

Betsy Cortes
Cross Country Runner
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Lam: Could you please state your first and last name and what sport you do?

Cortes: Yes, I am Betsy Cortes, and I do cross country.

Lam: When did you start doing cross country?

Cortes: I started cross country my sophomore year. Or like the summer before sophomore year. Because I had a friend who I was just like, you know, just hanging out with her. And she was like, you know, you should just come to the summer training. Like, you meet a lot of friends and you'll have fun. So I was like, okay, I don't really have anything else to do this month. So I went and it actually wasn't that bad. And I met a lot of people. And so I just kind of started coming back. And by the end of the summer, I felt like really prepared. So I decided to sign up for the season and see how it goes.

Lam: What are some of the struggles you faced while doing cross-country running?

Cortes: I faced a lot of challenges. The biggest one is probably motivation because at first I did running because it was like, why not, you know? I didn't have another, like, better thing to do. So I just kind of went for it. But over time, I feel like you either start hating it or you start loving it or a mix of both. For me, I first started hating it because I was like, I'm so tired, or I'm sore, or I don't want to go out in the cold. But I think if you take a break from it or if you kind of just give it time, you start realizing how much of an impact it has on your life and how much you actually enjoy being out there, feeling the wind, feeling your legs, all that stuff. Like it kind of falls into place after a bit, and for me, that definitely happened. And now I'm really attached to running.

Lam: How would you say cross-country has changed you as a person?

Cortes: As a person? Let's see, there's a lot of things. Like there's a social aspect because I have met a lot of people through cross-country, and they've helped me become a better person, either through just the conversations I've had with them over runs and stuff, or because it made me realize things like, you know, knowing when to push yourself, when to take a step back if you have injuries, and also just cheering for your teammates and getting to see everybody beating their PRs. Meaning like their personal records, it just makes you really happy. And it creates a really big sense of togetherness and that kind of just fulfills you and it makes you feel like, you get more comfortable with people, you get more outgoing and it just, you're just really happy.

Lam: Would you say community is the biggest reason why you're doing cross-country?

Cortes: Yes, community. It was community that actually helped me continue running, because at some point, I wanted to give up, especially like after or during meets that you just want to give up. It's not all fun and games, especially during a race in the last mile. You just, it's so painful that you just want to jump off the course, hide in a bush or something. And it's real, like everybody feels that. But if you see your teammates cheering for you, which they always are, then that kind of pushes you to keep going. And also you want to see your training pay off. You want to see yourself beat your previous record, get faster, make progress. You want to see that. And because of that, you push yourself in a healthy way. And I think that makes it really fulfilling.

Lam: Do you think cross-country has improved your self-confidence?

Cortes: Oh yeah, for sure. I think cross-country is probably like the number one confidence builder for me. 'Cause before I was like, I guess, well, not really insecure, but I was more like, not sure that I was a person who could, like, make such big improvements. I always just assumed that people were either born with talent or not born with talent, and depending on how much talent you had in a given area, that would define how you would succeed in it. But for cross-country, like even though I started like everybody else, like barely even being able to run like a mile, going at a really slow pace. Over time, I saw that, like all the effort I put in, it started paying off. I started getting faster. I started being able to run longer and started feeling more comfortable around people, learning my ways around the Los Altos Hills regions and becoming just a lot more knowledgeable about like myself and exercise and what I like to do and all that stuff. So I think, it definitely has helped me become more confident and realize that it's not just about talent, it's more about how much work you put in and that everybody can improve because running is something that everyone can do it. You don't really need to be like super tall, like for basketball or something. It's just everyone can do it and everyone will improve. And that's just super rewarding.

Lam: Have you done any other sports before?

Cortes: Yeah, I do ballet. I've been doing that since I was eight years old, so it's been like more than half my life now. And with cross country, I have, it's become a crazy mix, to be honest, because on Mondays I run, Tuesday's ballet class, Wednesday's is ballet class, Thursday run, Friday ballet, Saturday ballet, Sunday run. So.

Lam: That's really impressive.

