

# *Cross the Line: Ventures of a Collegiate Student-Athlete*

*~Jolynne Denman~*

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12: 1-3

Name: Jolynne Denman

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Abstract

Being a student-athlete for four years, you learn and develop as an individual and student at a swift pace. Most days for regular students end when classes are over, however, as a collegiate three sport athlete my day is far from being finished. From the beginning of the season we have to time manage our schedules – fitting in practices and weight-lifting, classes, working a job or two, and making time to be with friends and family. Also, it is a struggle for some of us student-athletes when we have to be away from our classes due to competition, we consider it lucky if a professor understand our absence. Likewise, being absent from our family and friends is difficult, and we miss out on some humorous activities. However, we student-athletes would not trade our college experiences for anything, because we are amongst a large family, which is our team, and we grow to love and support one another throughout our four or five years of college.

*“The pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible.”*

*~ Vladimir Nabokov ~*

**"Gypsy" ~ Fleetwood Mac**

So I'm back, to the velvet underground  
Back to the floor, that I love  
To a room with some lace and paper flowers  
Back to the gypsy that I was  
To the gypsy... that I was  
And it all comes down to you  
Well, you know that it does  
Well, lightning strikes, maybe once, maybe twice  
Ah, and it lights up the night  
And you see your gypsy  
You see your gypsy  
To the gypsy that remains faces freedom with a little fear  
I have no fear, I have only love  
And if I was a child  
And the child was enough  
Enough for me to love  
Enough to love  
She is dancing away from me now  
She was just a wish  
She was just a wish  
And a memory is all that is left for you now  
You see your gypsy  
You see your gypsy  
Lightning strikes, maybe once, maybe twice  
And it all comes down to you  
And it all comes down to you  
Lightning strikes, maybe once, maybe twice  
And it all comes down to you  
I still see your bright eyes, bright eyes  
And it all comes down to you  
I still see your bright eyes, bright eyes  
And it all comes down to you  
I still see your bright eyes, bright eyes  
(She was just a wish)  
(She was just a wish)  
And it all comes down to you  
Lightning strikes, maybe once, maybe twice  
And it all comes down to you

## Gypsy

Down some quiet dirt lane where pines stand  
proud

Where fields of corn and wheat wave their  
golden banners

Where birds fly amongst the kingdoms of clouds  
our caravan passes down the lane where sun  
winks down upon us.

Our caravan does not cease, we must away at

The break of dawn

The women look forlorn as we depart for our  
destination

Our patriarch sits honored on the first bench  
where we go, the patriarch decides and guides  
beneath the early morn we women sleep, as our  
beloved patriarch looks on

We are Gypsies, never stay in one place for too  
long.

Tumbleweeds in the wind, never knowing our  
course.

The dirt road is all I know,

Whilst students remain in dorms, I am on the  
dust

The Gypsy crowd is my family

With good songs, merriment, and laughter.

The first journey hard and plagued by homesickness

You have to forget, to let go, and move on  
the trips and rides to the meets are long and  
tiring

Gypsy sisters, sing and talk, sweeping to bearable  
distance.

The patriarch talked of far off days when times

Were simple and laden with youth

Where his Gypsies were prosperous and strong the  
lessons learned on the road will hold true in my heart

Gypsy women unforgotten, our teachers, of the free  
spirited.

We are sailors, sailing to far off lands and

The soldiers going to war

But miss what is left in the dust clouds

The nights are dark and the stars are rich with jewels  
set to see

From here the town glistens on the horizon,

I do not know how long we remain here,

My heart aches for the impending good-bye.

The life of a Gypsy.

*"You can't hate the Beast and expect to beat it; the only way to truly conquer something, as every great philosopher and geneticist will tell you, is to love it."*

*~ Dusty Olson ~*

## Tussling With the Beast

The Beast is ugly

Covered in scars, sores, and other ghastly features

Immense as the mountain,

Fierce as the sun,

Unrelenting as the typhoon.

Yet the Beast

Actually is us!

It is the doubt, the insecurity, and the jealousies

We harbor deep down.

As soon as you hit the gym, the track, or the field

It's there prowling.

Hungry to get a bite at you.

To tear your confidence and strength to shreds.

It whispers the doubt in your ear

Give up.

You're tired.

You can't make that last rep.

Or that shot.


That stride.

That kick.

That punch.


Just stay behind... it's no longer worth fighting for.

As soon as you hit the gym or the track,



And get down to business  
Here it comes struttin' in  
The Beast gives you the, "How you doin'?"  
"Ready for another round?"


Yet you get sickened  
You fear that dreadful moment  
Where exhaustion and vomiting  
Are playing tag with each other  
Weights land on you  
As though you are a pack mule  
You don't know if you can hang on  
Just one more second.



You look eye-to-eye with the Beast  
"You goin' to quit?"  
You smile and shirk the load off.

Let me tell you something about the Beast  
It may be immense, terrifying, and exhausting  
To face at every round  
But it can be tamed!

You can look at it straight in the eye  
And smile.  
In fact you look forward to your meeting  
You know you've pushed







Past the safety of comfort

Stagnation is shattered

When the Beast comes across your path.

Every bout you have

Fortifies and breaks you at the same time


The ole One-Two

Yet, this is where you want to be.

This is where few dare want to be.

However, this will take you far.

You pick up that weight



You throw that ball

You take that stride

Because this is where greatness and legends

Are created.

The Beast may take,

But we can take as well.


You want that title

Heck you want your name to be amongst

The others in Memorial Hall



You want to be able to look yourself in the mirror



And proudly say, "I did this! I beat it!"

So, when you go out

Whether to the gym, pool, field, or track



You feel fatigue gripping your limbs

And that hideous thing appears

What are you going to do?

Surrender and let it consume you? Or...

Go toe-to-toe with everything you have?



## Ice Baths

Ask any athlete about ice baths and you will see a slight twinge of pain. But it's brief. Then it transcends to a neutral gaze. Ice baths, or better known as whirlpools, use either hot or cold water.

Since I was a freshman, I was a main preoccupant of the Training Department's whirlpool. Took me a year and a half to remember which button operated the jets. One single button out of the twelve buttons on the control panel.

My favorite moment sitting in the fifty-two degree water, bubbling from the pressure jets in the solitude. The whirlpool is adjacent to the rest of the training room. Hardly anyone walks by, except one of the trainers to make sure I am not freezing like Steve Rogers did in *Captain America*. The only companions in the whirlpool are my thoughts and Squeaky, the yellow rubber ducky.

Most of the time my thoughts soar from school to events that occurred at track practice. How can I better myself? Am I supportive to the team? Geez louise!

When thinking becomes mindless and exhausting, I sink deeper into the frigid depths of the whirlpool, and I start to pray.

I do not pray for the water to be warmer. I do not pray for a rapid healing process. I actually pray for my husband while I soak.

My surrogate grandmother told me before she met her husband she prayed for her husband, Gene. It helped her deal with the heartache and envies she had when she waited. Also, it comforted her knowing her husband was experiencing the same situations as she. She said praying for your future spouse, not only brings peace for your significant other, it would bring peace to your heart. Rather than have it become envious and callous.

Right now, I just shiver in the frothing chilling water. A college student. Praying – for a future I hope to reach.

*“Being naked is a loss of control. This is good. We’re not  
in control in anyway. People see you as you are.  
Sometimes we expose ourselves before we understand  
what we have done.”*

*~ Natalie Goldberg ~*

## Crap

I have to go poop.

Enough said.

My bowels are groaning and begging me to go to the toilet.

But I can't now – I am in a hotel room with two girls from my track team.

You know the saying "girls can't fart; girls can't poop"?

Well that is complete shit – no pun intended.

This little lady had to drop a deposit in the white porcelain bank.

But I won't do it.

I don't want to stink up the bathroom or our hotel room.

Darn it!!!

My buttocks are clenching to hold in the sewage.

It hurts so much.

More groaning and begging from the bowels.

You can do it! You can hold it for a while longer!

I try to read, I try to watch TV, I try to do something to get my mind off from taking a dump

But to no avail.

**"Hey! You whoo! Earth to Jolynne!"**

Not listening.

**"Hey, this is your body talking to you!"**

Not listening.

**"If you don't pump this crap out, I'll do it myself right now on this hotel bed!"**

You wouldn't!?

**"I'll give you to the count of three."**

I can hold it.

**"One."**

Not moving.

**"Two."**

Oh gosh, bathroom! Bathroom!

**"Three."**

Safe!

Relief comes in waves as I finish my business.

Uh-oh! It smells like a carcass in here!

Now what?

