

## Kites in Mid-Fall

Stepping out of the car in the greenway parking lot, the piercing, cold wind scraping my face, chilling my arms, tightening my legs caught my attention. This was not starting out as a pleasant morning to be running six by three-minute repeats at the top of my heart rate zone. Tugging my heavy cotton gloves over my wrists, cinching my sleeveless windbreaker one final time, I pressed start on my running watch, dipping my upper torso into the stiffening wind.

Closer to retirement than I am from post-collegiate graduation, the first half mile was slower than slow and would have been, even without the howling wind that was supposed to be a light breeze according to the weather app. Eventually, my breathing found its rhythm and my legs followed suit. Passing one aging and balding fellow running the other way, I said hello, thinking to myself that his form seemed stiff. I realized I was being foolish, because I was older than he was and I know my running form is stiff.

Approaching the second of the two footbridges on the pedestrian trail, I also realized from the newly-laid asphalt that I had not been on the greenway in a long time. In fact, I thought, that last time may have been last spring. Because there is very little shade on this out and back 2.5-mile greenway, the Mid-South summer is not the best of times to suffer on this path. At the second footbridge, I passed a woman walking in the opposite direction. I waved without thought.

The second bridge is the beginning of the end of the greenway, the path making a triangular kite-shaped keyhole turnaround. From the bridge, around the kite with two turns, back to the bridge is one-half mile. From the beginning split of the kite to the first turn, around the second turn, back to the kite's beginning is 600-meters. From just the bridge to the kite's beginning and back makes up the remaining 200-meters to make the half-mile.

Today was six kite loops: jogging on the bridge string portion and blasting the kite triangle as best I could. Literally leaping into my first kite, I spied a middle-aged couple walking together towards me, both holding hands and both buried into their respective cellphones. If only they knew how awkwardly foolish and unloving was that image. They barely acknowledged me swiftly running past them.

The result of the first effort surprised me. Despite bracing into the wind after the second turn on the way back to the bridge, the pace was quicker than I expected. Normally, the pace quickens with each effort, with extended internal drama in my head scolding and extolling me to go faster. The consistently slower runs I put in on my non-workout days may actually be paying off.

Following my fourth effort, again faster than the third, which was faster than the second, which was faster than the first, in jogging back to the bridge, two women intensely walking with 5-pound dumbbells in each hand passed me going the other way. They acknowledged me and I returned the same. When I turned around at the bridge, beginning my solo effort on my fifth attempt, I saw that they had paused in the middle of the greenway under the one very tall shade tree available on the loop: they were lifting their weights over their heads, first the left arm followed by the right. In full go, I swooped towards them.

Slightly startled, they spied me coming, moved off the middle of the trail, the one in the camo outfit calling out, "How many are you doing?" I breathed out my answer of two more, sprinting past them towards the first turn. Coming back to the beginning, I saw they had moved into the kite section, as had the older fellow who was probably younger than me. My fifth effort was the fastest yet.

Jogging one final time back to the bridge, the other woman commented, "You are way to fast for us. I would have pulled something in my leg or just collapsed." We all shared the moment, laughing. And expectedly, the sixth was the fastest of all.

And of course, the older fellow who was probably younger than me, looked at me while I was in full flight, asking me, "how do you run on your toes like that?" Without hesitation or thought, I looked right at him, stating, "my parents." He laughed heartedly and I smiled.

Running the last two miles at a much more gentlemanly pace, into the never-ending wind on a day that was to be a picture-perfect late October day, arriving back to my car ready to get inside and remove the day's chill from my bones, I saw the woman whom I had passed at the second bridge. She looked at me, noticing that only my knees were exposed to the elements. "Your knees are red," is all she said. I looked down. My knees were deep red. I laughed, "indeed they are."