His Final 10k

After his final race, we five runners stood in a circle, arms wrapped around one another’s shoulders- five men shaped by eight years of running together. Cory’s maroon and white jersey dripped down, as wet as the tears he held back when he choked out, "I love you guys," in a voice that struggled more in that moment than Cory five minutes ago when he unleashed the final kick of his final 10k, and moved on from competitive running.

Tight in that circle, I watched a tear leak down his face, one that escaped his masculine impulse to hold it back by any means necessary. As that tear rolled down his cheek, I remembered we five running in the rain, hopping rusty guard rails, just a few hot summers ago in what we would later call "The three bridges in a rainstorm run."

The trees were a little more orange that day as rain pooled in their cupping leaves and then dumped them down to the hard pavement below. That day we talked about aspirations, dreams, and our lives yet to come. Who
to have kids? Who would be the one living in a trailer park, their dog tied to a pole, running in a circle so many times the grass faded away and left a perfect circle of dust?

The five crossed three wooden bridges that day—felt them knock under our feet, as the rain poured down and we knew we could outlast anything that God would throw at us. But, today Cory crossed a fourth bridge. His running career has come to the end. No longer will he feel the intensity before the starter’s gun. He won’t throw elbows, or talk shit, or feel the glory in seeing the finish line and fire in his stomach, burn down the last quarter mile. His running career has all too suddenly come to a close.

Soon, Cory will wear a wedding band on his finger and his children will call me Uncle Brian as they ask me to play tag in the living room. Soon, he will take on other names—names like "honey" and "dad." "Who the fuck is Cory?" they’ll say, those snot nosed brats that took him away.

We all have chain link fence scars, dog bitten calves, and big toes that press inward from five thousand miles of running down roads like the one
we ran down that day. But, no matter how far apart,
or how many little Corys we have, nothing
will change the way that those five,
each supporting one another,
rann into a cross country brotherhood
together.

- Brian Dunn