*"It doesn't matter who my father was; it matters  
who I remember he was."*

*~ Anne Sexton ~*

## My Coach

“Feeling appreciated is one of the most important needs that people have. When you share with someone your appreciation and gratitude, they will not forget you. Appreciation will return to you many times,” Steve Brunkhorst once said.

Ever since I was a little girl, I always had my coach with me, and I appreciate all the dedication and hard work he put into my life. He is a man made of muscle but also compassion. He was there the day I was brought into this world, and he keeps telling me he was the first thing I saw when I opened my eyes. He can be a very interesting man sometimes. One minute he can be made of stone, but the minute one of his athletes, his children, or me are in trouble, he turns into a fierce lion and is ready to protect us from whatever. When I was little I would tell him he was my Superman, and I was happy to have him in my life, and I remember a smile would creep slowly across his hard stern face. He may be intimidating on the outside but he is a giant teddy bear on the inside.

My coach helped me in whatever sport that I participated in since my childhood. From t-ball to wrestling, that man was with me till the end. He made sure I understood the rules of the game, to be humble and never be cocky, and to be a team player. As I grew up and joined my high school swim team, wrestling team, and track team, my coach followed me through my athletic career. He helped with my technique performance, establishing goals, doing weight-lifting circuits, eating properly, and enjoying being a part of athletics.

I admire my coach for he comes from a humble background. He lived on a farm in Park Rapids, MN with five younger sisters. So whatever girl problem I had, my coach had dealt with



it – his favorite girl activity to do is braiding hair and painting fingernails and toenails. There are pictures of my coach sitting on a couch and me sitting cross-legged on the floor and him gently braiding my long brown hair. I love that picture, because it shows the gentle side of my coach. In high school, he was a football star, a tough wrestler, and a determined track athlete. After college he entered the world of competitive rowing in Duluth, MN where he would meet the love of his life from Canada. My coach later became a three time national champion in rowing, and a father of three healthy children. He loves each of his children so much; each one of them inherited his determined, hard-working attitude, and strong athleticism.

Sometimes my coach would dig out a large plastic storage container from the back of his closet, and we would look through all of his medals, trophies, and talk about his glory days. Most of his memories are filled with strain, determination, and triumph. But he bears some of the scars and injuries from his past. Old age had also finally caught up to him. Crow's feet stretch around his steel-blue eyes, a Santa Clause size stomach formed around his middle – he calls it his “twin” – and his brown locks are gone leaving behind a shiny bald head, and arthritis plagues his joints. For being fifty-three years old, he somehow stays active. In the winter, he coaches the Cloquet-Esko boys wrestling team, and spars with them. Watching him over the years has shown me that age is just a number; and never let it stop you from reaching your goals.

In wrestling he was my sparing partner, in swimming and track he was my timer. My coach was my greatest fan – always cheering, whistling at me to pick up the pace, giving me hugs after my competition, and asking me, “Having fun yet?” I reply back, “Living the dream.” That saying continuously threw me off, my coach would say that, to keep my perspective in place – I had this one life to live, I have to make it count, and leave with no regrets.

I am truly grateful for this old man in my life. Full of wisdom, strength, and spunk in such a small, solid body. He was the shoulder that I could cry on, something to lean on for support after facing defeat. The ears that listened to my cries, my questions, and my demands about everything in life and sports. The eyes that have seen most of what this world is all about. The heart that keeps giving and that never breaks. My coach gave me courage, spirit, and true grit to use in sports, and in my everyday life. Plus, he gave the greatest gift I could ever ask for, he believed in me and cared about me. The hardest thing I did to my coach was when I told him I was going off to Bemidji State for college. I could see the pain and sadness in his hard blue eyes. His precious girl was spreading her wings. I promised him we would keep in close contact while I was away, but it was not the same having him with me during practice. I had to deal with a different coach, and follow his different rules and opinions.

When the day begins to settle after track practice, and all is silent in my little dorm room, I grab my cell phone, and dial my coach's number.

Three rings go by. Then...

"Hello?"

"Hi daddy!"

**"Look Through My Eyes" ~Phil Collins**

There are things in life you learn  
And oh in time you'll see  
It's out there somewhere  
It's all waiting  
If you keep believing  
So don't run  
Don't hide  
It will be all right  
You'll see  
Trust me  
I'll be there watching over you

Just take a look through my eyes  
There's a better place somewhere out there  
Just take a look through my eyes  
Everything changes  
You'll be amazed what you'll find  
(There's a better place)  
If you look through my eyes

There will be times on this journey  
All you'll see is darkness  
But out there somewhere  
Daylight finds you  
If you keep believing  
So don't run  
Don't hide  
It will be all right  
You'll see  
Trust me  
I'll be there watching over you

Just take a look through my eyes  
There's better place somewhere out there  
Just take a look through my eyes  
Everything changes  
You'll be amazed what you'll find  
(There's a better place)  
If you look through my eyes

All the things that you can change  
There's a meaning in everything  
And you will find all you need  
There's so much to understand  
Take a look (take a look) through my eyes  
There's a better place somewhere out there  
Just take a look (take a look) through my eyes  
Everything changes  
You'll be amazed what you'll find  
(You'll be amazed if you just take a look)  
Look through my eyes there's a better place somewhere out there  
Just take a look through my eyes  
Everything changes  
You'll be amazed what you'll find  
If you look through my eyes  
Just take a look through my eyes  
If you look through my eyes  
Take a look through my eyes

## Deal

***"Your teacher and your favorite athlete switch lives (but not bodies) for a day. Explain what happens."***

I scribbled the sentence on the black board, and I hear the soft huffs of my College Composition class behind me. The three day weekend apparently was not enough for them I guessed. A twinge of envy crosses my mind; the day before I was holed up in my tiny office with a pot of Italian roasted coffee, a red pen, and two stacks of Composition papers, the majority of Presidents' Day. Exhausted and counting down the days to the upcoming spring holiday, I situate myself behind my temporary desk.

The class is a mixture of classmen – majority were freshmen and a handful of upperclassmen – if I could not wrangle the freshmen, the upperclassmen would in a matter of seconds. There was one upperclassman, I did not want to admit I appreciated to have in the class, who was the designated den mother. "Listen up!" she barked and the students hushed up, I guess after four years of being a team captain you had to be good at intimidation and giving orders. Yet, something about her rubbed me the wrong way.

Her name is Krijger, well her last name.

Maybe that was what bugged me – Dutch for warrior. I snorted at the thought, at times she could be, however, she was a mousy woman. The attendance sheet stated she was a senior, and the Graduation Committee approved for her to graduate in May. I cringed at the thought of the past semesters I had shared with this student.

Multiple late or poorly finished assignments, and papers. Unexcused absences which would cause numerous arguments between the two of us. I kept a tally list of the amount of time Krijger had fallen asleep during my classes – she was pushing fifty. It frustrated me at how disrespectful Krijger was

to my class, well she did not blurt out while I was lecturing, but she did not appear to be putting any effort in this class. If Krijger was going to slack off in her last class, I was going to make sure she was going to be punished for it, with a low grade and the possibility of graduation unlikely.

I snorted in amusement, and immediately Krijger's olive toned eyes locked on me. We stare down each other for a few seconds; Krijger is the first to break it by returning back to her quiet discussion with one of the freshman. Apparently they were both student-athletes of various teams. Krijger was senior captain of the Track team and the freshman was from the Volleyball team.

"I don't know how to finish this in time," the volleyball girl sighed. "We have an off-season tournament this weekend."

"I hear ya'," Krijger sympathized. "I think I will hold this off until the last day."

Here we go again. *Where was this woman going to wind up in life?* Probably waitressing or some other blue collar job. *Also, why was it always the athletes that slacked off in their academics?* I wondered. I snuck a glance over at Krijger, and sure enough she had her arms propped up like a pillow, and her face nestled in them while sleeping. The volleyball player was her lookout, and when she caught my stare she elbowed Krijger in her rib cage. Krijger woke with a start, and the volleyball girl nodded in my direction, and I looked away.

I finally had enough of this. I was going to give Krijger an ultimatum.

Once class was dismissed, I slowly gathered my materials into my bag, waiting subtly for Krijger to go out the door. Rubbing her eyes and stifling a yawn, Krijger managed to fill up her backpack and head for the door.

"Ms. Krijger, may I have a word with you?" Krijger slowed her pace, and turned to me. Her athletic body tensed up in anticipation for what will happen.

"Yes Mrs. Oprosnik?" feigning politeness.

"You have fallen asleep again in my class for the fiftieth time."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Oprosnik. It was a late night for me last night," Krijger apologized. I could tell she was sincere with the apology; however, I could no longer tolerate her behavior.

"This is becoming unacceptable, Ms. Krijger. Lately, this semester and all the other classes I have taught with you your academic performance has dropped. I understand you are graduating this May; however, I will not let you get away with this. Either you change your behavior or I will fail you in this course."

