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A writer, a runner, a journey

His life a mess, Robert Andrew Powell began running. Where to is the focus of his new memoir, which he'll discuss May 5 at Books and Books.

By Nick Sortal, SouthFlorida.com

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He was disappointing his father, second-guessing his divorce and practicing slothful habits in Miami. So writer Robert Andrew Powell sold everything, moved to Boulder, Colo., and laced up his running shoes. advertisement

The result: a developed taste for running and a therapeutic memoir, titled, very aptly, "Running Away."

Powell, who returned to South Florida and now lives in Miami Beach, will appear Monday, May 5, at Books and Books.

Powell's good, hard look at himself begins with his decision to move to Boulder, a runner's paradise of training clubs and gold medalists. He said he would attempt to qualify for the Boston Marathon in a year — just as his father did. But he was 50 pounds above racing weight, and didn't really like running. Couple of big problems there.

So he adopted his father's devotion to a daily routine, and found running to be an excellent metaphor for life. You get what you put into it, and the results are yours and yours alone.

"I didn't set out for transformation. I didn't aspire to write self-help, but yeah, it was an important period in my life and a necessary one," says Powell, 45. "Running is a good activity for a memoir, because when you run, you're in your head."

Powell spent from February 2007 to July 2008 in Boulder, then started the book a few months later, relying on journal notes. No publisher wanted it.

"Running has helped me with everything in my life," he explains. "It doesn't matter. It's my responsibility, and I've gotta deal with it."

The book lacked a publisher, so it sat in his hard drive from 2009 to 2013. When Powell encouraged his agent to try again, Amazon had entered the publishing business. Within a week, they had a handshake deal with Amazon's New Harvest division.

"Running Away" is Powell's third book. He grew up in Chicago, and moved to South Florida for writing jobs. While at Miami New Times, his expose of the Miami High basketball program's blatant recruiting prompted officials to void the school's 1998 championship. Today, he is a freelancer, with multiple articles in the New York Times and the sports site Grantland.com, while also a contributing editor of

Howler, a quarterly soccer magazine.

Powell has continued to run, although he'll never train as rigorously as he did in Boulder. He says he "got what was coming to him" at January's Miami Marathon, covering 13.1 miles in a personal-worst two hours and three minutes. But that was 18 minutes faster than his then-77-year-old father.

"My whole incentive was, 'I can't stop, because he'll pass me,'" Powell recalls. "It was like being chased by a wolf. But he's still kicking butt. He got third in his age group."

Robert Andrew Powell will appear 8 p.m. Monday, May 5, at Books and Books, 265 Aragon Ave., in Coral Gables. Call [305-442-4408](tel:305-442-4408) or go to BooksAndBooks.com.

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