Cortes: I mean, yeah, I feel like I really like both of them, so I try to fit them in and it works, you know, three days a week for running and then four for ballet. And during the season it's four days for running and three for ballet.

Lam: So how would you say the community in cross-country differs from that in ballet?

Cortes: There is a huge difference. I think that's the first thing you notice is community, because in ballet, while you can build really close relationships with people, it takes a lot of time and also

just, you know, shared experiences, because in ballet more like you focus on yourself and it's not really a group effort as much. Whereas on the cross country team, it's like you do a bunch of like team building activities. You always spend new times with each other, chatting, on runs you always talk with each other, during races, you're always supporting each other. And all that stuff. And this is another thing. But like in ballet, to be honest, it's a lot more competitive, I would say. And there's a lot of rules and often it can create a very like harmful environment. I've been lucky where it's not, like, where I go, it's not very, like, I guess, the people don't, like, hate each other, and they're not doing all those stereotypical things where like, people are putting glass in each other's shoes and stuff. I've heard of that happening, but it's not, that doesn't happen. It's just like it's very nice. The only thing I will say is that the teachers are really, really harsh in ballet. And, I mean, they're preparing you for the real world because if you want to go into dance, it's a very harsh reality. So it's kind of hard. Like with them, I never really lived up to their expectations. I still don't, and that's been one of the things that actually pulls down on my confidence. And whereas with cross-country, like the coaches are really supportive, they totally understand with injuries. And I feel like, it's kind of like, it has the opposite effect. Like they kind of build me up and that kind of confidence that I got from cross country helped me more like, I guess, be confident in myself in ballet, and continue improving and focusing more on what I want to work on rather than what I want the teachers to see, if that makes sense.

Lam: That's really interesting. You mentioned injuries. So how do you usually deal with injuries?

Cortes: With injuries, so the best thing you can do and the number one thing is just take a break. It's definitely hard. Like right now, I'm injured and I haven't been able to run since last Monday, so I'm really sad about that. But if you do not take a break, it will get worse. You will continue feeling it and it'll really start taking the fun out of running because all you'll be able to feel while you run is your leg, or your hip, or whatever. You'll feel it hurting and it won't stop hurting and it'll just get worse. So you have to just really know when to take a step back and give yourself time to let your injury heal. And also you can't forget to do other things like icing and stretching, rolling it out, massaging and, you know, applying tape or other like medications if you need that. It's sometimes hard, like I would often forget. I'd skip all that stuff if I don't have time. But it is really important and everyone will get injured at some point. It's just a given. You just have to deal with it and in time you'll be back and you'll be stronger, and then you'll be even happier to be running.

Lam: Do you think you face pressure in ballet to push through injuries instead of letting them rest?

Cortes: Yes. There's, I mean, I feel like if you're also like in varsity cross-country, like if it's the number one thing, if you have a certain goal, injuries just detract from that and you will push through them. In ballet, it's definitely been more about hiding the pain, not just injuries, but in general. You could be hiding mental struggles or long term injuries, illnesses or just the regular day to day wear and tear on your body or a bunch of blisters from pointe shoes that never really heal because pointe will always hurt. That's just a fact. And in ballet, it's more about masking that. And you can't really, I mean, I guess for that kind of pain it's really hard to just take a step

back, take a break and let it heal, because it can take up to years for some of those injuries to heal. But, I mean, it's really dependent on everybody. Some people are more, they, they're more confident themselves. They're just able to advocate and say like, hey, I cannot do this because I have this injury and this is what my doctor said. Whereas other people like me, that have always been more shy or, I guess, I was definitely terrified of my ballet teachers for the longest time. I still am. So for me, I wouldn't go up to them and tell them I have an injury unless it's really, really severe. Like even now, like my leg, is, I have like a shin splint, and then my other knee, something's wrong with it. I can't run and jumping does hurt, but I can't just be like, hey, I can't do Swan Lake because my leg is hurting or whatever. So I just have to push through in those scenarios. And it's not always a good thing, but it's just something that is really hard to get over, I feel, and everyone just kind of discovers that on their own, I guess.

