

Sultry air mixed with a strong hint of warm humidity fills the air; strong, dark clouds piled across the horizon fill the sky. Twenty minutes later, the warm, comforting breeze strong from the south turns from the north, now cool and forceful. Twenty minutes following that change, the breeze-now-biting wind blows in a temperature twenty-degrees colder than before, light raindrops dancing about in the ebb and flow of the wind. Another early April day on a run.

Only, today is not just another day. A running acquaintance has passed away without obvious warning. Almost my age, he had run for over 40 years, as I have done. He had loved running. He had created his own runner's life, complete with a marriage, children, grandchildren, a career, and the daily ritual of being a husband, a father, a grandfather, a co-worker, a runner. Each had melded into the others with a clarity and grace of a paced run.

No longer will he run his comfort course; the one near his home that let his mind meander over even the slightest changes on his chosen route. He won't see the new yard being rebuilt along the quiet lane. Nor will he smile over the giggles he hears coming from children playing along his path. The couple close to his finish won't be waving hello as he passes. They won't realize that he's gone until the day that they realize they don't see him pass anymore.

Those weekend long runs with his own running gangsta's will be a man down going forward. That first run without him will be filled with awkward silence of missed companionship, allowing those remaining to run to listen to the footfalls of the others. Over time, he will be remembered by them all for what he brought to the group effort as well as his quips, his encouragement, his acceptance of each of them as runners. Eventually, each will quietly and consistently mourn his being permanently gone, and yet, they'll smile wryly at his wit.

His running, as it is for anyone who runs, was a solo endeavor, taking him to places only he imagined, a champion in his own mind, supported by the heartiness of his stride. He ran long and slow, short and fast, and any combination of the four. He felt the salt dry on his face, the wind push back his skin, his tendons and ligaments giving him what he needed, at least on most days.

Though he ran for health, he didn't expect longevity because none of can anticipate the flow of our own lives. He learned over those running days, the continuous running weeks, the consistent running months leading into decades of a never-ending shoe supply, aged running shirts, and sweat evaporating into his running clothes, the quality of his life running gave him in family, work, and the self-satisfaction of effort well done, progress well earned, and joy never forgotten.

Today's run hurt. It hurt emotionally. It pained my soul. I run for the same reasons he ran. I have continued to run and race for the same reasons he did. What was in the fabric of his life included the joy of running. My fabric includes that same joy. Tears did not present themselves, today. Rather, a smile appeared on my face in those moments when the effort was hard and relaxation was the need of the moment. I caught a sense of his running moments, moments all runners share. Those moments are shared but never spoken aloud, and we share without knowing that others have the same feelings.

Today, we will cry. Tomorrow, we will celebrate. Life is short and time is long, don't squander either. We wouldn't have it any other way.