
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,
ran into a cross country brotherhood

together.

- Brian Dunn