Immediately Krijger's body stiffened and her olive eyes widened in disbelief.

***Oh yes, honey I have that kind of power***, I snicker on the inside. Then Krijger's eyes shifted to the blackboard, and to my surprise a witty smile creased her lips.

"All right, Mrs. Oprosnik, since you have given me an ultimatum I will give you one."

***This ought to be rich.***

"All right, what is it." What stupid bargain was I going to be a part of?

"You and I will do what the blackboard says. You live in the day of my life, and I will for yours. Home, class, work, and everything. We get to see each other's life, and then come to some kind of understanding. One day, and no backing out, all right?"

Wow! I was impressed with her strategy.

"And if I don't accept this deal?" Krijger shrugged her shoulders.

"Haven't thought that far ahead, ma'am. When I do come up with something I'll let you know. Anyhow, do we have a deal?" Krijger extended her hand towards me, and I see the various callouses and scars on it. Throwing pride out the window I shake it disdainfully.

"Starting tomorrow at 7 a.m.," she says. "I'll see you at the office." Then casually, Krijger strutted out the door, leaving me feeling like an idiot.

I arrive on the dot at my office, and Krijger had beat me for she was napping sitting down in front of my office.

*Is this girl a bear?* I wondered. I cough aloud which startled Krijger awake. She nodded acknowledging me, and handed me a piece of notebook paper. She explained it is her daily schedule, I notice it had her class and work schedule with their locations and the times. Plus, her practice schedule was included alongside with the name of her coach and fellow team captains.

"My number is at the top of the paper," she explained. "Just in case you get mixed up about something." I was a little surprised about her consideration. "Oh, I thought about what would happen if you or I broke the deal."

"Go on," I mutter looking at the sheet of paper.

"If you or I break the deal, the person has to admit to the other person they are unable to live the life of that person. The person that 'wins' gets to decide how the loser is penalized."

"Fine," I sighed. Again, Krijger extended her hand and shook mine.

"Pleasah doin' beziness with ya govena'," Krijger jokes in a fake Cockney accent.

I pass her my schedule and she reviewed it thoroughly, and I gave her my work keys. A feeling of uneasiness sickens my stomach as I passed over my control as teacher to her.

Krijger casually waved a silly salute and walked down the hallway, "Getting breakfast!"

I sighed in regret, and looked down at the sheet clutched in my hand, "all right, what is first on the agenda?" I scan the first entry, and my jaw drops.

Schedule				
7:30 – 8: 45 a.m.	Weight lifting	Coach Hardly	Weight Room	Rec Center
9:00 – 9:50 a.m.	European Renaissance Art and History	Dr. Maxeager	Room 320A	Hanker Building
10:00 – 10:50 a.m.	Coaching Techniques	Coach Farmer	Room 212	Rec Center
11:00 – 1:45 p.m.	Work in the Honors Office	Mrs. Nagel	Room 415	Hanker Building
2:00-4:30 p.m.	Track Practice	Coach Hardly	Track	Rec Center
4:45-5:10 p.m.	Rehabilitation	Mr. Brosik	Medical Office	Rec Center
5:15 – 6:30 p.m.	Weight lifting	Coach Hardly	Weight Room	Rec Center
6:45 – 8:00 p.m.	Study group/ Head Home	Team	Library	Library

"7:30 am Weight-lifting!" I scream. I hear a cackle down the hallway.

"You'll love it, Mrs. Oprosnik," Krijger laughs. "Remember to pace yourself."



I rush to the Recreational Center, and I thank myself for renting a locker there as I dress hurriedly. I can hear behind one of the segmented parts of the Womens' locker room, supposedly Krejger's teammates. I wait until some of them leave the locker room to head for the weight room. Pretty soon a trio of slim blondes leaves the segmented area, and I tail behind them. One of them turns her head, and looks quizzically at me.

"Morning, Mrs. Oprosnik, are you lost? The public weight-room is on the other side of the building," she politely says.

"Good morning, but no, I am accompanying you ladies to your weight-room," I explained, trying to hide my embarrassment, and growing irritation. "I have to settle a bet."

"Settling the bet Anja made, huh?" a voice said behind me. A medium built girl with striking auburn hair and gray eyes caught up to the group. Seeing my confusion and surprise, she smiled reassuringly to me, and held out her hand. "I'm Casey, co-captain with Anja of the Track team. She told me everything related to the bet. Could hardly believe she had the gaul to challenge you like this."

"Yeah, I am surprised too." The girls laugh as we make it to the weight room, known to them as "the cage."

Upon observation I understood why it was given the title. The entire weight room was caged up in solid black mesh metal. It nearly gave the appearance of a dungeon. It was drafty in the room, and the smell of cleaning chemicals lingered in the air. Casey explained it was due to the ventilation system, "The football boys stink up the joint when they have double days, so we're thankful for the system." There were various machines scattered throughout the room, along with several squat racks and back benches. In their eyes these were tools to cultivate their athletic career; while I saw them as crude torture devices.

Standing off to the side door leading into the weight room, a middle-aged man with gray hair and steely dark eyes waited with a packet of sheets in his hands. His eyes appeared to be assessing the girls' body language and behavior.

"Good morning, ladies," he said, almost like a parent would to waking up a sleepy child. "Ready to shake loose the cobwebs?" Several groans were his answer, and he smiled as he passed out the packets. When I approached him, I felt a slight twinge of intimidation the coach may have appeared old, however the way he carried himself commanded respect and attention.

*He knows his way around the block*, I thought.

"Good to see you, Mrs. Oprosnik," Coach Hardly says with courtesy. "I hope you are doing well this morning?"

"I am well, thank you," I reply. "I suppose Anja Krejger told you about the deal?" Coach Hardly chuckled and hands me Krejger's packet.

"Last night she did," he chuckled. "Just to let you know you don't have to do the work out. I don't want you to get injured." I shake my head as I walk into the weight room. *I am not going back on my word*, I tell myself. Besides, I did not want to admit to Krejger I lost the deal.

*\*Meanwhile\**

*How am I supposed to teach these guys if they cannot take me seriously?* Krejger wondered, as she panicked behind the temporary desk. Mrs. Oprosnik's schedule showed there was going to be an English Department meeting from 8:00 a.m. till about 9:00 a.m. followed by 9:00 a.m. Understanding Literature class. Thankfully, there was a Graduate Assistant paired up with Oprosnik. The class was in a hubbub about upcoming Midterms the following week, and none appeared to be prepared.

"Hey!" Krejger shouted. Cricket chirps. "Just for today I will be teaching for Mrs. Oprosnik, she is away performing a social...experiment." Questioning stares and shoulder shrugs were her reply.

"Now let's start where Oprosnik left off," the Graduate Assistant began.

"How about a movie?" a boy hollered from the back of the classroom. Then came a volley of remarks and questions. The Graduate Assistant appeared to falter in his authority, and Krejger sighed in agitation. *Time to take the bull by the horns*, she thought. *No wonder Mrs. Oprosnik appears so stressed out.*

***\*Meanwhile\****

I situate myself stiffly in the office chair in the Honors Department Office instantly I regretted not taking Coach Hardy and...Krejger's advice on taking things easy during practice. It had been almost ten years since I had done that much physical activity.

"Paying the piper, eh?" Roslynne the office administrator asked. I had known her since I was hired as an assistant professor years ago. I groan as I try to resituate my hips only to be followed by shocks of pain.

"How the heck does she do this?" I mutter. Roslynne smiles and shakes her head.

"I wonder that myself, yet, she is always composed and bright eyed," she said.

"I barely made it through the classes on Anja's schedule. I kept nodding off."

"Oh Tuesdays and Thursdays are her easy days," Roslynne explained. "It appears she let you go easy. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays are her stressful days. On those days she is always cat napping."

It did not occur to me about the rest of Krejger's weekly schedule. How in the world could she keep everything in order? It began to make sense why Krejger was exhausted when she would come to her Monday/Wednesday Composition class.

"Does she tell you how late she stays up studying or working?"

"I know she has a mandatory study group meeting every week night from 6:45 till around 8 p.m. After that she finishes whatever is left over at her house, which is sometimes till around midnight."

***Midnight, then morning weight lifting, I thought. Good grief!***

"How much do you have left for her schedule?" Roslyne inquired.

"Just practice and more weight lifting."

"Sneak in a cat nap while you can."

I fold my arms into a pillow as Krejger would, and immediately sink into sleep.

***\*Meanwhile\****

Krejger twirled herself in Oprosnik's office chair, and stared tirelessly at the ticking Edgar Allan Poe raven clock above the desk. Almost four o'clock, then Oprosnik's office hours are done, and then she could head back to the rec center and catch a quick workout. Then a knock on the door startled her back to reality.

