

Not a Matter of Miles
By SARA ALGASE
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**Zoe Koplowitz's 'lessons from last place' teach others
that nothing is impossible.**

Zoe Koplowitz has gained national attention as the world's slowest woman marathon runner. At 25, she was diagnosed with relapsing/remitting multiple sclerosis, a degenerative neurological disease with no known cure. For 24 years now, she has battled its unpredictable and debilitating symptoms, including profound muscular exhaustion, motor skill problems, and speech and vision impairments.

But Zoe has used her disability to prove to herself and others that nothing is impossible when you set your mind to it. She sees marathons as a metaphor for life.

"Most people run marathons every day of their lives, at their jobs, with their families," she says. "You can pursue your dreams with all their ups and downs, or you can fall by the wayside. It's not a matter of miles. It's a matter of commitment and strength." Her new book, *The Winning Spirit — Life Lessons Learned in Last Place*, tells the story of her own trip down that road.

As she has for the past 10 years, Zoe challenged the New York City Marathon on Nov. 2. "It was hard this year," she says in her understated way. There was a torrential downpour that "seemed to last forever." New York's Guardian Angels had to ride alongside her to protect her through remote parts of Brooklyn in the early morning hours. Rain fell on and off all night and through the next morning. Zoe finished at 30 hours and 23 minutes — dead last.

"There is nothing particularly special about me, except that I'm a reminder that nothing in life is impossible," Zoe says. "If I can do something undoable, others can, too. And if I represent anything to people, it's the keeper of the dream." Zoe chose her own name while still in her 20s, on a quest for spiritual fulfillment — *Zoe* means life.

Her strong message about life has encouraged many inner-city children. One school was so overwhelmed by her story from the *Today Show* that they helped raise money to buy two wheelchairs for two other marathon participants with MS.

Now Zoe visits more than two dozen schools to teach lessons about self-esteem and confidence. She also spends countless hours on the phone talking to people with MS and their families about coping with the disease. And she is the spokeswoman for the MS Society's annual MS walk, its largest single event to raise funds for further research and program services.

"I've become like a post-it note that someone can stick to their refrigerator that says, 'You can do it,'" Zoe says. "I feel the purpose of my soul is to tell my story. Everyone will take from it what they need. If I can achieve my own goals and do something that matters to other people, then I'm blessed twice."

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For information about the National MS Society, call their hotline at 1-800-FIGHTMS (800-344-4867).