Lam: Is there anything like that in cross-country? Like any kind of pressures you face?

Cortes: In cross-country, the only pressure you would face is from your team, yourself and your coaches. I feel like a lot of the times they want you to rest. I've seen them telling kids to just not race, to let somebody else do it, to just take it easy. And it's the kids themselves that want to push through their injury to get through a certain race, mainly because they want to help the team score and stuff. And I feel like that is definitely healthier than having a teacher force you to do something against your will. Even though in both scenarios like it's always gonna be hard, like pushing past an injury. I think if it's coming from you, if you personally want to do it, that's better than if somebody else is forcing you to do it.

Lam: So what do you think the coaches do or the people do in cross-country that makes it so different from in ballet?

Cortes: In cross-country, they're a lot more understanding, a lot more casual, too, about it. And there's, there always feels like there's an alternative, whereas in ballet it's kind of individual. If you can't do a certain move that looks badly on you, it doesn't look badly on everyone else. And if you don't push through your pain, it's just like they look at you weird. I don't know if that makes any sense, but our teachers are always telling us, like, if you guys don't get blisters, you'll never get calluses. And that's how your feet will never get stronger. And yeah, like I understand what they're saying, but at the same time, it often extends past a simple blister. Like a lot of times you'll have like stress fractures or like a lot of, like severe shin splints. And you just have to push through it because that's the way you've been, I guess, raised, and you haven't really been taught to just take a break every time you get an injury so that you can come back stronger. Whereas in cross-country they're always like talking about injuries and always implementing prevention strategies and methods. And really trying to get students to see that their health comes first, and that it's more important to take a break than to just continue pushing through.

Lam: Do you think teammates play a part in encouraging that too?

Cortes: Yeah, for sure. In cross-country, they're really big on that. Like you're mostly running with your friends, or rather you enter, you make a ton of friends, and then they become really

close to you. In ballet, it's the same thing. But the thing is, it's kind of like students versus a teacher in ballet. Like, your friends would understand that you're really injured. And yeah, they'll feel pity, or they'll feel sorry for you if they see that you have a really bad injury, but you have to push through, but there isn't anything they can do to change that. Like, you know, besides just being there for moral support and stuff. In cross-country, I feel like they would be a lot more willing to go as a group and advocate for you, if there was something that you couldn't do on your own.

Lam: So you think that you have more power in cross-country?

Cortes: Yeah, for sure.

Lam: Then also, what do you do on the cross country team to build community?

Cortes: To build community? A lot of things. I would say, like almost everything is to build community, from the practices – which you just go with a pack that runs at your same pace and you go run, like you choose a route, and then you go run with them and you talk with them, like the whole way – to the busses, which, some of the meets are actually kind of far, so you spend a lot of time in the bus. Sometimes you have to wake up like at 6 a.m. because the busses leave super early, and then you spend most of the day at the site of the race. And you're just talking with them. When it's time to race, you warm up, they cheer for you, and then you just spend the whole time being with them and cheering for other groups and stuff like that. And, there's also events like pasta feeds, which are super fun. Everyone loves them. It's one of my favorite things about cross-country. Like the night before a big race, you all go to somebody's house, and that's where a lot of parents have brought pasta dishes or just dishes that are high in carbs to give you energy. And you guys get to enjoy good food and each other's company. And that's really fun because after practice, you're really hungry and there's a lot of food and you get to chat with your friends and it's just really chill and a good way to de-stress before a race.

Lam: What would you say is your favorite part of cross-country?

Cortes: That's really hard. Let's see. Okay, if I had to go with one favorite thing, it is probably when me or one of my teammates has a good PR because nothing beats the feeling of seeing the clock and it's like, say a whole minute before your previous time and you're like, "oh my God, I'm going to PR by a minute", and then you just suddenly feel the adrenaline. You push yourself through and you realize you broke your time. That's really cool. Or when you see a classmate doing like, you know, they've been working so hard towards it and then you see that they're about to break that record and you just get really excited for them and you start cheering super loud. Seeing that, seeing all of your work pay off, all of that. That feeling is just, I think, the best thing in cross-country.

