

On a chilly morning in the spring of 2004, I stood next to my dad on a newly paved asphalt road at Ginghamburg church in Tipp City, Ohio nervously anticipating for *it* to start. Wearing soccer shorts, tennis shoes from Kohl's and the black cotton long-sleeve shirt that we received in our race packets an hour earlier, my goosebumps & I waited for the crack of a gun and the momentum of the runners in front of us to mark the sprout of a running career.

But before a thing can sprout, it must root itself beneath the topsoil.

Casstown Roots

Growing up, I was often on the soccer field trying (but never succeeding) to juggle my ball or outside in the woods concocting potions and inedible soups I forced my poor brother to try. I dabbled in other sports even midway through high school but ultimately realized (read: accepted) that a constant fear of having to make the next play, striking out or being the target of a pass would not precipitate success. This realization would have never occurred, however, if it weren't for a constant flow of persistent encouragement and from Casstown's kindest couple, Ron and Linda. This running duo watched me buzz around the soccer field on summer afternoons and approached my parents many, many, many times: *Your daughter should really join the cross country team once she reaches 7th grade. It will be fun!* After a brief education of *what* cross country is and a plethora of reminders that I *should* try it, my dad and I finally agreed to 'test' this running thing out before committing to an entire fall season of cross country (at that time, I was confident I would grow up to be the next Mia Hamm and had concluded, *if I chose to join the cross country team*, I would continue to play on my club and select soccer teams).

We ran a couple of times up and down Weddle Road a couple of weeks before the New Path 5k at Ginghamburg church. Standing among the other 5kers that morning, I repeated the two goals my dad had created for us earlier that week.

Goal #1: Don't go out too quickly.

Goal #2: Run the 5k in 25 minutes or less.

Junior high, high school and college have become a blended, fuzzy book of memories. Numbers float around in disorganization, races are misidentified, others are completely forgotten. I remember the New Path 5k with clarity, however. And these two goals provided a web in which to catch and preserve the morning's memories. I remember gangly legs thundering down the newly paved asphalt toward the finish line, matching Dad's stride as well as I could. I remember being propelled by the cheers from spectators and runners we passed. All of this support from people I didn't know! I remember 24:20. Aspects of that morning: community support, personal achievement, teamworking with Dad are my *running roots*.

It is for these reasons I chose to run and it is for these reasons I continue to run.

Viking Shoots

I experienced success throughout junior high and high school, learning along the way that commitment and passion and execution turn your dreams into something more tangible. My first breakout season occurred in 8th grade, where I went almost-undefeated in cross country and undefeated in track. My goals changed from finishing in the top-100 at races to breaking course and school records. Despite my whirlwind of success on the track, I chose to play softball my first two years of high school. Thankfully, the track coaches encouraged me to participate in the district track meet my sophomore year. This experience guided me to the decision to retire my composite bat and replace it with a baton and spikes. My first state qualification came my junior year in track. I finished 8th in the 1600 meter race. Momentum from the spring continued to fall; I improved my 5k PR set my freshman year from 19:38 to 18:45 and I qualified for my first state in cross country, finishing 7th. Coming off of my strongest cross country season, I dreamt big for the track season. These big dreams led me to leaping out of my comfort zone between seasons; that winter, I bought a Nike swimsuit and bright blue goggles and joined Miami East's first (3-person) swim team. Training and competing was just as much strength-building as it was mind-building. I finished last - *dead last* - at meets. But I was damn proud! Because swimming for me was like chemistry: awkward, confusing, difficult, extremely fatiguing. Unlike the fall and upcoming spring where my focus was directed toward top-finishes, records and qualifications, the winter's energy was given toward completing minute victories (not belly-smacking off the blocks, swimming 3 consecutive laps at practice). The swim season matured my perspective, redefined success, awakened an adventurous spirit and developed a sense of open-mindedness that I applied to training and racing in the spring. My Viking career pinnacled on the Jesse Owens track, where my big dreams revealed themselves in a 1600m state champion title.

And that crazy couple from Casstown, Ron & Linda, were *there*, every stride along the way, from the top-100-finish goals to the dream of becoming a state champion. Their incredible guidance, a familial Viking team and immeasurable support from the Miami East community created a nurturing environment that instilled a joy for growth and a curiosity for limits.

Bobcat Branches

The Appalachian hills and brick streets in Athens, Ohio became a 4-year nest of growth and knowledge. As a freshman at Ohio University, I was overwhelmed by the positive energy that radiated from the women's team, by the level of commitment that teammates passionately gave to the sport, by our coach's, Mitch Bentley, expansive running knowledge and by the raw challenge of transitioning from high school to college. That first year, 'The Adjustment Year', I rode the caboose for almost all runs and workouts and general understandings of our sport. A seat in the caboose is quite advantageous, however, because it serves as a prime observation dock. My teammates were wonderful role models; from the caboose, I was able

to note their routines and habits that developed them into successful runners that I dreamed of becoming.

A year's worth of miles & learning provides college sophomores with newfound senses of confidence and comfortability and strength and guaranteed progression entering the cross country season. The progression I experienced during the 2011-2012 season was unexpected and invigorating. And it was simple; a naivety allowed for a single-track method of training and racing: *Let's see how far I can go*. I improved my 32nd-place finish at the Mid-American Conference Cross Country Championships to a first-place finish. An 8th place finish at the Great Lakes Regional meet was a qualification for the 2011 NCAA Division 1 Cross Country Championships. And at NCAAs, I squeaked into the top 40, earning All-American honors. That winter I ran PRs in the mile, the 3k and 5k. I had run my first *track* 5,000m that season in 16:05 -- just a few seconds away from an NCAA qualifying time. The following weekend I qualified for the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships with a 15:58.69 PR. It was a fairytale whirlwind of PRs and qualifications that were seeded in an incredible support system of coaches and teammates and faculty at Ohio University.

In the final two years at Ohio University, I continued to progress, earning cross country All-American honors in 2012 and 2013. On the track, I wetted my feet in the 10,000 meters, but believe that my legs and I have much more to show! A sentiment of unfinished business led me to Oregon.

Growing with TRE

Team Run Eugene and coach Ian Dobson provides runners with resources to *finish* their unfinished business. Eugene, the city, provides an unmatched system of support to her athletes. Encouragement, passion, curiosity and commitment buzz around like flies near a picnic in June. It's intoxicating, it's invigorating and it's downright *fun*. I am extremely optimistic for the future and excited for this new place of discovery. I hope to root myself deep within Eugene's community and blossom with longevity!