

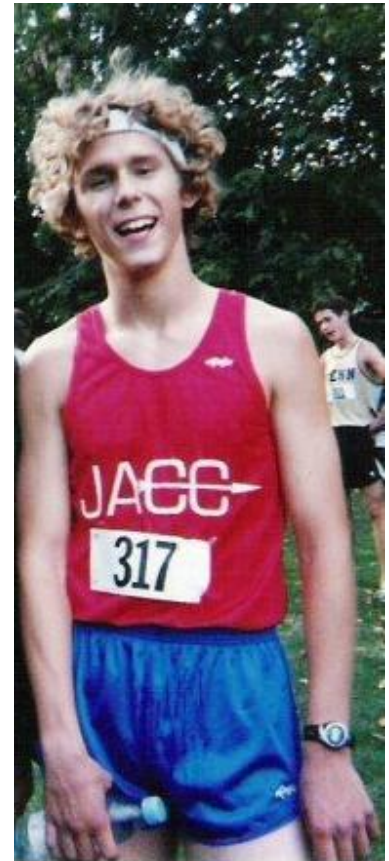
Dear future and current members of John Adams Cross Country,

I was commissioned by your current captains to compose a heart-felt, compassionate letter that instills a sense of inspiration and encouragement, by citing my numerous positive experiences within the program. I jumped at the chance for such a venture with a characteristic gleam in my eye and a smug smirk on my face. I was slightly disheartened, however, when I was strictly informed that if I wrote about dead hookers and/or the communist party, that my contribution would be ghost written by a Chinese immigrant. Rather than have my message replaced by a garbled Cantonese haiku, I will try to impart my actual experiences in a semi-inspirational format.

For those of you new to the program, the previous paragraph might have made it obvious that in my high school career, I rarely took things seriously. I am **positive** that there is a person you know that is just like me (we breed heartily and often). Always saying something really strange just for a laugh; never seeming to shut up; playing a pun out until its paper thin, and then when you think its finally done, he brings it back for another round of abuse; never a ladies man because dick & fart jokes are too funny just to stop for some tonsil hockey (Think about it. You know a *Me*). Be it school, running, or any other extra-curricular activities, I was always screwing around, much to the general amusement of people around me.

When I say that I rarely took things seriously, however, I mean that I never took situations with the same sort of morose gravity that other people did, not that I didn't work my ass off. As I am writing this, I am finishing my senior Track season. I have not seriously taken a day off from running since the beginning of Cross Country my Junior year, excluding one week between seasons to prevent injury. Every Sunday, when most of my team-mates are asleep, I wake up, sore and groggy, and call my fellow die-hards to find out when we=re doing our over-distance run. There is very little, save raining Sulfur, that can prevent our workouts; even the cancellation of practice because of supposed weather conditions like torrential downpours and sub-zero temperatures. In many ways, my attitude towards Cross Country is a paradox. I take the extreme level of effort and combine it with a minimal level of sobriety.

Unfortunately keeping with the double meanings, when I say minimal level of sobriety, I am also making reference to my years running as an underclassman. I spent a large amount of my freshman and sophomore Saturdays absolutely plastered out of my mind. I even came to several summer practices with what can only be described as white hot searing hangovers. I ran, but I did a lot with my drinking buddies, and didn't think too much about the combination of my interests. Turns out I didn't think a whole lot about anything until my supposed "buddies" broke into my house and stole electronics for drug money. This experience ripped me apart. Having your entire support-structure outside your family be torn down in a blink of an eye can affect a person.



Fortunately for me, I had only three days to contemplate upon my supposed loss, because I had already signed up for the JACC camping trip. As corny as it may sound, I took a lot of meaning and self-realization from those four days. I realized that there was a group of people that would support me no matter what, simply because I was part of the team and tried my hardest. I came to the understanding that I had been wasting my precious, fleeting moments as an athlete and that I had the power to completely change my perception; not only on athletics, but on life. After those four days on the beach, I came back with a new appreciation for what I was capable of, and I always strove to do the best.

A single tear is now shed for the movie producers of the world, because while Hollywood would like this paragraph to be about how my great personal catharsis inspired my indomitable work ethic and propelled me to the top of my field, eventually to the State Finals, I am only slightly saddened to say that I never ran faster than low eighteens (for a slightly less eloquent, but more Mighty Ducks oriented kind of story, read Jeff's entry). Why, you might ask, can I state this with such calm certainty and without even a twinge of regret? Because I played my part on the team and did everything I possible could to succeed. When I couldn't run, I rode my bike. When I couldn't ride my bike, I lifted weights. When I sprained my ankle, I distinctly remember doing repeats by moonlight the night I got a clean bill of health from the doctor. I was a man obsessed, despite my modest improvements.

As a result of all my experiences, running is my passion. It is the greatest mental, physical, and emotional release that I have ever encountered. When everything else is wrong in your life, and it seems like nothing can go right; a good hard run will never let you down. Some people find religion: I found the team, the trails, and the road. I truly love the sport and everything about it (even the stretching). If I thought I could continue seriously on the collegiate level, I would in a heart-beat. As it is, I'm sure the Notre Dame Men's Running Club will become my new point of obsession.

If I could bestow any small token of wisdom upon those who read this letter, it would be that life is entirely too short to take seriously. It is also entirely too short to wait for the right moment, the right race, or the right season. Cross Country isn't about getting in shape, or winning one for John Adams, or the damn T-shirts. It's about overcoming yourself, about wanting more, when you've got nothing left; about the supreme feeling of success that comes from collapsing at a finish line. Cross Country is about puking on your shoes.... and smiling.

Rob Plasschaert