

“The great American writer Willa Cather’s tombstone reads ‘This is Bliss: To be dissolved into something great.’ Have you ever known bliss? Can you imagine what your bliss would be? What would it mean to be dissolved into that?”

Finding Bliss in the Unexpected

Have I ever known bliss? Well, as a groggy-eyed, motivationally-declined, sleep-deprived highschooler, the initial answer may seem cynical. “I don’t know bliss,” I’d say harshly, “I only know useless facts about the fourteenth president and how to take a 4 hour standardized test which apparently defines my future.” Honestly, I wouldn’t blame myself for such a pessimistic answer. Being inculcated with the notion that junior year academics define my future definitely brings a hefty load of stress. Wrestling through this seemingly incessant barrage of stresses can cause a distraction from finding complete happiness, or as the Merriam Webster dictionary defines it, “bliss.” It’s not that my life is defunct of bliss, per se; I just need to shift my paradigm regarding bliss. For example, Willa Cather’s tombstone defines bliss “To be dissolved into something great.” Maybe this new perspective on bliss will portray it in a new light, leading me to identify bliss in my own life.

Even looking at bliss in a new light, it seemed like I wasn’t doing anything “great.” And even if there were something “great” in my life, I am nowhere near “dissolved” in it right now. I’m just trying to survive each day through junior year and make it to college (or what parents and teachers seem to portray as “The Promised Land.”) However, it occurred to me one day when I truly discovered that I was “dissolved into something great.” I was at pre-season track practice along with Jonathan, a senior athlete who motivates me to be the best version of myself. The day was a dreary, misty, and mundane monday. As I neared the end of my third set, I hollered out to Jonathan, “This rain is miserable! Why are we out here?” Jonathan, as calm as could be, simply replied “No dude, this is great.” It was then that I realized, maybe I am doing something great. After all, why would I be out there in the notoriously gloomy Oregon rain if I wasn’t doing something great.

Alright, well I’ve realized that the sport of track and field is maybe a source of bliss in my life. But the question which keeps coming back to me, like a kid playing with a boomerang, is “Why?” There can’t possibly be a justification for the only bliss in my life to be running in a circle multiple times in the gloomy Oregon rain. Why would I enjoy the dry heaving, the excruciating leg cramps, the soggy mud-soaked clothes, and the occasional sickening throw up after running. To my parents, it seems absurd that I willingly partake in such activities, and to say that I consider such activities to be “great?” Well if I tell that to my parents, they may think I’m pushing the boundaries of insanity.

At first glance, it seems like I would partake in these activities because I have an inherent talent to track and field. I would want to work hard to get better and develop my skills. Maybe even earn an athletic scholarship, and please the “college hungry” individuals in my life. But that’s not the case for me. I am a junior varsity athlete who participates above average, but still nothing great, and I certainly don’t anticipate a collegiate running career. So there must be something else, something else convincing me why I find bliss in the sport of track and field. This was difficult to find, but it occurred to me one day as I sat in a circle with my men’s track team, stretching out after a workout which seemed to test every ounce of my determination.

I realized that I put up with the toil of running for the bond that I have with this group of men. However, this is a different kind of bond; one formed through blood, sweat, and the occasional tears. Over the years, I have developed a meaningful rapport with each member. First, there are the seniors Sam, Jonathan, and Jack, whose sheer dedication and work ethic motivate me to be my best self. They exemplify the notion that “hard work pays off” as they have their names on a school record for the relay (and possibly the state record in a few months.) Next, there are my junior peers Robi, Andrew, and Jack, whose presence alongside mine show me that I am not alone as I combat the challenges associated with running. Having been in the same training group with these individuals since freshman year, we often reminisce on how far we have come since then. And lastly, there is Ethan, my best friend since kindergarten. We have run practically everything together: the annual elementary school jog-a-thons, the amateur middle school meets, and now we compete together in high school. For the two of us, we have developed a tradition of running as a time to destress and talk about issues, and more importantly, listen to each other. We have continued this tradition of running together for over eleven years, and hopefully many more to come.

All of the individual relationships add up to the greater beauty of the men’s track team. I cannot think of another activity in which I feel so connected (“dissolved” if you must) to a group of people. We do everything together: we pray together; we stretch and run together; we cry and curse together; we laugh and holler together; we face the ups and downs together. The important word is “together.” We have formed a togetherness of that of a brotherhood. I know my track family cares deeply for me, just as I reciprocate the same for them.

I thank Willa Cather for showing me a new perspective on bliss. I thank her for catalyzing me to reflect on bliss in my life. Although I still am a groggy-eyed, motivationally-declined, sleep-deprived highschooler, I feel reassured knowing that I have found bliss in my life. A bliss which I vow to hold on to as long as possible.