

My brain activity is never so low than after school. I spend the school day in fifty minute increments, switching my brain from French to Biology to Philosophy. It's no big deal, after this many years of schooling I'm practically hard-wired to think in some scheduled direction. The drive home is really what does it though—fifty more minutes in agonizing traffic, trapped by incompetency and double yellow lines. Once I'm finally home, homework is just not yet an option, so I run.

I slip on my favorite running shorts and ancient purple Asics and I'm off. Down the driveway, past the yappy dogs down the street, past the handprint in the curb, past the aqua fire hydrant exactly two miles from my house. My body knows what to do and where to go, and my mind is finally unleashed—travelling from one intangible, irrelevant idea to the next, in tandem with my syncopated breathing.

I wasn't always a runner. I remember taekwondo as a kid, and feigning illness nearly every Saturday in hopes of avoiding the two-mile run after sparring practice. Each run would begin the same. I would lead the pack of kids, ranging from ages eight to seventeen, and then I would slow to a crawl as my stomach muscles began to painfully knit themselves together, my lungs and throat imploring me to walk. Suddenly I was the last in the group, cursing myself and wondering what made the other kids so superior.

My dad sensed my frustration, and one day he told me to follow Karen. I remember laughing—Karen was perhaps the least athletic member of the taekwondo crew. I always beat her in sparring matches; she had seniority both in age and belt ranking, but her awkward figure was no match for a wiry ten year old. I hadn't even realized she participated in our Saturday runs, but I trusted my dad's running expertise. The following Saturday I began by sprinting ahead, as per usual, then remembered I was supposed to stick with Karen. I was horrified to look back and find her dead last among the kids AND the adults, who began about five minutes after we did. She was chugging along at an unfathomably slow pace, her frizzy ponytail slicked back with sweat and her face splotted red with her efforts. I walked for a bit, allowing her to catch up, then I began jogging next to her.

That was the day I think I became a runner. I struggled endlessly, embarrassed and pouting, to finish with Karen. My puny body quivered with defeat after each heavy step, while Karen grew beautiful and strong before me, actually running an extra mile after everyone else had finished. I gained such respect for her—the silent winner—and learned at an early age the truth in the saying “don't judge a book by its cover.” The other crucial half to running, the mental half, was revealed to me, and I began to develop my mental stamina as well as my body.

I've ran many miles since my ten year old epiphany. I never had the drive to be a champion, and I gave up running competitively after double knee surgeries, but the passion is still ingrained in my muscle fibers. I am addicted to running, and the self-harmony it brings me. I like the relentless battle against my psyche to persevere, and I like the bodily exertion. But mostly, I like the glorious, enhanced state of mind—the effortless power I feel as my thoughts outrun my legs.