"Yes?" A salt-and-pepper haired man stood in the doorway with a folder and a cup of steaming coffee. The smell was dark and rich with aroma of Italian roast. Krejger felt her body long for a sip, it had been a long day.

"It is the weekly Literary Research committee meeting," he says. Krejger groaned and stood up to follow the man.

*How does this woman do it?* Krejger wondered, as she locked the door. So much for leaving early. *Remind me to not be a professor. I'd rather take middle or high students.*

"All right, ladies, only an 800m and two 400m left to do on the ladder," Coach Hardly barked from across the opposite side of the outdoor track. The stadium lights cast the football field and the track in shining light and only Harder's silhouette could be made out. A cool breeze gently swept past the panting runners, providing gentle caresses to the sweat building on their bodies.

My lungs pumped hard to get fresh air into my body, while my legs were shaking from the buildup of what the girls called lactic acid. Coach Hardly assigned for today's workout to be a ladder – 200m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1000m, 800m, and 400m – then it was back to the weight room for further conditioning. I did not know how much more I could handle, I was feeling this morning's weight lifting workout and this ladder set was adding to the exhaustion. I glanced at Casey who had been racing right beside me throughout the whole practice; though she was breathing heavily, her body was tensed for the next round.

*She's good at hiding her fatigue,* I thought. *I guess when you are in competition you have to hide it in order to mess with your opponent.*

"Looking sexy ladies!" a voice hollered from the home side of the stadium. Although the lights blocked out the features of the person, immediately the girls smiled and hollered back. I recognized Krejger. She walked down the steps and sat in the front row, observing the rest of the workout.

*She held her end of the bargain*, I thought. A part of me was impressed she made it, which I did not want to believe. *Well, I better hold up my end or otherwise she will never let it go.*

The rest of the ladder workout was grueling, although I tried to stay on Casey's shoulder the whole time, she clicked into another gear and pulled away on the last lap of the 800m and on the 400m I was ready to let go. Then –

“Come on, Mrs. Oprosnik! The freshmen are coming in hot!” Krejger hollered from the opposite side of the field. Gritting my teeth I tried to pick a new gear, and barely stayed ahead of the blonde trio I met that morning. I was welcomed by applause and cheering by the girls who had finished, I was taken aback by this. They smiled as they gasped for air while they held their hands up for a high-five or clapped me on the back.

“Nice job, Mrs. Oprosnik, you have completed a full College track practice,” Coach Hardly said as he handed me a water bottle, which was sweating with condensation. I took it gratefully and squirted the cool liquid down my throat which was raw and cracked. When I handed back the bottle I noticed the team was heading for the Rec Center to finish up their workout. However, I had to ask Casey something before Krejger arrived.

“Why does Krejger have to do rehabilitation? She seems to be in perfect health,” I said. Casey looked at the turf, and then across the field watching Krejger leave the stands to meet up with us. She shook her head and her eyes had a slight mourning look.

“Car accident two years ago,” she said. “During Cross Country season, we thought we had the right-of-way when we were running through an intersection. The driver didn't stop, they were texting. Anja pulled me out of the way, she was clipped by the car, and her right leg and pelvis were broken in three places.”

I was shocked, and I remembered two years ago Krejger walking around with crutches for months. Also, her wincing in pain when she would stand up from sitting. I had no idea it was from an accident...and risking her life for her teammate.

"Yeah, even though it took her awhile to regain her strength she is still here," Casey said with adoration. "That is what I appreciate about Anja; she's a fighter in everything she does." With that Casey walked over to Anja, and gave her a fist bump with a grin on her face. Then Krejger walked over to me, and I noticed the slight hitch in her walk, the accident had marked her for the rest of her life.

"I will admit, I had a tough time holding to my end of the deal," Krejger mused when she reached me. "Teaching your classes was a shocker."

"Now you understand the other side of the coin?" I asked. Krejger nodded and rested her hands on her hips in resolve.

"How about you? It seems you did a great job on your side," Krejger said, and I noticed the look of approval in her olive eyes. We both acknowledged our capability.

"It's tough huh?"

"Yes, I have to admit that."

"Well, now what? We both held up our ends of the deal."

I look down at the turf and tried to figure out the best way to handle our predicament. It was good I was able to see the other side of the coin for a current college student. It was exhausting and interesting at the same time. I had come to an understanding of Krejger's past behavior and actions she could not help them, she was trying to keep her studies and athletics in the balance.

"How about a truce?" I asked. "I was being a little harsh and inconsiderate. If you can keep on top of your studies, then I won't have a problem with you."

"Okay, no guarantees, though," Krejger said, as she shook my hand.

***\* Two Months Later \****

I sit in my chair during the Graduation Commencement ceremony. The room is stifling from the various bodies packed inside. Also, May had brought warm sunshine and comforting breezes, which added to the heat in the room. However, the temperature did not bother me I was glad the semester was over for this year. Watching the students making their way up to the stage was an enjoyment for me. The student transitioning onto the next stage of their journey, and becoming an individual different from when they arrived at college their first year.

"Anja Krejger, cum laude." Roars of praise erupted cockeyed from the stage, and I was amused. Her family, teammates, and boyfriend were present. She smiled as she shook the president's hand firmly upon receiving her diploma. Once she crossed the stage she raised her arms in praise and pride for herself.

I applauded for her, and our eyes connected for the last time. She smiled and nodded in gratitude to me. I nodded in congratulations. I would hold onto those last couple of months I shared with her. We had both taught ourselves, before you make assumptions or judge someone; take a look at the other side of the coin. There are plenty of lessons you can learn from the other side. All that it took was simply making a deal.



## What a Character

My roommate... What can I say about her?

She rises at the crack of dawn every day.

She slips silently out of our dorm.

Walks out into the cold frozen winter morning.

Alone. Peaceful. Still.

Bangsberg Hall is quiet.

Perfect...

No disturbance to play by herself.

She lovingly caresses the ebony and ivory keys.

Soft gentle melodious sounds float around the still atmosphere.

Her fingers move gracefully, while her soft blue eyes scan the music sheets in front of  
her.

She has practiced hard and long.

She talks about Chopin and music theory in the day.

At night, she dreams about melodies, never played and unheard by audiences.

This woman is unique.

Each time I gaze upon her, I smile to myself.

I am rooming with the next Mozart!

## Winds of Change

You can smell the wind wafting the warmth and salty air of the coming Spring Break as we file into the conference room. We imagine and anticipate the bright sunshine, the sandy beaches sprinkled with students, basking before retreating to the northern territory.

Not just yet.

Before our many adventures, we partake in the annual pre-spring break meeting with Coach Hougen. "Dad" laying down the ground rules for us girls.

"Be good and be smart. Take care of each other." We know this, yet, we listen to him. On the black board he lists what we should do to stay active over Spring Break. We giggle and wink because we know this won't be happening – we all know the beach will have our full attention and possibly some Adonis walking along the beach.

"Girls...some things will change after break. Possibly...for the best." More money for scholarships? A new track? More morning practices? "I love you ladies. But this has to happen."

**RETIREMENT.** In bold white chalk letters.

The world goes gray, all thoughts of sunshine and Adonis are gone. Walls are coming down; the wind is taken out of our sails.

"You promised another year!" one of the captain's cries.

"You can't leave us," a girl sobs in the back row of the classroom.

"You are my family. I love you." Cries and screams will haunt that conference room; the wounded noises are etched in the concrete bricks. No words are said, we mourn as though at a funeral.

Like any family, we gather and hold onto him for support. Though he will not be with us next year; the moment for us right now is the most we can ask for.

## "Forever Reign"

You are good  
You are good  
When there's nothing good in me  
You are love  
You are love  
On display for all to see

You are light  
You are light  
When the darkness closes in  
You are hope  
You are hope  
You have covered all my sin

You are peace  
You are peace  
When my fear is crippling  
You are true  
You are true  
Even in my wandering

You are joy  
You are joy  
You're the reason that I sing  
You are life  
You are life  
In you death has lost it's sting

Oh, I'm running to Your arms  
I'm running to Your arms  
The riches of Your love  
Will always be enough  
Nothing compares to Your embrace  
Light of the world forever reign

You are more  
You are more  
Than my words will ever say  
You are Lord  
You are Lord  
All creation will proclaim

You are here  
You are here  
In your presence I'm made whole  
You are God  
You are God  
Of all else I'm letting go

Hallelujah, forever  
All the glory, forever  
All the praise to You

My heart will sing  
No other name  
Jesus, Jesus

## Finish Line

Being a three sport athlete here at Bemidji State is challenging. In autumn I compete in Women's Cross Country. In winter I switch to Women's Indoor Track, which I compete in the 3k and 5k. When spring rolls around I go to Women's Outdoor, and I compete in the 3k, 5k, and 10k. Although my season is long, and the training and races are grueling, these moments are similar with my walk in Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 12: 1-2 these verses best describe a race and a Christian's life with following Jesus Christ. "...let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith..." I can agree that running in a distance race can be difficult. One has to deal with anxiety, competitiveness, injuries, and the fear you will not be able to make it to the finish line. Normally, the race course is marked out for the runners, but in the case of us Christians, our race is unmarked, and we have no maps to guide us. When I was first converted at the age of seventeen the race began for me. So far my race in Christianity has been side-winders, loop-de-loops, and backsliding. However, my race continuously moves forward. The only things guiding me along the course are reading and memorizing the scriptures, being mentored by the elders of my church and gaining wisdom from them, and keeping a healthy relationship with my Lord; while trusting Him that my course will be great and I can finally reach Him one day. Even though everyone has their own pace they use throughout the race we are all heading in the same direction towards Jesus Christ; who is waiting for us at the finish line with a smile, and open arms and welcoming us home.

