

I know what it is to feel trapped. I visited my father in federal prison every weekend for five years. I remember the stuffy, basement visiting room where I sat in a blue plastic chair. It was suffocating, filled with the smell and the breath of other people, of microwave food, of muffled sobs and hushed arguments. I live to escape that feeling. When daylight fades my house is calm, lit by the comfortable glow of computer and TV screens. I strap on my neon vest when the sparkling stars and the nip of the night air pulls me outside, sometimes in the middle of a sentence or the jotting of a pre-calculus problem; I am filled with a rush to move, to run for miles; my lungs borrow the air to keep me coasting through quiet streets. My feet pound the unforgiving pavement step by step, grinding each of my hardships into the earth and pushing off against them. Through the snowy blasts and the cold air that squeezes my chest or the humid breaths I draw in the still summertime nights, running is consistent for me. When I run I feel alive. My pulse throbs and I think. I think and then I talk, and I write. Running builds this connection that I have with the outside world; it establishes the balance I keep between body, mind, and spirit.

My running career started with a flash of my purple Sketchers platform sneakers. Down to the fence and back, I raced with every inch of my wiry frame, to feel the burning in my heart and legs and the satisfaction of competing. The Fastest Kid in the third grade, I chased this title as I darted around lunchboxes and tagged the hands of "judges" standing at the end of the playground. These were my first race officials, columns of screaming classmates and an expanse of worn gravel the first backstretch I would fly down. My passion for running ignited when I was in the first grade and has not subsided, but has matured. I am not preoccupied with the desire to win or be the fastest, but instead I see and appreciate the ways running contributes to making me a better person. To me, running is an escape and a way to blow off steam. When I'm running I burn up and generate passion in the rush of my blood and bounce in my step. Running is my state of mind; when my body stops the attitude still persists in me, *go, go don't stop, don't give up.*

When I run I turn myself inside out each day, filled with desire to communicate, to generate my worth, to explore, to create my own existence that is not confined by plexi-glass walls. Running gives me the energy and motivation to do this, the comfort of something consistent, a way to ease my anxieties and pound out my problems, a slate to meditate and clear or to fill my mind. Sunday nights alone or dewy mornings with the team, running is always the best time to dream. This is the time when I feel closest to myself, and I feel like anything is possible. While my future is so unclear I take comfort in seeing that running will always continue to be a central aspect in my life as well as my social staple. I will continue the close friendships I have formed through this sport and form new ones competing in college next year and far, far beyond. The sport is not only my safety net but something I look forward to, generating fun and excitement, the promise of future marathons and triathlons, road races and jogs with friends ensure that I will always be healthy and happy. No matter what life throws at me, I will hit the ground running. I simply cannot be contained.