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Robyn Stevens has the need for speed...walking.

It's what she was destined to do. She takes on the persona of her favorite superhero, Supergirl when she hits the race walking course. Her grit, fearlessness, determination and her underrated nature play to her advantage against her opponents. [Just ask Kevin Hart and Keegan-Michael Key](#), who tested Robyn and lost in their race walk attempt on Hart's "Going for Gold – 2020 Tokyo "Tryout" episode on his "LOL" network.

Those same qualities helped her place 33rd in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which was 27 spots better than where she was seeded going into the race, which was outside of the top 50 race walkers.

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Steven's journey has been a walk, and not a run – a marathon, and not a sprint. She retired from the sport officially in 2004. However, she said she mentally checked out of the sport in 2003. It was a decision that she had to make for her own well-being.

"I said goodbye to that person," she says. "I had to get to know me again and reconnect with myself."

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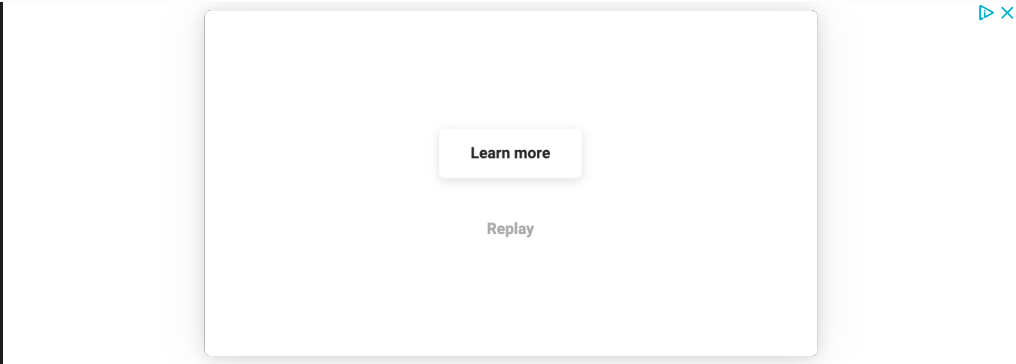
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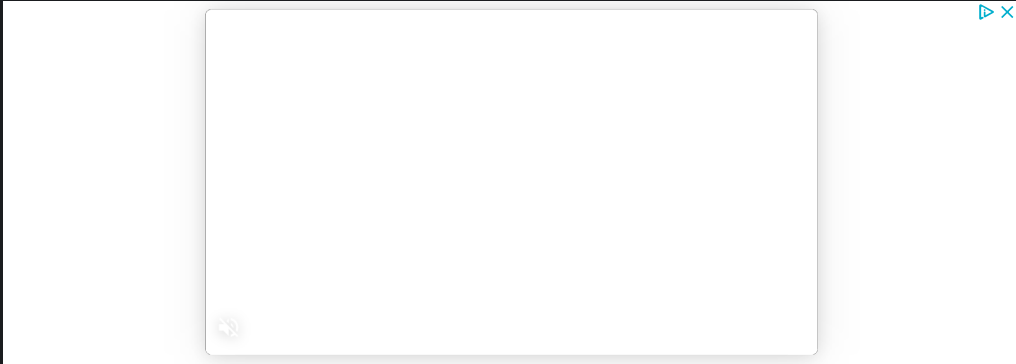
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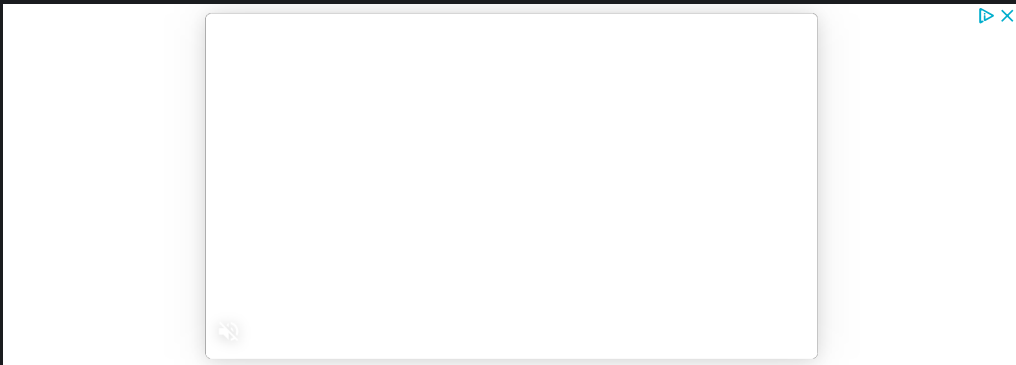
Stevens said that during that time, she was constantly punishing herself and wouldn't allow herself to experience success. Her reason for punishing herself came from the feeling of disappointing so many people who had invested in her throughout her career.