## Hair Cut

Snip.

Snip.

The silver scissor whispered as it crossed the brown strands of hair. Luscious wavy locks of trimmed by large hands. It started off as a simple conversation in my friend Matt and Trevor's room. Talking about how haircuts were refreshing, peaceful, and exciting. You lose a bit of your old self, and then in the end you are anew. Oh how we wished to get our hair cut soon.

"Lynnea, you want a haircut?" Matt offered jokingly, to my friend as my roommate Molly and I sat together on their futon. Molly and I laughed. We didn't trust any of the boys on our co-ed floor to even trim half an inch of our hair. With our luck they would chop off major patches of hair, leaving our hair uneven and disheveled.

Lynnea looked at the tips of her brown hair, and nodded in resolve.

"Let's do it."

Half an hour later, a chair, a pair of sharpened scissors, a comb was brought into Matt and Trevor's room. Matt placed an old sheet on the floor to collect the trimmings. Trevor played music from his laptop to keep us entertained. I watched Matt gently comb Lynnea's soft brown mid-length hair. His large calloused hands moved with purpose and care. Hair cutting seemed to be his natural skill. He reassured us women that he had cut hair all the time, for both boys and girls, and he would do a good job. Lynnea's back stiffened as Matt's fingers slowly measured the length to be trimmed – two inches, just a trim.

Snip.

Snip.

Just a trim.

Rapunzel going for a cut, a funny sight to see. Long flowing waves suddenly chopped off. Matt and I measured out the hair into even layers, so it would be easier to trim. There was a nice rhythm to it; brush, slowly measure, snip snip, repeat.

After all the layers were trimmed, Matt tenderly brushed the comb through Lynnea's freshly cut hair. His movements were like stroking a soft puppy, gently and delicately.

Then a low resonating laugh escaped Matt's throat.

"Lynnea, I lied about cutting hair. This was my first time doing this." Wait – what? I looked at Lynnea's head, and shook my head in disbelief. There was no uneven layer or split end to be found on Lynnea's head. Her hair looked as though a hairstylist had done the job, instead of a male college student going for a nurse degree.

"Lynnea, you may want to check your hair in the mirror," I suggested.

## **"Right Here" Ashes Remain**

I can see every tear you've cried  
like an ocean in your eyes  
All the pain and the scars have left you cold  
I can see all the fears you face  
through a storm that never goes away  
Don't believe all the lies that you've been told

*[CHORUS:]*

I'll be right here now  
to hold you when the sky falls down  
I will always  
be the One who took your place  
When the rain falls  
I won't let go  
I'll be right here

I will show you the way back home  
never leave you all alone  
I will stay until the morning comes  
I'll show you how to live again  
and heal the brokenness within  
Let me love you when you come undone

*[CHORUS]*

When daybreak seems so far away  
reach for my hand  
When hope and peace begin to fray  
still I will stand

*[CHORUS]*

When the rain falls I won't let go  
I'll be right here.



## Meet Me in the Rain

The locker-room welcomes me to its solitude. It is the haven few find in life. Being a freshman at the time I found it as a place to gather your thoughts, or steel yourself up before heading out for practice or training.

It was not the case in that moment.

My coach always told us at the beginning of each practice and competition, "We are one injury away from never having the opportunity to compete or train. Very few would give anything to get back out there." It is a heart-breaking sight to see an athlete be told the news they cannot perform the sport they care about.

Yet being told as a Freshman! ***A Freshman!***

I always believed it was upperclassmen that dealt with injuries, for they were training and competing the most.

Yet here I am – with two stress fractures along my left shin. Out for the rest of the season.

I struggle to hold in the tears as I strip down and wrap myself in a bath towel. Walking with a hitch which had been my infuriating companion these last few weeks, I chose the furthest stall. I wanted **space**. Privacy.

**Why of all times**, I berate myself as I turn on the shower. **I thought I had done everything right** – proper running form, good shoes, stretching, rolling, and the dreadful ice baths.

"Why?" I whimper and salt droplets mix with the hot shower water. "What have I done to get this!? I do not need this." Then one of my mother's sayings randomly passed in my mind: "Tears are the words you cannot say."

I hit my knees to the tiled floor and heave in body shuddering sobs. **God, I pray, please meet me in here. In my grief. In my pain. I do not understand.**

I do not remember how long I knelt under the shower, raining comforting warmth on my back. But the torrents of sobbing and screams left me hallow and numb. Why keep on fighting? I do not have enough grit to carry on.

Then a surge of reassurance cascades through me. It is sudden but I was in need of it. I cross myself and nod in acknowledgement for the answer and comfort I received. "The teacher is always silent during the test," my pastor used to say. "God is the same way."

I massage the shampoo into my hair, and make the power stance under the falling steaming water.

"You'll catch them later!" I tell myself. "You have time." I piece together the fortitude I need for my healing will take some time. Regaining my resiliency, the rains the shower gives me washes away the sorrowful remnants, and a renewed soul will soon emerge from the steam.

## "Hope In Front Of Me"

I've been running through rain  
That I thought would never end  
Trying to make it on faith  
In a struggle against the wind  
I've seen the dark and the broken places  
But I know in my soul  
No matter how bad it gets  
I'll be all right

There's hope in front of me  
There's a light, I still see it  
There's a hand still holding me  
Even when I don't believe it  
I might be down but I'm not dead  
There's better days still up ahead  
Even after all I've seen  
There's hope in front of me

There's a place at the end of the storm  
You finally find  
Where the hurt and the tears and the pain  
All fall behind

You open up your eyes and up ahead  
There's a big sun shining  
Right then and there you realize  
You'll be all right

There's hope in front of me  
There's a light, I still see it  
There's a hand still holding me  
Even when I don't believe it  
I might be down but I'm not dead  
There's better days still up ahead  
Even after all I've seen  
There's hope in front of me

There's a hope still burning  
I can feel it rising through the night  
And my world's still turning  
I can feel your love here by my side

You're my hope  
You're the light, I still see it  
Your hands are holding me  
Even when I don't believe it  
I've got to believe  
I still have hope  
You are my hope

## Symbol of Love

John G. Lake once said, "Men have said that the cross of Christ was not a heroic thing, but I want to tell you that the cross of Jesus Christ had put more heroism in the souls of men than any other event in human history."

It was the summer of my junior year, my mom and I took a trip to North Dakota for some bonding time, and visit Theodore Roosevelt National Park. We stopped in a quaint little town called Medora, where in one of the shops I found my cross necklace. It looked simple and small tiny diamonds embedded in the silver metal. It may be a piece of jewelry, but it represents the love and sacrifice that Christ had made for us. Each time I wear it, I wear the love and kindness of Christ, and the sacrifice He made for me. Being a Christian is more than just being a good person, you consider Jesus to be your hero. You get to know Jesus as a personal friend. You get to learn what kind of person whom you say you trust, love, and worship. You watch and listen for Him in every day of life. I always stand in awe of Him, because of all the wonderful blessings He has given me, and the sacrifice He made on the cross. His love was so strong for us, that he chose to give up his own life so that we may be spared from living in an eternal world of suffering.

As you think of the price that Christ paid to save you, does that inspire you and motivate you? If someone were to pull you out of a burning building and save your life at the cost of his own, would that mean anything to you? If someone were to push you out of the way of an approaching car and get run over to save your life, would that motivate you? Would that mean something to you? Would you be grateful? I am most certainly grateful even being a three year old Christian. I am still getting to know Christ and each day that passes I wear His love and

sacrifice with pride around my neck. Not only does Christ understand what we go through, but He went through more than us. Being nailed to the cross was greater than just the physical suffering which Christ endured. Other men have also been crucified on crosses, and experienced this torturous death. On the cross of Calvary Christ bore the awful wrath and anger of a holy God because of our sins and the sins of the whole world. None of us will ever know the depths of the sufferings that the Savior endured for us. Also, wearing my cross gives me confidence and strength through every trial and obstacle that I face. I know that there is a plan for me that Christ has planned for me, and this is a test to see how I will overcome it.