Lam: So you're into running now. You like going on runs on your own?

Cortes: Mhm.

Lam: So even when you aren't with friends, do you still like running?

Cortes: Yes. Okay. So, running in cross-country. So it's kind of like a different feeling. It's more about the people you're with and pushing yourself so that you can beat certain times. Whereas during the offseason, it's more about you just keeping up with your cardio, focusing on your own needs, what you need to work on, and also just kind of de-stressing from the day. It's a good way to relax and to get focused again, because at the end of the school day, I'm tired and sleepy and hungry and all that stuff. And after I finish my run, I feel productive again. So it helps me get started on homework and really have a fulfilling day. Because if I don't run, I just feel so, like, it feels like a waste of a day, to be honest. And it's like, how do they say, like, cross-country is a lifestyle? It definitely is, because without it, you just do not feel like yourself. And running on my own. It just makes me, like, I feel like it helps you like answer hard questions. Like a lot of times, if I'm really thinking about something or worried about something, I just go running and I just think about it. And soon enough, an answer comes to me. And then when I'm done with my run, I just feel a lot better about it.

Lam: Could you give an example of one of those questions, if you're comfortable?

Cortes: Yeah. I think one of those questions was, whether I was. Okay, so this is kind of a long time ago, but I had a friend who had a dance performance on a Saturday, and I also had a dance performance that Saturday. And I did not know what to do because I told her that I'd be able to come, but that was because I thought my show was going to be the week before, and then when I realized they were on the same day at the same time, I was really stressed because I did not want to miss her thing because I knew it was important to her, but I also could miss my performance because they would like, kill me. So I just went running and I really thought about all the pros and cons, and I ultimately ended up deciding that if she was a true friend, she'd understand, because it would be, like my ballet teachers would probably hate me for at least the rest of the year if I missed that performance, and told them with like, you know, only like a month notice. So I knew she'd understand if I told her that I couldn't make it to her performance. And I just wished her good luck. And if there's like a video recording, if she could send that to me or something. So yeah, I guess it was a really hard decision, but I really had to think about what does it mean in the long term and just kind of, I don't know how to explain that. But it just takes, it just like. Running, it really helps you clear your mind, see everything clearly and think ahead instead of think in the moment. Does that make sense?

Lam: Yeah, I think you said that well. You said a friend encouraged you to start doing cross-country, but if you didn't have that friend to encourage you or there wasn't a cross-country team in school, do you think you would have ever gotten into running?

Cortes: No. Definitely not. I used to hate running with a passion. Like in PE, freshman year, this was before cross-country, we would have to run the mile or the half mile, and I would dread it as much as everybody else. I would start walking halfway through because I was too tired and I just hated the experience of having to go out on the track and start running. I hated the pacer, I

hated all that stuff. So no, I would have never thought that I would end up liking it as much as I do now.

Lam: So for anyone who wants to get into a sport or into running, would you recommend them to do it with a friend or with a team?

Cortes: 100%. I would say if you have, if you found a good group of people that will keep you going, they're going to motivate you and they're going to be what keeps you going and what you start looking forward towards. So I would totally recommend it. And once you kinda have that, everything really starts to fall into place. So even if you have doubts about yourself, about your abilities in a given thing, or even you're just struggling with problems overall, if you try something new, you will find that it's really rewarding. At least most of the time you'll find that it has so many more benefits that you could have never foreseen. And I'm just really thankful that I joined cross-country because it's helped me so much with my life in general, and kind of like thinking about my own self-worth and self-confidence and applying that to other parts of my life, like in ballet. So yeah, I would totally recommend it. Like, what's the worst that could happen? You just don't like it and you end up not doing it next year. You know?

Lam: Is there anything else you think people should know about running or getting into sports?

Cortes: I feel like I've pretty much said it all. I've talked a lot. Yeah, I would say just go for it, even if you don't... Like for me, I hated running and I decided to give it a try because I had nothing else to do. So just put yourself out there, just try it and it cannot hurt. Come on. Just go for it. And you will always gain something. Whether it's just experience, like, oh, I genuinely am not cut out for running, I do not like it. Or you actually just go to a whole new world. So I would say just go for it.

