

DEVON SHERMAN – “RUNNING WITH FOUR FEET”

Mud and dusty gravel grind beneath our gleaming back-to-school sneakers. Encroaching weeds have long eroded the edges of the old track but it appears as an Olympic stadium. My identical twin sister, Elise, occupies the lane next to me. With shared anxiety and shaking knees, we take a visual trip around the endless course. Our first timed mile is about to begin.

Lap One, 0:00 minutes:

In the midst of my anticipation, the whistle blows. Elise sprints ahead, leaving me on the starting line.

With frozen legs, I detect the distinct smell of new crayons as I stare up at an ominous sign, which reads, MRS. PILACHOWSKI'S FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM. The paper apples that border the door envelop me like my older brother's torturous headlock. Giggling among a crowd of students, Elise breezes into the classroom across the hall and slaps on her name tag. How can I enter without my identical twin sister, my second half?

The race is bound to start so I open the door. Will anyone know that there are two people on this track, running different races?

Lap Two, L49 minutes:

I take shorter steps and pump my arms more rigorously than Elise. Friends, teachers, and coaches bombard us with monotonous questions. "Elise or Devon? Which one are you? Do you have the same dreams each night?" Unable to effectively articulate their curiosity, most people cannot fully grasp what it is like to have an identical twin. As I grow older, my individuality yearns to be released as fervently as an innocent man wrongfully accused. I am a risk taker who craves fajitas with hot peppers while Elise is a perfectionist who will venture no further than a cheeseburger. I am a math nut with negligent penmanship rather than a literature lover who meticulously dots her i's.

The spectators surrounding the track, however, only see that we are wearing the same orange Nike sneakers and that our hair curls more on the right side of our heads. Is running backward the only way to prove my independence?

Lap Three, 3:01 minutes:

Fatigue sets in.

I have an arduous day during which I lose my Latin homework, trip down the gym stairs, and miss an open net in my soccer match. My breathing resembles that of an eighty-year-old man trudging up the Eiffel Tower. "Keep it up, Dev, were almost done!" encourages Elise. My homework is found. My balance is restored. My shot is buried.

Ample motivation drips off of me along with the sweat running down my forehead. I am as fast, if not faster than my sister, and the track is no longer endless.

Lap Four, 4:52 minutes:

I gain on Elise until we are shoulder to shoulder. The clock is obsolete for we are one another's pacesetters.

I ace a grueling calculus test and we rejoice. Elise backs our '94 Explorer into the garage and we share the guilt. My triumph is her gain. Her failure is my loss. I run my own race but it feels as if I have four feet to carry me.

The end is visible. Accelerating into a sprint, I lead Elise. Alone, I am fully capable; together, we are relentless.

Finish, 6:00 minutes:

With shared exhilaration and aching muscles, we simultaneously cross the finish line.

Having restored my stamina, I stand atop the podium. Supported by my spare set of feet, I stride into the classroom. My twin sister, my pacesetter, my trophy stands beside me. Our individuality has been freed but our friendship is forever bonded.

A knowing smile, a humble glance, and we are off for another lap.

COMMENTARY

Having an identical twin brother or sister is not that common, and neither are narratives as successful as this essay. The author tells her story creatively, while she relays how she perceives herself as an identical twin.

The framing of her essay is creative. Breaking her thoughts by laps allows the writer to provide momentary glimpses into her life: Just as the laps of a run join together to total a mile, these anecdotes join together to tell one larger story about her relationship with Elise. She vividly depicts her mind-set at the onset of the mile and humorously introduces the differences between Elise and her as well as the sense of unity she has with her sister. The developments in both her race and her flashbacks chronicle how the author defines her relationship with her twin as she matures.

One of this essay's greatest strengths lies in the writer's humility, in her ability to identify her faults. The essay is a realistic portrayal of her growth, as she is willing to take on responsibilities, learn from her mistakes, and be at peace with who she is.

--- Naveen Srivatsa