"I think it was that because I walked away, I had felt like I disappointed all the people who had been on that journey with me," she says. My parents – all of that money, all that time, all that energy that they invested in me. And I knew I had to do it. For my health, I knew I had to do it, you know, choose life, and that was good, it was the right decision."



"..I had made a promise to myself before that, I had promised myself in high school, that I was going to make the Olympics, not just for me, but for my parents, because of all the energy that they had put into me."

When it came to her health, Stevens suffered from an eating disorder in college that she did not know about or understand at the time. She said that she went through a body transition in college that was delayed.



"So it's not like I went through it in middle school in high school like a lot of my other women peers," she says. "So it's not so it's like if we're all going through at the same time, people are asking similar questions, we're able to kind of relate and talk about it, I'm going through it, way late, I have no idea what's going on. And there's no one else that seems to be going through it that I know of. And so I'm not really sure how to talk about it. And because of that, my body feels different."

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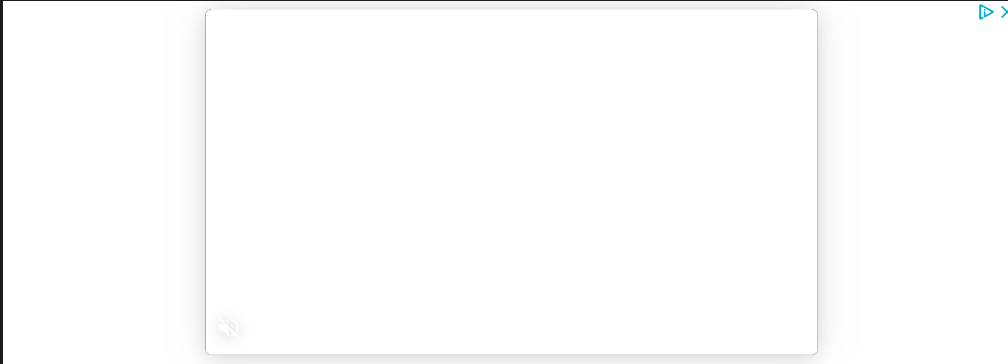
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When Stevens was in college, she recalls living on \$3 daily and would try to buy 2000 calories worth of food with that money, which equated to ice cream sandwiches. Stevens' body wasn't getting the essential nutrients that it needed from optimal sources, so it would hold on to the fat, which caused her to look heavier.

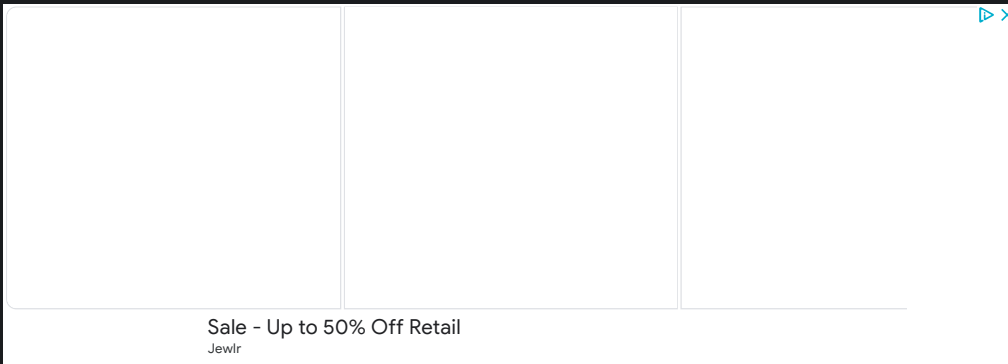


"So most people would think, oh, she had an eating disorder, she should have looked really skinny," she said. "No, I actually was the heaviest I've ever been. And that's the body I'm holding on to because it doesn't know what it's going to eat."