Coming from a past filled with pain, heartache, and disappointment I am now free of it in this new life that I am living. Sure I still get hurt every now and again, but I know I am stronger than I was back then, and I have someone to count on. Sadhu Sundar Singh once said, "Salt when dissolved in water, may disappear, but it does not cease to exist. We can be sure of its presence by tasting the water. Likewise, in the dwelling Christ inside us, though unseen, will be made evident to others from the love which He imparts to us." Even though we cannot see Jesus anymore; He is still alive in all of us, and in the love of others present to us. The clearest evidence of his presence is this simple silver cross which I wear around my neck – I wear His love and sacrifice with pride.

# The Runner's Prayer

Lord,  
Watch over me today as I run.  
This is the day  
and this is the time for the race.  
Watch over my body.  
Keep it free from injury.  
Watch over my mind.  
May I listen to the signals from within  
as I enjoy the scenes from without.  
Watch over my spirit.  
Watch over my competitors.  
Remind us that we all are struggling equally.  
Lord,  
Let me win.  
Not by coming in ahead of my friends, but by beating myself.  
Let it be an inner win.  
A battle won over me.  
And may I say at the end,  
"I have fought a good fight.  
I have finished the race.  
I have kept the faith."

~ Carolyn Erdman and Jay Hodde ~

## One More Walk

I stand at the white line amongst the other thirty-five runners. Instead of placing us in two tiers to accommodate us, they packed us uncomfortably side-by-side. The last time this happened I was tripped by a runner due to the close proximity, the same one standing beside me.

The meet official stands before us giving the instructions I have heard repeatedly. Instead I pray – not for me, but for the runners and our race. Why do we choose this grueling race? By the ninth lap the walls come up and temptation to slow down or stop to walk off the track talks in our ears. Yet we strive forward because we are the rare ones, the undaunted. We are strong enough to tell temptation to shut up.

None of the girls know the loss I have swirling in my gut. I have trained for the three solid months to finally break my 5k record, and desire to carry it on. However, I lost the second I stood on that line.

He won't be there anymore.

Craig Hougen, my coach for three years, had reached the time to retire. He had become such a massive role model while in my college years. Basically, a father for most of my teammates.

This was my last 5k with Coach Hougen – I lost him in a season. I promised him and...myself to break twenty minutes in the 5k.

Gun goes off. Various jerseys swarmed in a colorful flood to the front of the pack. Word of advice: Avoid that suction to the front! Let the racehorses go, while us quarter horses gain inch by inch. I find my pace and focus on the center of a brown jersey ahead of me. Brown shoulder blades. White

shoulder blades. Purple shoulder blades. Now focusing on another pair of white shoulder blades. Steady girl – stick behind, hold on tight.

Only one voice reigns over the tempting voice in my head, the voice that takes the helm when the will to fight begins to falter and steers you to the safety of the strength and determination they see in you.

“Come on, Jo!” If you do not do it now, when will you?

Legs straining to keep the pace, lungs gasping for air, my feet sore in every nook and cranny. I have to break. Launch to the next threshold.

I see white. I wobble and hit tarmac. Relieved to be finished, but still in physical and emotional agony. I gasp for air while salty tears burn my eyes – everyone suspects joy of the finish, 19:53 for the 5K! Shattered.

I mourn though. I cannot do this again with him. Keep on with shattering time and time again. He understands my tears and helps me to my feet as he has always done.

Thank you is all I can say. We both acknowledge the depth he affected me, and the loss. We do not say anything, just walk off the track. Arm wrapped around the shoulder, one wrapped around the waist.

One more walk.

**"Call Me" ~ Shinedown**



Wrap me in a bolt of lightning  
Send me on my way still smiling  
Maybe that's the way I should go,  
Straight into the mouth of the unknown  
I left the spare key on the table  
Never really thought I'd be able to say  
I merely visit on the weekends  
I lost my whole life and a dear friend

I've said it so many times  
I would change my ways  
No, nevermind  
God knows I've tried

*[Chorus]*

Call me a sinner, call me a saint  
Tell me it's over I'll still love you the same  
Call me your favorite, call me the worst  
Tell me it's over I don't want you to hurt  
It's all that I can say. So, I'll be on my way

I finally put it all together,  
But nothing really lasts forever  
I had to make a choice that was not mine,  
I had to say goodbye for the last time  
I kept my whole life in suitcase,  
Never really stayed in one place  
Maybe that's the way it should be,  
You know I live my life like a gypsy

I've said it so many times  
I would change my ways  
No, nevermind  
God knows I've tried

*[Chorus]*

Call me a sinner, call me a saint  
Tell me it's over I'll still love you the same  
Call me your favorite, call me the worst  
Tell me it's over I don't want you to hurt  
It's all that I can say. So, I'll be on my way

I'll always keep you inside, you healed my  
Heart and my life... And you know I try.

*[Chorus]*

Call me a sinner, call me a saint  
Tell me it's over I'll still love you the same  
Call me your favorite, call me the worst  
Tell me it's over I don't want you to hurt  
It's all that I can say. So, I'll be on my way  
So, I'll be on my way  
So, I'll be on my way

## I'll be on My Way

It is twilight as the road weary luxury bus crawls into the Rec Center parking lot. We have been gone for three days – and the ride had been nine bitter hours. I know most of us are trying to keep up a front for the younger ones – the children cannot see the big sisters and mommas cry.

Most of us have managed to hold on this last year with every bit of strength and willpower since Hougen retired last May. The bus shudders as it sits idle along the sidewalk, and I lower my head. Grief and sickness clutch my chest, and dread swirls in spirals in my stomach.

This is my last descent off the bus. A place I finally consider another home these last few years. Our coach does not give any words of congratulations or meaningful words of comfort. It does not surprise us. He has been an impersonal dismay. I look at the team captains and mournful gazes are my reply.

***This is it, I think. It is time for us to be on our way.***

As we descend off the bus, it is traditional unloading process – grab the two food storage totes, the javelins, the throwing hammers and discuses. The parking lot is eerily quiet, for most of the student body have gone for home for the end of the semester. This is not surprising for us. We are the first to arrive on campus, and the last individuals to leave for home. We never have the chance to say our good-byes to our friends and professors; the road always calls us away from all we know.

Once we walk into the darkened Rec Center, I feel the icy prickles of anxiety in my core for the impending good-bye. The sorrowful ritual we have to face in our lifetimes. I only hear the whispers of conversations shared between the under-classmen; their voices are the only sounds breaking the stillness. Then one of the captains, whom I have had the most connection to rubs her neck to relieve the

aches of the bus ride left her, as she walks next to me. She reaches over with her free hand and carries the other side of the food container I am carrying.

"Final time carrying this stupid thing, huh?" she says, feigning amusement.

"So it is," I reply mimicking her amusement. We stare forward as we watch our coach open the Track and Field storage garage. Soon the switch is flipped and the white florescent light casts long dark shadows across the beaten blue track, and we are drawn to its luminous light.

"Well, I guess that's what's to be expected of us seniors. We get to unload the bus instead of the freshmen. It's stupid to me," she says, however, I notice a slight crack starting to form in her voice. I nod in agreement, and I feel a crack somewhere in the depths of my core. It feels excruciating. My breathing quickens as I try to calm my laboring heart. She turns and notices the condition I am fighting.

"Jo, are you heartbroken and stuff?" she asks, this time the cracks have turned to fractures. Anguish is slowly rising through the cracks of the wall of security she had built. A couple laughs follow but they are more like the gasps you make before the grief overwhelms. "But...I-I...sorry."

We keep walking together towards the garage, the rest of the team keeps their distance, they have a sense the inevitable moment between us. I notice our walking has slowed to a shuffle, unconsciously agreeing to try and delay time as best we can.

"I don't think..." she snivels. "I don't think...I can't cheer up just now..." Then the sniffles and ragged breaths of weeping follow. The defense against the bitter sweetness had broken it as though it were nothing. She falls back as I try to lead her forward in the remaining ten steps to the garage. They are measured, and in a way mark the end of a tradition. We have both led each other these last few years, and she granted the final opportunity.

"Figures," I say solemnly, as we rest the food container on the concrete floor of the garage. She is wiping her brown eyes on her sleeve, and now the ragged breaths have turned into gasps for air in between the sobs.

"But, same for me." The tears finally are released. "It is regretful...to leave this all behind after all." We walk out and I immediately grab her and we hold each other. The guttural noises we share are deep and harrowing.