Lam: So what are some of your favorite places that you've been to on a run?

Cortes: Favorite places. Definitely Los Altos Hills. I've been to like Baylands and, let's see what other places, Rancho San Antonio, you know, kind of nearby preserves and nature areas. I definitely like Los Altos Hills the best. However, if you want to really experience the full nature and the hills and all that stuff, you have to kind of climb up high. You have to get all the way past the freeway into the burn preserve, Boyle Preserve. And that's where you really start feeling kind of disconnected from the city and your life and school and all that stuff because that's when you're surrounded by nature and trees. And there's many places that where you can't even have cars, you can't have dogs. So it's definitely more self focused. And that's where you kind of start feeling other emotions and thoughts. But that's definitely my favorite place to run. I've developed a few favorite routes either because I like the steepness of it or because I like the scenery, but yeah, over time you kind of realize what kinds of terrain and places you like to run in more.

Lam: You have a favorite kind of terrain? Do you want to describe it?

Cortes: Yeah, this is an unpopular opinion among many runners, and I was with them once, but I love hills now. It is hard at first. You do hate them, but I feel like flat land is just so boring. Like, you're just running straight and you kind of don't really... You never really experience the hardness of charging up a hill or really, like, controlling your speed when you're going downhill. So I definitely love things that are challenging. Some hills obviously are really steep and really hard to go up, and some are not that hard, it's like gradual increase. But I really like when there's a lot of different types of terrain. Also just running on dirt trails. That's a lot better than running on concrete. Both the way it feels, and because it's better for your knees, you know, going on softer ground rather than harder ground.

Lam: Is there anything that you still dislike running on?

Cortes: Oh yeah. I personally don't really like downhills because I always go a lot slower since I'm really scared that I'm either gonna fall forward or I'm gonna, like, slam my knees and injure them if I kind of, like, race down a hill. So I still don't really like doing that. And I also kind of hate running on sidewalks or like roads because it's just so hard. And I don't really like that. Oh, and like stoplights, I do not like stoplights. So this only applies if I'm like, when I'm coming back from a run and I have to wait at the stoplight in order to keep going. Because most of the time where I run is just, you know, in nature and you don't really have to stop. But, you know, it's okay. Like sometimes you do need to, like, take a quick break, tie your shoes, something like that. So it's not that bad.

Cortes: So, like in cross country, this is one example. So I got sick like the night before a meet. It was not, it was not like a huge league meet, it was just like an invitational. But I let the coach know at like 11 p.m. that I was sick and I wasn't going to be able to race tomorrow. And then she responded the next morning saying it was, like, okay and that she hoped I felt better and that was like, really chill compared to like, what I remember during Summer intensive for ballet, where I woke up that day with like a really bad fever and I was super dizzy and I was so, like, stressed the whole morning because I wasn't sure how I was going to be able to dance through that. I knew I had to though, because there was no way I could just, like, not come or just say that I had gotten sick and I couldn't dance. And like the whole morning, I just kind of spent it like trying to, like take medicine, eat food, rest up. You know, obviously during the dance itself, I was not feeling great. It was not one of my best performances, but I knew that there wasn't really any other way to, like, go around that. I couldn't just tell my ballet teacher that I was sick and couldn't dance, like I just had to go through it. Whereas in cross-country, I felt like more like I could tell the coach and that she would be a lot more understanding towards it. So yeah.

Lam: You have other stuff deep you wanted to say?

