

CROSSING THE LINE

Running for Your Life

Why five mornings a week, I get up early and run 6K as hard as a can

By Kelly Bouchard

break sweat. If my primitive hunter-gatherer ancestors could see me labouring along the seaside, they'd probably look to see what kind of predator was chasing me down. They wouldn't understand that, like most modern people, I run to improve myself. I run to look better, to live longer and to be a better athlete. There's nothing chasing me – what got me out of bed at 7 a.m. was the desire to outpace my own limitations.

When I'm actually out there, sucking wind and glancing frantically down at my wristwatch, my experience has more to do with confronting my limits than it does

running is just a much more intense version of the basic movements that I constantly do that are not considered exercise – breathing in and out. Putting one foot in front of the other. I realize that running merely elevates my sense of these things to the point that I have no choice but to notice them. In truth, I am constantly expending energy so that my heart can beat and my lungs can pull air in and release what's not needed. Like my running pace, my body can only maintain these activities for so long. Over time it will have to slow down and eventually stop.

Pushing myself to my physical limit forces



My apartment is only two blocks from the seaside in Victoria, and five mornings a week I go for a run along the cut banks that overlook the water. It's 3K to my turnaround at Clover Point. I try to get there in under 12 minutes, which for me is difficult. Some people can run hard with a graceful poise and dignity, but I'm not one of them. Friends tell me I look insane.

Of course, running 6K as fast as you can is insane when examined from any kind of objective perspective. It only makes sense in the context of a predominantly sedentary society, in which most of us have our basic needs met without ever having to

with expanding them. This is not something that's often emphasized when we talk about fitness or training. It's true that I can continue to expand my capacity to run farther and faster over time, but at any given moment I'm limited. It usually hits me as I crest the last hill before the turnaround and remember I'm not even halfway done. Tomorrow I might be able to keep this pace, but today I can't. If there was a predator chasing me today, I'd get eaten.

I always think I'll have to stop, but somehow I make it back to my apartment. I collapse on a bench outside my building and lie there with my legs stinging and my pulse pounding in my ears. It's usually at this point I realize

me to confront an important reality that has not changed since our species began: to be human is to be finite. Running at my limit is a way of indirectly confronting my own mortality. This sounds like it would be a bad experience, but it's not. As I lie on the bench, I tend to forget that I woke up this morning in order to improve myself. I forget to check my watch and compare today's time with yesterday's. I just look up at the sky, breathe deep and feel grateful I can run at all. **R**

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