*But nothing really lasts forever.*

I feel arms envelope me they are shaking yet holding fiercely as possible. There will be no telling of our next opportunity. I am the first of the two to break the hold and I wipe the salty droplets from my burning eyes. The freshmen who were hanging onto to us, had been sobbing so hard they developed hiccups, and I feel a twinge of a smile along the corners of my mouth.

*Our sweet and young freshmen, I think. You mean so much to me.*

I gently take two of the freshmen, whom I had worked with the most throughout this last year. Trying their best to regain their composure they wipe away their faces on their sleeves. I hold them tightly, even though they are half a foot taller than me, I squeeze them hard. Even though I never told them of how much I loved and was grateful for them, I wanted them to feel it.

"I don't want you to hurt," I say. "Both of you are the greatest women to work with. I am proud of the both of you, and what you have done."

I'll always keep you inside, you healed my heart and my life.

I brush the tear soaked strands of hair out of their eyes, and lovingly dive into the blues and grays within them. I want to hold onto every memory, especially these remaining ones. As I walk out of

the building, I look over my shoulder to the locked darkened building as the remaining athletes trickle out to the parking lot. I sigh in acceptance as I unlock my car, and slide into the driver seat. After starting the engine, I glance over at the idling bus and the barren Rec Center, and out of respect I give it my best salute.

So, I'll be on my way.

## **"Eagles"**

My pain and problems keep me chained  
And my troubled heart makes me weak  
I'll wait for You to comfort me  
And in You I know I'll find my strength

I will soar on the wings of eagles  
I will learn to fly high above this world  
And I will soar on the wings of eagles  
I will learn to fly  
I will learn to fly high above this world

I tremble with this heavy weight  
And I'm buried underneath my grief  
I'll run to You and not grow faint

And I'll lay my burdens at Your feet

## Cross

Sunlight spreads the wildfire of

Discovery,

Youth turns to adulthood,

Compass pointing due north.

My compass,

Silver metal displayed for eyes.

Crystals twinkle,

Simple and small.

Knowing my Lord,

The task I was destined to have.

His Love and Sacrifice graces me.

Men, tried and tortured, likewise,

None carried the burden

As far as East is from the West.

Paid ransom in full

It is finished.

Suffering desires me,

My Lord, gives me strength and courage

My alter laden praises and songs,

Glorifies the evidence

Of mercy and affection.

My Savior.

My Cross.

## Love Cake Recipe

Ingredients you will need:

- 1 cup of hugs
- ½ cup of holding hands
- 2 hearts
- 2 teaspoons of finding no faults
- 1 ½ cups of knowing all about you love and still loving them
- 1 ¾ teaspoons of waiting for their next call, email, or text
- ½ cup of happiness

Now pre-heat the oven of your heart to 350 degrees F.

Grease and shower kisses on a pan of eternal love.

In an everlasting bowl, cream together the hugs and holding hands.

Stir in the hearts, one at a time, then add the finding no faults.

Combine knowing all about them and still loving them and waiting for their next call, email, or text message together.

Add to the creamed affection mixture and mix well.

Finally, stir in the happiness until the infatuation batter is smooth.

Pour or spoon the tenderness into the prepared pan. Bake for a lifetime of bliss in the yearning heart oven.

Love is done when it is fulfilled and is respected by another.

Serve it when your lover comes home, world weary and stretched thin.

Look into each other's eyes. Remember all the memories the two of you shared – the good, the bad, and the funny. And finally serve it to them before bedtime.

Never forget the kiss goodnight. And always remember to say, "Sweet dreams."



*“Flying is a great symbol. It has to do with reaching heights physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It has to do with taking off, ascending, soaring.”*

*~ Bonnie Goldberg ~*

## Bombers of the Hill

"We're soaring!" I scream as I rush down the green hill in the Greenwood golf course. I can hear my teammates back-pedaling behind me, and harsh gasps for air.

Hah.

Hah.

It is a steady rhythm. Breathe in for a few strides, and then release the breath for a few more strides. The whistling of the wind brushes through my long ponytail, individually combing the strands, and whisking the droplets of sweat off my brow.

It is exhilarating bombing down a hill. As you run down while carrying momentum on your back, you can feel the heels of your shoes barely touch the ground. Your body begins to lean to the angle the hill makes, and then the coasting begins.

If you create enough force as you rush down the hillside the number of strides lessens by a few, and they become lengthened almost to bounds. As the bounds appear, you can feel the lift-off in between. Your stomach starts to flip, like when you are on one of those rollercoasters blasting a high hill, it is an odd sensation yet it boosts in the adrenaline.

This feeling never goes away. Once I see another hill, my body tenses for the climb. Leaning into the hill, driving my knees and arms forward, I become the Little-Train-that-Could, chugging hard and steady up the hill. When the top of the hill appears, my soul becomes giddy, I can come close to flying one more time.

Now, somersaulting down a hill, that is a different story!

"To know one thing, you must know the opposite."

~ Thomas Moore ~

## Coaching Philosophy

Being a three sport athlete for over six years I have come across different coaching styles and team environments. In high school I participated in swimming, wrestling, and track – each sport had various coaches and team captains whom I looked up to as mentors to assist me in my growth as an athlete. As for college, Women's Cross Country, Indoor and Outdoor Track were my main sports. However, each of my collegiate events was coached by one man. Each of these four coaches provided different examples on how to be a mentor to the younger generations while maintaining a love for the sport.

In my high school swimming years, my swim coach placed an emphasis of having a foundation beneath you before you come into the season. If you desired to be strong or fierce in swimming you spent the off-season dedicated to the pool. Being a distance swimmer at the time, my coach gave me information for various swim camps to build up my endurance and stamina in the summertime. This is the one aspect I hope to emphasize in my coaching philosophy, if you want to be strong or better than your competition, work begins after the last day of the regular season.

As for being a female wrestler on an otherwise all-male team, I thought I would be on my own. However, the head coach and the two assistant coaches were involved with my four years of athletics. Though the head coach was my father, Alan, he placed the seed of hardiness and ferocity in my mentality. He never played favorites with either my teammates or me, considering I was his oldest daughter. Also, all three coaches made sure we visualized our matches a few days before the competition day being prepared and one step ahead of your opponent was key during the match. If we did not prepare ourselves, anxiety would overcome our mentality, and the match would go down the

drain. By visualizing your match or game before the day of competition I will instill this lesson in my athletes, so they can go confidently and well prepared.

My track coach was also my teacher in a few of my high school classes, so he was consistently involved with his student athletes every day. He always wanted to know how we athletes were doing in other academic classes, as well as in our family lives. His main philosophy as a coach was communication, not only with your teammates, captains, but the coaches as well. If you had a problem with a teammate, bring it up to the captain; if you were struggling academically, see the coach; if trouble occurred in your personal life, the coach had to know. By establishing a good communication system with your athletes, it eventually will lead to a trusting relationship, and the parents of the athletes hopefully will understand you are there to look out for their children.

Once I had moved onto the collegiate level of sport, I met the coach I hope to model one day as a coach in Cross Country and Track. Coach Craig Hougen has been involved in the running world for over twenty-six years, and his style and philosophy have not changed since. The first day of meeting his new athletes, he immediately established the rules for the program and what his philosophy was, "If you give me respect, I shall give you respect." This is an aspect I will add to my philosophy as a coach, by reciprocating respect amongst each other, it will benefit with establishing a bond between athlete and coach. Plus, this will avoid any conflict amongst the athletes as well; better to have cooperation than being divided amongst each other. Hougen maintained good conduct when he was around us by being level-headed and a welcoming body language, which made it easier for us women to approach him. The only time Hougen ever lost patience with us, was due to unneeded drama that ran amongst us women during a particular season. He arranged a sit-down meeting with the team to let out what bothered us, and to move on. Also, when it came to practices or deciding which events each of us had to compete in, Hougen had observed each of us for such a long period of time that he knew what our strengths and

weaknesses were. He knew how far to push our limits in practice without causing a breakdown, and reminded each of us of the potential he saw in our performances. By the time most of the athletes reached their junior or senior year, Hougen had become a "father" figure for us, and a mentor to one day model.

