

Nothing to Lose

- Kyra Veprek

Because I am a teenager in one of America's most tight-knit communities, it's no surprise that I need an escape from the town of Marblehead every once in a while. As a runner and a recently licensed driver, I find nothing more peaceful and therapeutic than driving to an unknown destination and pounding the pavement. Running provides an individual escape that requires no effort or coordination from anyone other than yourself. My time spent alone pushing through the roads of the North Shore allows me to clear my head and decompress from stressors without the influence of my peers' opinions. The uncertainty of the sights I'll encounter and the hills I'll trudge up leads to purpose and impulsion in each stride, knowing I'm on to something new. There is no escape from reality more perfect than a run.

Recently, my favorite run has become a 7-mile "out-and-back" that begins at the Red Rock in Swampscott and leads to a small loop in Nahant. Not only does it have the most beautiful views of Boston and Nahant Bay, but is exceptionally peaceful at sunrise and sunset, both of which take place on either side of the Nahant causeway. The wind is tolerable (although chilly at this time of year) and the attitude of fellow-exercisers is encouraging. Needless to say, the Nahant Bay run has become my addiction.

This past weekend I woke on Saturday feeling more blue than usual. Whether the stress came from school or friends, I knew there was only one option to fight the fatigue: attack. My drug of choice was to run, and for a morning as particularly sour as this I would travel the extra mile to my new favorite route. Like most mornings, I laced up, put my earbuds in, and hit the pavement. I had a drive to go fast and a need to go far and pushed myself miles from my parking spot. I had neglected to eat a good breakfast, however, and felt my muscles begin to ache. I needed sustenance, but wanted to break my time on the route and escape the thoughts in my head. But I miscalculated my strength, and at the end of Lynn tripped on my own leg and fell fast and hard onto the pavement. The wind was knocked out of me as I skidded onto the sidewalk, damaging my knees and dragging the skin off my palms. A couple walking past turned around to check how I was; I assured them I was fine but couldn't hold back tears. High on pride, I attempted to turn around and jog back to my car. My knees, however, were in no condition to do that as blood began to soak through my leggings. I was pissed; My personal nirvana was ruined.

Instead of mustering up the strength to walk back, I decided to call it quits and walked down to the beach. As I wallowed in the frozen sand, however, I became more aware of the happenings around me: a man and his dog playing fetch, the ducks riding the tide, the sun reaching its peak in the middle of the sky. I had run past this community tens of times, and only now was understanding the true beauty of how it functioned. I felt no defeat as I limped back to my car with my shattered knees; I finally understood that the path I ran did not revolve around me, but rather accepted me as part of its ecosystem.

Some run for exercise, some for therapy, and some simply for fun. It's easy to go through life in the way of running: with one ultimate goal. It's important to understand, however, that life will redirect you and put you in places you never intended to be. There's lessons to be learned everywhere you turn, regardless of whether where you are has anything to do with "your ultimate

goal.” Accept roadblocks rather than challenging them; they are there for a reason. You’ve got nothing to lose but the pride on your back and the skin on your knees.