

Running is often considered to be a highly independent sport, depending mainly on self-discipline and motivation. While there are definitely inherent aspects of running, there is more to it than that. Running, particularly in my case, requires community. Community in the sense of teammates and family, both offering me support. There have been times when I found myself close to giving up, but there has always been someone there to encourage me.

My involvement in running began in 8<sup>th</sup> grade when I started out literally running one block at a time. At that time, I saw running purely as a way to burn calories. Shortly after that I developed a pretty bad case of Anorexia losing a tremendous amount of weight. It was the fight of my and my family's lives, and, of course, it forced me to stop running. About a year later, I had become a bit more healthy and it was time to start my freshman year of high school. My friend Josh recommended that I go to a cross country practice with him, so I agreed. That first day of cross country was when I met Bruce, the assistant coach.

He began to teach me how to use the mental aspects of running as therapy and when I hurt my leg after my third practice, he taught me how to take care of myself physically by improving my running mechanics. After I began to view running as a form of therapy, I began to finally become truly happy, and my running performance improved. I went from running a 33-minute 5k, for my first race, to my current 5k of 20:43. My teammates were also extremely important to my success, pushing me in workouts, practices and meets.

Another community aspect of running is community service. I went with my team on various runs on which we picked up litter. This taught me that community service doesn't have to be something big. We can make a collective difference by doing something, even if a relatively small thing, by looking for opportunities to do so every day. My cross-country experience really made me focus on my impact in the world, and gave me the fortitude to change it. After I began running, my grades drastically improved, and volunteering honestly felt natural. I guess running around in the world made me pay attention to it more often.

I think that my running career has been a reflection of my struggles in life, not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. I've often been at my lowest when I just considered running to be a workout, and at my highest when running has been an almost spiritual experience. Running has basically forced me to face and improve myself. I both sometimes hate it in the moment, but love it ten-times more hence, as I realize that I needed it. I went from a person who used running to keep my weight down, to a true runner.

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