Cortes: Deeper stuff? Yeah. I know there's a lot of like mental health aspects to both cross-country and, ballet, but I feel like as, like someone who does cross-country, like junior varsity recreational, it's very, very much chill. Like the only pressure would really come from yourself on you to, like, push your limits and get a new personal record, whereas in ballet it comes from, like, everyone around you, and also the fact that you're staring up at mirrors 24/7,

that it also takes a huge mental impact. Because in ballet it's not just like an athletic, it's also an art. So it's not just getting through the movements and being physically fit enough to do them. It's also about making it look nice. And sometimes that really messes up with your self-perception, your confidence and all that stuff. Especially if you grow up in that environment, if you grow up being in front of the mirror, looking at your body all the time and really analyzing it. Like, it can be helpful, but at the same time, it's super easy to start going down the wrong path, and me and a lot of people have experienced that, and it's really hard to kind of come up from that and realize that what matters is how you feel about your own art, not really what society thinks it should be.

Lam: I've heard a lot about body image issues and teachers being like, you have to be under a certain weight. Have you had any experience with that?

Cortes: Yeah. Like personally, the teachers would be... they know they're not really supposed to say anything about that. But they do mention that if you kind of go over a certain limit, they will have to talk to you and stuff. I don't think it's happened to any of us, but I know it happened to like this one guy who used to dance at our studio. And I think he came back as a professional to be hired or something. Anyway, I heard he got, like, that talk. For us, I think we're all, like, pretty aware that you need to, like, eat healthy and maintain a healthy weight. And in general, like a lot of what they say is like, "stomach in, bottom in", and you have to be really flat, really this, like all these things that they tell you, like, obviously like there's ways you don't have to be like super thin to be able to follow that. But it's definitely like implied that the thinner you are and, like the more defined your muscles are, then the better it looks. Also, just like in general, like we all know that if you have like really nice arches, really straight legs, long limbs, all that stuff, it will look better in the mirror because it's just kind of the way ballet has been like, I guess. That's how it evolved over time, because it wasn't like that a long time ago. But nowadays all those like all like the thinness, the lines, all that stuff, it's just been tied together. And everyone agrees that that's the standard. And you're all kind of like, secretly like trying to strive for that, even though it might not be healthy for some people.

Lam: By the way, you said it was a summer intensive. Can you explain what that is?

Cortes: Oh yeah. Summer intensives are basically just ballet summer camps. They are kind of a big deal because you have to like audition for them, submit like videos and pictures and all this, all these things about yourself to these like prestigious companies that will, I guess they kind of host it. They usually have like an, I don't know, six week program, eight week program, whatever, where you kind of go over there, you sleep there, take your meals there, you just kind of live up there and you dance every single day. And at the end of the weeks, then you have a performance that kind of showcases all you've been working on. They're really competitive. And personally, I have not applied to them because I've been doing other things like cross-country over my summers. And I'm not like, I'm not focusing on trying to like become a professional ballerina or anything. But for those like I would say they're definitely difficult because the casting is like really fast. And if you don't get like a spot that you want, you just, you always feel like you're not good enough. Which kind of goes for like all shows in general, but especially in

summer intensives, where it's like only a few weeks, a few select individuals, I guess it's it's a lot harder to deal with. But then again, it also depends on like the kind of dancer that you are and how strong you are mentally.

Lam: Ballet seems so intense.

Cortes: It is. Like, it's not, I would say it's really, it has to do with your maturity. If you like, know who you are and you have your boundaries and all that stuff and you're willing to uphold them, then I think ballet would be great for you because it'll help you become a better person. But if you're kind of like vulnerable, then you really, well, you can't obviously know this ahead of time, but if you're put into ballet at a young age and you're like an insecure person, it will like prey on those insecurities. It'll make them worse and it'll just kind of be up to you when you eventually, like, grow up and realize that you're more than what you think you are.

Lam: But do you think ballet, when people start really young, they don't know that yet, do you think it affects them for the rest of their life?

Cortes: I would say yes, it definitely does. And this also kind of ties into like talent, because in ballet, obviously there is a body type and it's very clear to see who has it and who doesn't. And oftentimes you can see the teachers have a lot of like favorites and it's very obvious, like, who do they put in the front? Who do they give more corrections to? Who do they act nicer towards? Whereas the other kids who maybe they don't think have as much potential that they often like are a lot harsher towards, or they ignore, they always put in the back. Also who they let get away with injuries. Like that's a big thing which I never really liked. But if one of the kids that they like tells them like, "oh hey, my leg's hurting, I can't, I can't do jumps today," they're, like, super okay with it. Whereas if someone who they don't like goes up and tells them the same thing, they'll just kind of like stare at them and it feels like a lot more nerve wracking. They really want you just push past your pain, like they don't really value you and your safety as much as they would somebody they *do* like, if that makes sense.

