



Chooper's Guide & BreakingTheCycles.com
INTERVIEW WITH
MICHAEL HERBERT



To dream anything you want to dream, that is the beauty of the human mind.

To do anything you want to do, that is the strength of the human will.

To trust yourself to test your limits, that is the courage to succeed.

-Bernard Edmonds

“Until I was in the race, I didn’t believe in the race,” says Michael Herbert. “The same was true of recovery. Until I got into it, I didn’t believe it was possible, but once I started, I just stayed. Recovery was just too good to give up. The same was true of the race.”

Tim Cheney, co-founder of [Chooper's Guide](#), and Lisa Frederiksen, founder of [BreakingTheCycles.com](#), sat down with Michael Herbert, CAC, CASC, ICADC at [Caron Renaissance Treatment Center](#) in Boca Raton, Florida to talk with him about his recent race, his recovery, and his plans for Racing the Planet: Jordan 2012.

TC Describe this race – what was it like?

MH It is called the Sahara Race and is a seven-day event, covering 155 miles, through the Sahara Desert (Egypt) in temperatures that reach as high as 50°C / 122°F. It is a self-supported race, meaning runners carry all of their food, clothing and equipment (water is replenished at Race checkpoints) on their backs. This race is one of the 4 Deserts, named by *TIME* magazine as one of the Top 10 Endurance Competitions in the world.

TC What prompted you to run a 155 mile marathon through the Sahara Desert?

MH In part, my recovery. The race did not make sense, how could someone run six marathons in 6 days? I just couldn't wrap my head



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around that. Just like recovery it did not make sense. Not using even on the weekends and holidays, you mean nothing? Staying clean seemed impossible just like this race.

Recovery helped me to see that my dreams can come true. I'd always been a day dreamer, but addiction and all that comes with it got in the way of ever really doing anything to make them happen. So it was being in recovery that caused me to think, "That'd be fun. I can do that," after reading an article about desert runs in a *Men's Health* magazine. I did a primitive living course in the desert, and it changed my life. I realized that I could do things I'd imagined doing. I could move beyond my daydreams.

The other motivation was fundraising. After the primitive living course, I ran the Lewa Downs Wildlife Conservatory Marathon in Kenya in 2008. I chose that one because I wanted to run a marathon and go on a Safari. It was through the Savanna jungle with untamed wild animals "everywhere," and I swear that race seemed all up hill!

Runners of races like the Lewa Downs or Sahara often raise money through these events to benefit a cause they believe in – for me, that was Caron's Scholarship Fund. I raised \$7,000 for that race and found that I liked fundraising. So, I decided to run the Sahara Desert race to raise additional funds for the Caron Scholarship Fund and collected \$43,000 for Caron.

TC But why such a grueling race?

MH In part it was to raise a greater sum of money – 155 miles vs. 26 miles, but then I also wanted to help people in recovery see there is a great deal out there to do, and that it is good to dream, but then you need to set the dream in motion – get in the race, so to speak. Often people in recovery see life as being restricted to going to therapy and meetings, but there is so much more – anything you set your mind to.



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TC How do you train for such a race?

MH Well, first of all, I'm not an athlete – I never played professional sports. And I was 51 when I ran the Sarah Desert. I was 278 when I started training for that race and dropped to 238 through eating clean – only fruits, vegetables and meat, and the only sugar I had was in my coffee. I've since gained it all back, and I'm training differently for the Jordon 2012. I only eat vegetables and proteins (no fruits, this time) and eat six meals a day. I'm working to get stronger in my upper arms/body/back through cross fit training and want to get under 220 by October. That way, I'll go into the race stronger and lighter – my goal is to finish it in the time allowed

LF You mentioned you carry everything on your back. How is that possible for a 7-day run in the desert?

MH I got all of my gear down to just 20 pounds, believe it or not. I have an ultra light backpack and inside carry my sleeping bag, headlamp, backup headlamp, compass, knife, safety pins, space blanket, signaling mirror, windproof jacket, running/trail shoes, electrolytes for seven days, blister kit (you wouldn't believe what goes into that alone!), seven days of 2000/calorie/day running food – basically that's dehydrated meals, carbo powders, soup powders, rehydration salts, running shirt, running short, long sleeve shirt, Gators, lip balm, sunscreen – there's more, but I'll stop here -- it's amazing really what all we can pack into one of these backpacks

LF Where do you put your mind during the race?

MH I listen to mindless dance music on my iPod. Then I'll switch to other music that's a little deeper to get myself into a meditative state; and at other times, the music gets so annoying that I focus on that annoyance which then pushes me through. The other thing that helps is to remember I can't stop. There is no way I can just give up because I'd



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have to tell all the people who believed in me – who donated to my cause – that I quit. I just couldn't do that and focusing on that message helps, too. I have to say, though, that the last three hours were the worst. Once I saw that finish line and that people had crossed it, that's when it got really hard. I had to really stay focused on my not giving up. Sort of like recovery – you're in it and think you've got it done or it gets routine or a feeling like "this is it?" – that's when it gets hard and that's when you have to push through.

LF You said you ran the race in Tevo's – how in the world did that happen?

MH I ended up in Tevo's because my feet swelled so much in my sneakers, I couldn't wear them anymore. It's a funny story how I came to have the Tevo's – one of those higher power things, I'd say. You see, I'd planned to bring my flip-flops as my change of shoes for the nights, but my dog ate mine the week before the race. I had a \$40 gift certificate from Sports Authority and headed over there to buy new flip-flops. They didn't have any. I looked at the Tevo's which were far more than I'd planned to spend, but I had this gift certificate – free money, you see. I bought them and thank goodness I did because once my feet swelled up, I could no longer wear my sneakers. And, believe it or not, I was the only person who finished with only one blister. Amazing, really.

TC Michael, when all is said and done what do you want to be remembered for?

MH I want to be remembered as a guy who helped and cared about people; a good friend; a good human being, but most of all, as a good son. You see, my mom had three kids by the age of 21 and was divorced by 22, yet she went to nursing school and worked hard, always worked hard, to put us in private schools where we got an exceptional education and foundation for speaking. The ability to speak clearly and correctly really carried me though. I never went to college, but if you listen to me



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you'd think I had a Masters degree. For that, I want to be seen as a good son; as a credit to my mom and all of her hard work and sacrifice for me and my brothers.



Follow Michael on Facebook as he prepares for his 2012 race.



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