I hope to one day either coach Cross Country or Track and Field in the middle and high school level. By starting off with this age group, I would like to instill in them the aspects of dedication, grit, and being well prepared for what may occur in the future. Also, being respectful and humble proves that you have the characteristics of being a leader and a person that will be reliable. I hope to develop this age group not only as athletes in either sport, but to leave them as strong capable individuals when they finish up their senior year. When the beginning of the season arrives, I will arrange for a meeting of the returning athletes with the newcomers so it can establish a bond amongst them. As for the parents, a meeting will be arranged as well to discuss the season, and what my objectives will be for the season, that way there will be an understanding between the parents and me. As for what I would like to achieve as a coach, I would rather see my athletes grow than to see them dominate in a particular sport – if they continue with winning it will lead to arrogance and self-importance, and I would like to have my athletes be united and supporting each other even if we do not have a good winning streak. Finally, I would like to look back on my past years as a coach and be proud not just for all the competitions my teams had excelled in, but knowing I had influenced each athlete in some form into becoming the adults they are in the future.

## Procrastination

Due date is coming

MMM...I will work on this later

Awe shit it is due.

Can I have a break?

I need to focus on the task

OOO let's watch T.V.

Bloody Hell in a cart

So much for planning ahead

Sit at this computer.

Just type some lines now

What's the worst that can happen?

That new movie is in theaters.

## "Alive"

I was born in a thunderstorm  
I grew up overnight  
I played alone  
I'm playing on my own  
I survived

Hey  
I wanted everything I never had  
Like the love that comes with light  
I wore envy and I hated that  
But I survived

I had a one-way ticket to a place where all the demons go  
Where the wind don't change  
And nothing in the ground can ever grow  
No hope, just lies  
And you're taught to cry into your pillow  
But I survived

I'm still breathing [4x]  
I'm alive [4x]

I found solace in the strangest place  
Way in the back of my mind  
I saw my life in a stranger's face  
And it was mine

I had a one-way ticket to a place where all the demons go  
Where the wind don't change  
And nothing in the ground can ever grow  
No hope, just lies  
And you're taught to cry into your pillow  
But I survived

I'm still breathing [4x]  
I'm alive [4x]

You took it all, but I'm still breathing [8x]

I have made every single mistake  
That you could ever possibly make  
I took and I took and I took what you gave  
But you never noticed that I was in pain  
I knew what I wanted; I went out and got it  
Did all the things that you said that I wouldn't  
I told you that I would never be forgotten  
And all in spite of you

And I'm still breathing  
I'm still breathing  
I'm still breathing  
I'm still breathing  
I'm alive (You took it out, but I'm still breathing)  
(You took it out, but I'm still breathing)  
I'm alive (You took it out, but I'm still breathing)  
(You took it out, but I'm still breathing)  
I'm alive (You took it out, but I'm still breathing)  
(You took it out, but I'm still breathing)  
I'm alive

I'm alive [4x]



## Alive

I walk into the darkened room, as the detective reassuringly touches my back. He has me on a metal chair in front of a pane of glass. The other side of the glass is abysmally dark. I only see my reflection looking curiously back at me. The whole situation is unsettling.

"Don't worry it will begin shortly," the detective explains as he stands next to a set of switches.

"Why am I here?" I ask.

"Just some things have to be sorted out," is all he replies. Then he flips the switches, and I turn only to gape in surprise. He is there. Sitting on the other side of the glass. Cool as a cucumber. Unfazed by the situation at hand.

"What is he doing here!?" I demand.

"Like I said before," the detective explains. "Some things have to be sorted out."

"With him!" I cry. Realizing what I did, I covered up my mouth. The detective laughs and stands beside me.

"Don't worry, he can't hear you, but he can see you through the glass," he explains. He pats my shoulder in encouragement. "Now is your chance. A chance to let it go."

I feel ashamed and an like idiot being placed in this situation. I did not want to say what I nailed in a coffin and buried in the depths of my core. That man had no right to hear the words. Given a different situation I probably would have given him a whole earful of the coffin's words.

"I don't want to. He's not worth it," I say as I stand up, and am about to leave the room.

"What about Hougen?" the detective asks.

"Yeah?"

"You miss him, don't you?"

"Yes," I admitted. Every day it had become worse since the beginning of the year. I was given a lousy excuse of a man to be a coach. Why did I have to identify myself to this man's team.

"I am sure you have words to say to him?" says the detective as he points to the glass. I turn and notice Coach had been observing the exchange, and his head was tilted as if trying to catch the words being said.

"Yeah, I do."

"Well, here is your chance."

I feel twinges of excitement; I was given permission to say the coffin's words. I would not be punished. I walk to the glass and stand directly in front of Coach.

"Who the hell do you think you are!" I scream at Coach. The first cannon blast had been fired, the rest of the volleys were yet to come. "The team and the program were better off without you! You replaced our dad! Couldn't you wait another year before taking his place?"

Taking more deep breaths, I continue the explosive cries and demands at Coach. I am almost crying from the emotions I am opening up from the coffin. It was raw and painful. I keep shouting and then proceed to call him every obscenity under the sun.

Coach keeps watching but he had moved several steps away from the glass. He should have because there were gallons of pent-up anger and grief ready to shoot up from the depths. Then the shouting of obscenities transitioned to me beating and kicking down the glass – trying to break through

so that Coach can hear the pain and rage I have unleashed in the room. Yet, as every blow and kick lands on the glass, there is indication of my blows leaving marks on it.

Exhausted, numbing tingles move up my arms and legs as I slump to the ground and gasp for air. My lungs burn from the harsh ragged breaths I had taken earlier from shouting and crying at Coach. I cover my face in shame and disgust – I could hardly believe what I had said.

“Is that all?” the detective asks, as he raises his hand to the light switches. I shook my head; I had one last remark to leave with Coach.

“Look at me,” I said as I picked myself off the ground. I hold Coach’s brown eyes in a vice. “You thought you could break me since the beginning, but news flash – I don’t break that easily. I am still here. I am still breathing.”

## Till I See You Again

Hey JoJo,

I am sorry that it has been awhile. You know how life can be. Like a ball of yarn – the knitting process goes smoothly, and then out of nowhere a tangle occurs. This is the best analogy I can think of.

Anyway, I wanted to check-in with Poppa and you.

It has been nine years since I last saw the both of you. I know you both did not mean to leave so soon. You were needed somewhere else. But I miss you both terribly.

I want to tell you so much! A lot has changed these last nine years. Well, I am graduating college this spring – just like I promised Poppa and you years ago. The clock keeps ticking faster every day. I am captain in three sports at Bemidji State University, and have been Academic All-American three years in a row. Can you believe it?

I have met amazing coaches and wonderful teammates. My friends from the English and Honors department are great to be with. They make every class enjoyable because of their humor and good-nature. Also, most of my professors are like family members – especially Marsha and Kari – you would love them! College has been an amazing part of my life – every year I grow like a little sapling to be cultivated by various teachers, to assist in my growth into a fortified tree.

But...this is all because of Poppa and you. The both of you loved my siblings and I so much, and wanted to provide us a bountiful future. I deeply appreciate the gift you gave me years ago. I certainly would not have the opportunities, I have and have yet to experience. Each morning I wake up and walk to either practice or go to class is a blessing.

However, everything must come with a price.

I lost Poppa and you when I turned 13...far too soon. Especially when I needed you the most.

The day I received the letter of acceptance from Bemidji State University I put on a front for everyone, especially for mom and dad. I took the letter to my room and dug out the envelope that held the letter you wrote to mom. I cried gut-wrenching torrents of grief into my pillow, because I did not want mom or dad to hear.

I did not want to go to college. What was the use of going? Especially without the both of you. I needed your support and presence in my life.

All I had left was the money set aside as a gift for us in the future. I did not understand at the time. No, I take it back – I did not **want** to understand.

But now I realize how great a gift you gave me. Poppa and you loved each of us dearly. You wanted to give us the best you could. I remember how much you valued education and teaching us to pursue the stars, to not shy away from the unknown, and make the most of what you have.

Yes, I miss you every day – especially when I look in the mirror and see your brown hair and smile. I want to drive to where you are to see you. I want to pick up the phone and hear your voice and laugh. But not yet...I still have time.

Little do people know about the gift you gave me – four years of college debt free. You know what...I would give up all four years of college and the money to have the both of you back in my life. No lie. No second thoughts. It has been too long...

However, I know how proud the both of you are over there. Your grandchildren have grown excellently and absolutely hard-working just like you both were.

I know you are with me in my best moments, and in my lowest. Even though I cannot tell you how I am doing, I still carry you with me.

When Graduation comes in a few weeks it will be a big celebration. We made it! Each one of us. I will hold up my diploma and your picture high in the air! This would never have been possible without the both of you.

You deserve to walk with me across the stage and be recognized. You have always been my inspiration and the person I wish to grow to be.

And I promise to continue that. All right, I better get ready for finals – you know how difficult and stressful they are. Even though I never had the chance to tell you both, “Thank you!” Till I will see you again.

I love you will all of my heart and hold you both tightly there.

With unmeasurable gratitude and immense thanks,

Your grand-daughter.

P.S. Say hi to the rest of the family over there.

## Appendix

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