Lam: Theres, like, a lot of favoritism?

Cortes: Yeah, there is a lot. But I feel like that's just natural of the ballet world. So I don't think it's because they personally hate us or anything. They're kind of just trying to prepare us for how it will be in the future, because that's the way it will be in the future. You're competing against everybody, and if you get injured, that's kind of your problem. If you don't have what they're looking for, that also kind of becomes your problem. And it's just kind of a harsh reality that I guess maybe they're trying to prepare us towards. But, you know, it can be hard for people at times.

Lam: And so did you say, like, they help people who they like more and people they don't like as much, they help less?

Cortes: Yeah, I have noticed that a lot. In a lot of my classes, I've also been noticing that. And there isn't really much we can do about it. Like if they don't want to give us many corrections, then there isn't really, you can't just... I mean, you can talk to them and stuff and see if like, maybe there's something that they want you to work on first before they really start helping you more? I don't know. But it's kind of hard. So like what I do personally is I know what I'm going to, like, work on. Like, say, one day I want to work on, like really getting my knee straight or another day I want to work on, like my alignment and keeping my back straight. Then all I try to focus on those corrections and kind of give myself that feedback. So even if the teacher's like not telling me, like, I still know what I need to work on. Also like recording yourself helps. If you, like, you know, go after after class or on another day and you film yourself, like, you kind of already know everything you need to know. The teacher's just like an outside perspective. But you could also be that outside perspective for yourself. So you don't always need their feedback. And sometimes when they see that you're putting in that much effort, that's what gets them to like want to help you more. So there are things you can do to like, I guess, make them like you more, but a lot of it is kind of predetermined and it's, yeah, that's kind of hard.

Lam: Would you recommend ballet for most people? Because it seems like really hard to be mentally strong enough to get through it.

Cortes: That's a good question. I know a lot of little girls do ballet. In fact, most people do. And then they just drop out when they're bored of it. I would say kind of... It'll determine itself over time. Meaning if you think you're not cut out for ballet, you'll probably just drop it. Whereas if you genuinely like it or there's something that you want from it, you'll continue. And that determination is what will push you to continue trying hard and giving it your all. In some cases, it's mostly attachment. And sometimes that attachment can be unhealthy and it really, really, really depends on the individual: how your parents raised you, your own values, your own personality. And it will be completely up to you whether that attachment becomes healthy or whether it becomes unhealthy. And it's just kind of like just the way life is with everybody. There's gonna be good things, gonna be bad things. And the more you face these challenges and overcome them, the more you discover about yourself and the more you grow as a person. But I would definitely recommend it because I feel like as you grow up, you will just become a better person naturally. And you will realize that even though some experiences may be bad, they actually helped you grow a lot more and you'll be grateful for that, eventually. Betsy's story helps me with my documentary by providing the perspective of an athlete who has been part of both very supportive communities and less supportive communities. It gives a clearer picture of how community affects athletes' mentality and health. It explains how cross-country plays a vital role in building healthy habits and relationships with exercise. By having a better, more supportive community around her, she felt less pressure and instead felt more enjoyment from exercise. Her experiences show that cross country could help many people improve their health, both physical and mental. Mental health issues are on the rise, but cross-country could potentially help to decrease these effects. The audience should care about this topic because it could help them improve their lives.

Lam: I think I've asked everything I want to, if there's anything else you want to add?

Cortes: No, I think that's pretty much it.

Lam: Okay. It was nice talking to you.

Cortes: Nice talking to you, too.

Lam: Thank you for telling me about your experiences in cross country.

Cortes: I'm really happy to share anything about cross country. It's like one of my favorite things in life. It's really my favorite thing in life, to be honest. Running. But yeah. Thank you for interviewing me.