Stevens' disorder turned into bulimia and describes it as more of a body dysmorphia because she didn't like what she was seeing in herself. It took her five years to get to where she felt she normalized again, which led her to step away from the sport completely.

While she said that she was initially embarrassed by the disorder, by sharing her story, her former teammates started to reach out to share their experiences as well.

"I was embarrassed, and I think that's why so many of us who have struggled with disordered eating are afraid to speak up about it, or, we don't reach out for help, which is why I'm glad a lot are now like the ones that we have some of the ones I follow that are they are getting themselves checked in," she said. "They're saying I need help. And I'm so proud of that because it's so important."



Stevens had written off race walking completely after she retired. But in 2014, a head injury brought her back to the sport and showed her that her journey was far from over.

On March 8, 2014, Stevens walked into a door frame and suffered a minor concussion. For four months, she suffered from static migraines. At the time, she'd started running with the Wolfpack Running Club, but Stevens had to follow her doctor's orders and stay away from running.

"She didn't want me on a bike. She didn't want me running. She basically didn't want me doing anything," she said. "I wasn't even allowed to just jog across the street to beat a car just because any of that could cause the brain the swelling to hit the skull and it could be bad for me. So she's just like, 'Yeah, I just don't want you to do anything for four months, except that you can go to the office and work.'"

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She was inactive from March until July. But that September, she competed in what would be her second ever 20k race walk. Her results from that race gave her the qualifying time for the 2016 Olympic Trials and gave her the qualification standards for other international events, such as the World Team Cup. Her results showed her that there was still more to come for her.

"So when they told me I had qualified, you know, I was just like, okay, well, not really sure what some of these things are, she said." I know what the Olympic Trials are, so I guess my story's not done. I guess there's more."

"I never thought I was going to return, But there are all these little nuggets that were gradually being planted from that date from that September... things just started to fall into place that these strong signs and subtle signs telling me my story's not done and my body has a lot more than it wants to show me I can do."

That was only the beginning for Stevens. She's competed in the World Team Championships in 2016 and 2018, along with other international meets across the world.

Her boyfriend Nick Christie, who also made the Olympic team in the 20k race walk, trains with Stevens in California. He admires her tenacity and humility, especially with all of the obstacles that Stevens has overcome.

"..I don't think a lot of people recognize that that's a pretty difficult thing to be able to know. You're at this level but then you got to sit here for like a year or two till you can get back," he said. "And I think a lot of athletes struggle with that, especially coming back from injuries and stuff and that kind of tenacity with Robin and that ability to keep that focus going forward and everything is really, really good, like something really admirable."

The toughness, humility, determination and tenacity that Stevens shows in the face of adversity doesn't surprise her mother, Carolyn Stevens, who said that her daughter becoming an Olympian is elating for her as a mother.

"She has a lot of grit and she can do anything she wants to do," her mother said. "And I've always told both her and her sister if there's something you want to go for it. And I always saw that in her as even as a very small child, that she could do whatever she wanted to do because she always excelled. If she wanted to do something, she made it happen."

Robyn said she had to learn to love herself during her struggle, and that the race walk helped with that. She believes that acknowledging the different struggles that humans go through shows strength and that it's something that should be celebrated.

"But we all have our struggles, we all have our things that we deal with, we all have families with various struggles of their own," she said. "And the more I think people can be brave enough to just celebrate that because that's what makes life beautiful, and humankind and just everything just really beautiful. Because without those challenges, we can't really appreciate the triumphs and the beautiful parts."

On June 26, Stevens walked through the finish line as a winner on N. 5th St. The first person to greet her was her mom, who whispered in her ear "you're an Olympian." As tears streamed down their faces, the reality was evident. In that moment for Robyn Stevens, a dream chased was a dream that was fulfilled and a dream delayed wasn't a dream denied.

Graphics by Katherine Burgess – [Follow her work on Instagram @katherine_kart](#)

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