

## It Only Gets Worse From Here

The neighborhood above our house connects to the outside world via a left turn onto our street. We see cars, trucks, the occasional skater, the even rarer skateboarder, and a whole mess of dog walkers. We see plenty of walkers sans dogs, too. And there are the joggers, the runners, and the high school athletes preparing for their team sport seasons. The ones consistently walking or running daily are the ones that interest me.

They look so jaunty and light on their feet passing by my house on the way down the hill. They look so happy gliding down the hill after having held themselves back on the other street, yet they are less than pleased when they find themselves working to get up my street, knowing they have another hill awaiting them. They look absolutely miserable trying to run, then jog, then walk, then drag themselves up the hill when they return in the opposite direction. So close to their finishing destination, if only this street wasn't so hard to get up. Their expressions are always the same: who put this hill right here at this point in my exercise. Anguish, frustration, and sheer exhaustion are part of their countenance.

I live on a short street with five houses, one currently vacant, four dogs, two kids, two cranky men, one in-ground pool, a groundhog, assorted squirrels, and one cat all adjoining the roadway. The road dips down on the north side before a quick 100-yard climb to the top of the street that "T's" into another street that heads uphill to the west leading to another subdivision. The uphill does not slow down a car, but it does slow down walkers, dog walkers, joggers, and runners.

Now that we're into the second half of spring, leading into the traditionally hot and humid summer, those bodies will droop on their way up the street. They will perspire, that sweat clinging to their clothing. Their hair will stick close to their scalp, slick from the humidity, glistening in the sunlight. Their shoulders will droop as if they were carrying an anvil on their shoulders. They will each suffer every time they go outside. Neither early morning nor twilight will save them from the hot, wet air when they are outside. This is the mid-south and I live in it.

I see in the local residents suffer in their attempts to summit the south end of my street, wilted, exhausted, irritated, each with their own thoughts of dejection, and see myself as I crawl through my summer running. During the harsh moments of winter, layered with freezing air, frigid winds, icy roads, air breaths invading the eyes, and never comfortable running outside, I envision a warmer time.

Then comes spring into summer and the oppressiveness increasing the heart rate, slowing the pace, making running feel like a chore. It's awful on so many levels. The air is so hot and wet that my sweat doesn't evaporate. I carry my own anvil on my shoulders in moving my arms, into my chest when I breath, on top of my quads when I lift my leg from one stride to the next. My training shoes never dry out, requiring a dryer sheet in each shoe to mitigate the foul aroma left from the hot, wet, humid runs in late May, all through June, every day in July, without let up in August. Not until mid-September is there a respite from the ceaseless misery.

Yes Virginia, there is a clear benefit in the fall and winter from summer training. But I'm not there yet; that's four months and too many suffer fest runs away. We're in mid-May and I know what's coming. Hot. Real Hot. Damned Hot. Hot in the morning running at dawn. Hot in the evening running at dusk. Wet running attire when we stat and completely

drenched when we finish. The air is thick with humidity and the ground hot from too much sun.

Sunscreen that doesn't stay on under the perspiration that never cools and remains stuck to the skin long after the run. Shade trees holding in the excessive heat, dripping with humidity. Squeaky shoes, unpleasant moldy feeling socks inside them, shorts plastering themselves to the legs, and running shirts that are peeled off at the run's conclusion. Starting out slow before becoming slower throughout the run is the norm and not the exception.

And the grind of the run itself. Pushing through the endless heat with the accompanying omnipresent humidity. Thick air increasing the heart rate, decreasing the pace, each aiding in the decline of happy running. Each run becomes a "race" to the next water stop. Get there before the buzzards get you. On some runs, the buzzard almost wins. It only gets worse.