

Sarah Marvin  
Runner Up

Dark room, dark sky. An iPhone illuminates and sounds- it's 4:53 and time to get up. The brightness of the screen hurts my eyes; I could easily dismiss the alarm and retreat to sleep for another 90 minutes. Before I can think long enough about what I'm doing, my shoes are tied, hair is up, and I'm out the door.

I get to work at 7 and my 20-something year old coworker asks me how many I have in for the day. He means miles. I answer 8 and he raises his eyebrows, rolls his eyes, asks why. I laugh and sip my coffee. This is an everyday joke for the two of us- I'm not sure I really have an answer for him, not sure he really expects one.

The rest of the day unfolds in slow motion as the sun crawls across the sky and I wait wait wait until 3PM so I can go home and pass out for my afternoon nap. The next day is more of the same. Throw in a few weight lifting sessions, add a whole lot of mileage, 3 pairs of trainers, too many cups of coffee, and you have the summer of a distance runner.

For most onlookers, the summer of a distance runner is an unintelligible jumble of numbers and early mornings- weekly mileage totals, splits, pace, cadence, reps. Why I do it at all is a difficult question to answer, especially when it's asked by the non-running type. On the surface, it looks like repetition, repetition, repetition with no end in sight. Of course if you don't run, you fail to see the subtle beauty of a summer spent training.

It's hard to explain that I'm not just moving my feet, one in front of the other. That's what it looks like, but really, I'm gathering wood for a fire, putting the hay in the barn, preparing my body for the inevitable. Come fall, I'll light the match.

I love running because it lets me straddle both impossibilities of time- its finitude and infiniteness. Every race against the clock we as runners are reminded of time's ceaseless march forward. But, by the same token, the time

we have is precious. You only have so much of it to prepare, to gather the wood and put the hay in the barn before it's time to light the match. That's really where the thrill of running is, the part that is so incomprehensible to anyone who's not a runner. Those 2 seconds between "Runners take your mark" and a gunshot where time is both standing still and galloping ahead faster than anything.

Every mile you ran to prepare is impossibly contained in those 2 seconds. So when my alarm goes off and it's time to get up, it's not even a question whether I'll run or not. Because in those 2 seconds before the start of a race and the lighting of the match, when your mind has that "Oh S\*#%" moment, the body takes over, calm and ready to blaze.