've never read anything like RUN, DON'T WALK, except possibly the first chapter of CATCH-22. Humor heals, comforts, and saves. Don't take my word for it. Read this magnificent book."

?Josh Hanagarne, author of THE WORLD'S STRONGEST LIBRARIAN

?An amputee rehabilitation center is a crucible of emotion, and this book throbs with the pulse of a human heart. The characters are hilarious, harsh, eccentric, brave, and real, portrayed with tenderness and unflinching honesty. Yet Levine moved me more with what she didn't say. A master of understatement, she paints a picture of what it's like to work at

this strange job, patching up broken soldiers only to be sent back to war --- and tells her own story, setting her own sorrows and struggles beside the pain of her amputee patients.?

?Lydia Netzer, author of SHINE SHINE SHINE

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