

Experiments

He went to Vietnam during the war. He went as a computer IT contractor before there was such a title. He was a military contractor from the private sector, having served in the Air Force, during which he was taught computer. He was in Saigon to maintain the flow of information.

He also discovered a small restaurant near his billet that served French-Vietnamese cuisine, including a potato salad that was more than that and a whole lot different. Loving the taste and the texture of the salad, he went back to that same restaurant, ordering the same potato salad, dissecting the ingredients. And, he enjoyed the salad being part of his meal.

Easily determined was that the potatoes were boiled, soft to the tongue, great in taste, because attached in the bite were the other ingredients. The potatoes were clearly different from back home in the Midwest, but they were potatoes. Similarly, the small, sliced tomatoes and the boiled eggs were different, because he was dining on vegetables and eggs grown and raised in Southeast Asia. But there was more to this salad that intrigued him, not to mention its great taste.

Each time he came back the restaurant, he sat closer to the kitchen, with all its frenetic activity and the rapid conversation in a language he did not understand. He found diced red onion, small taste of cheddar cheese, larger taste of blue cheese, diced green onion, and a pleasurable hint of an olive oil based dressing, something between Italian and Caesar, not heavy, that bound the salad's elements together.

He learned that the potatoes and eggs were boiled together, the potato and egg shells peeled away. He saw how finely the red onion, the green onion, and the small tomatoes were diced. He noticed that the salad contained twice as much blue cheese as it did cheddar. Also, he watched the simple oil and vinegar dressing be made, mixed with the grated cheddar and crumbled blue cheese, before being added to the potatoes, the eggs, the onions, the tomatoes, all blended into a thick conglomeration that was then ladled onto a plate, alongside the fish entrée. Surprisingly, no salt.

Making notes in his computer-like writing style, he brought that recipe home with him on his return. He practiced his recipe, finding that the taste resembled his

experience. Honing his skills, which became his go to side dish with the steak he grilled while he smoked his cigarettes.

Mindset

Making time in the day for a run, which leads to

Determining how far to run, the decision then melding to

Setting the pace for the day's run, which results in contemplating

Perhaps varying the pace, which becomes the run.

That's the arithmetic of the run.

That's running. In a nutshell. Running is not the shoes. It is not the running attire worn on a run. Running requires mental energy in myriad ways just to get to the first step out the door. The weekend long run is a composite of running's mindset.

Today's run was 12 miles. The route consisted of two main loops, the first loop was 5.5 miles and the final loop was – wait for it – 6.5 miles, with smaller loops contained inside each loop.

The night before I ran the morning's route, I dawdled over where I would I run. Late Spring brought steady rain showers and warm temperatures. Though I had pondered other routes, there were weather-related issues with each. Some would be flooded, others with long patches of mud too slick to run over, still others would not be as much fun this time of the season. I picked a course that I'd run three weeks before with the running kids because the path would not be covered by standing water or mud, at least not too much.

Then, the needed mindset kicked in. The weekend long run is always early this time of the year. The temperature is too high for a long run done mid-morning or in the afternoon. The trade off is cooler temperatures from overnight and thick air, or heat coupled with the humidity pounding down with each running step. A no-brainer, as it is. The real question at hand was the run's pace.

Forecast for the run's start just a half-hour after the sun rose, was for complete overcast, light to moderate rain, low dew point, and a decent humidity level. With minimal splashing on the morning's running route, truly no reason existed not to enjoy pushing the pace. Legs felt good and the brain was willing to push the body to

a quick pace. What remained was to get up at o'dark thirty to be sufficiently awake to carry out the plan.

Getting out of bed when the alarm goes off is too similar to a work day. But just that simple effort leads to coffee, then to dressing for the part, then stocking up on the water, the nutrition, the after-the-run dry clothing, and coffee. I remind myself of the plan to run quick for the duration of the run.

Into my fifth decade of running, I know that the best-laid plans can lead to disappointment. Not every day is a good day, much less a compliance with the goal. This morning, my long run was solo, without the running kids. The memory of running with them on the same route just weeks ago remained a wound that hasn't healed. That was a failed day, the epitome of disaster, despite my morning's mindset.

On that morning, I was working hard, really hard, to keep up with the rest, and that was just in the first mile, while they were gathering their running legs under them. Their rhythm would come, I knew, but I thought I had a chance to keep up. Foolish me. I was almost a minute behind them at the first mile split. By mile three, I was almost a half-mile in the rear. I lost sight of them until mile seven, their mile 8.5. A pattern developed. When I finished, I received a text that they had a seat for me at the restaurant table. They had finished, changed, driven to the restaurant location, been seated, and had ordered, before I had finished. Alone.

That morning, I passed.

This morning, driving to the run destination, I pondered my morning's goal. It wasn't ostentatious in vision. I merely had to run at a pace I knew I could hold for two hours. Straightforward. No different than hanging with the running kids. Perhaps this morning, I could succeed.

Having parked, I laced up my favorite long run shoes, the ones that feel like a soft glove once they've warmed up in the first couple of miles. There are running shoes so comfortable, so responsive to the run that I don't think about them being on my feet during the run. So, I had that going for me. Stepping out of the car, locking it, taking my first batch of honey, and without looking up, I could feel the slight cool of the post-dawn moment, and the light rain.

Running the opening mile a bit slower than I had with the running kids, I instinctively knew the pace would quicken. After berating a dog owner whose unleashed dog threatened to tree me, I saw just two other runners the rest of the long run, which was unique for this time of year, despite the rainy weather. On this morning's run, I was that flower blooming in the forest that no one sees. I was also that kid that starts out thinking he's a great hitter, tossing up the ball to hit, only to imagine he's a greater pitcher, after striking himself out.

Each passing mile split was faster than the one I had just run. With each passing mile, I gained strength, just slightly increasing the pace, focused on the next footfall. Complete a mile, see the split, move onto the next, incrementally moving at a faster clip. See the next landmark, run to the landmark, note the time, feel the energy, see the next landmark. I may be older now, but I know a running groove when I'm in it.

Two long hills are included in this two-looped route. This morning, there was no trudging up those hills. I glided up each, noting the yards I passed along the way, the fact that the rain remained steady, as did the pace. Though the paved paths, and streets were wet, they were not slick. With no one to compare against my running, I lost myself in the moment, edging the groove at an ever-increasing pace.

Through mile six, I had dropped the run's average pace by over half a minute, merely by focusing on the next corner, the next incline, the next stretch of the course. By mile nine, I knew I could drop the average pace of the run even further, to over a minute faster, with just a bit more effort. Those last miles consisted of my running from marker to marker a bit faster to faster. Mission accomplished.

Finishing, I realized that this morning's run was done in the fastest overall pace I'd run in a long time. It may not happen again, but I have this run on this day. It felt good, endorphins aside. I conducted a semblance of a plan. I came back to a route that left me feeling that my running attempt before was less than ideal. I could keep this run in my mind's back pocket, pulling it out when I needed reminding that I enjoyed running, despite those days when I could only trudge along. Looking into the back pocket, having forgotten the obvious, I have a plethora of runs like this one, each built from the simplicity of a mindset. I couldn't keep up with the running kids, but I could run.

I went to breakfast.