Even two houses later, I made it a point to visit my friend on Nash Dr. — the longest I’d ever had. She, Cory, and I lay in her bed watching a film. I had sunk so far into their comfort that when the door ripped open, the adrenaline made me dizzy. Through a haze of confusion, I watched her father point his finger at me and say things like, not under my roof, and then he left. The shock left me shaking and the blood rushed through my ears. The room buzzed around me. I looked over to her and to her door and back to her until Cory took my hand and said, we should go. I followed him and the glance over my shoulder was the last time I’d see her. I felt the electricity of sixteen years of memories spark in my head as I walked through the hallway, touched the knob of their front door, strode through the front yard. The instance flashed before me and all I remember is the splintered memory of it laid bare across my thoughts.
As I sat in the dim hallway outside the band hall, I made small movements with my hand before they called my name for drum major tryouts. As the music in my headphones bloomed into my ears, I thought about how my sister had spent four years in this very band hall. How she would return to this very band hall in the middle of the night after a football game. How she would prepare for hours in this very band hall for competitions. How, in this very band hall, there was an enormous trophy she helped secure years before me. I thought of the rumble in my ears as I stood on tip-toe trying to see her poised on the field after the final note resonated throughout the stadium and was swallowed by the roars of us in the stands.
When I was lined up with each of the other students trying out, I kept my head down and sat stark still with anticipation. The directors made a show out of making us wait. When eventually they emerged, the tension bloomed into a still silence. I held my breath until I heard my name called and I imagined an uproarious commotion being made. This was it. My senior year as drum major would be the year I could relive the memory of my sister’s past.
Most of the yelling came from our band director as he, the other drum majors, and I watched the 300 sweating and panting students create bloated figures on the blacktop. From my stand perched high above the others, I watched the band fall on its figurative face week after week.
As the Texas heat of the year climbed to its most unforgiving highs, I tended to wear less and less clothing during my runs. I spread my legs with the wind to my back and listened to the screams of the cicadas like heat surround me. The half empty bottle of water came out of nowhere. Or, more specifically, out of the farm truck passing. Its diesel coughed up fumes which evaporated into the waves of heat. When I stepped off again to run, I felt the overwhelming sense of loneliness beat down heavier than the heat and the screams surrounding. It was everywhere.
The last time I would run in Texas before moving to college I fell face first into the cracked asphalt. For weeks leading, I had limped and ran through an ever-growing pain in my hip. With each run as I stepped off, I bore down on my teeth until the pain was gone. Or numb. But I was running. As I parted the thick, hot air, I could feel each footfall send shockwaves of white pain up my side and into the space between my eyes. It only took about a mile before a final eruption of pain sent me crumbling to my knees and chest. The blood was smeared across my torso, flowing from the place above my heart.
No pain, no gain? I'm not so sure.
On the precipice of winter, Indiana sent biting cold winds
to herald in my very first northern winter. As I began my
run, my blood rushed to the surface of my skin and turned
me shades of red and purple. The icy gusts squeezed tears
from my eyes and froze them in time. Perfectly preserved
anguish streamed down my face. I leaned far into the wind
and could feel my body’s joints grind into their sockets as
they inflamed and froze. I could feel the frozen air through
the porous sleeves of my flimsy running jacket. The only
good it did was to catch the wind flung into my body. I re-
member the gray clouds that swam as an ancient sheet of ice
low and fast above my head. As I rounded a final corner on
my way home, the wind shifted to my side and back. The
remaining distance loomed in front of me and, as I con-
jured my last efforts, I watched a single flake of snow spin
wildly within the wind until it landed in the road ahead.

 Above me, the snow began to fall.
The second gray, barren Indiana winter I endured brought with it the cool detriment of a long-distance relationship with Cory.
Now Playing: “Runaway” - My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy, Kanye West
Behind the English building there is a concrete barrel filled with the butts of cigarettes. As there was yesterday, and is today, so there surely will be in the future. On some evening, I stood next to these butts and watched others smoke. They call themselves writers like me and I breathed deep to take them all in. It smelled sweet like fading memories of my father. I heard my name behind me and when I turned around someone was holding a glowing cigarette out to me. It seemed so natural the way she held it to me. It seemed so natural to take it between my lips and suck and watch the red glow blaze between my eyes. I let the milky smoke leak out from behind my teeth as it rose to wreath my head sensual and lazy.
The anxiety might have been visible on my face as I exited the convenient store, a pack of cigarettes in hand. I shoved them into my pocket and walked across the street to my apartment. The glow off my stove light was soft and shroud the kitchen in darkness as I struck a match and held it to the end of the cigarette in my mouth. I watched the smoke snake into nothing above my head. Instantly, my kitchen was filled with the smell. I extinguished the newly lit cigarette under the faucet and grabbed the book of matches before I left my apartment again.
Outside, the sky bled as the sun disappeared. I walked away from my apartment and felt the prick of the road beneath my bare feet. The connection was freeing as I lit up another cigarette. I mumbled to myself and thought of the feeling coursing through my veins. The cigarette? The endorphins of my walk? While I walked in circles around the complex, street lights clicked on above me head and sent shadows streaking across the ground. For hours I walked until when I reached for a new match, there was nothing left to ignite.
The computer screen hummed in my face and I could hear the receptionist speak under her breath to the phone at her mouth. The questionnaire in front of me began, Have you ever considered committing suicide? There are other questions like, Do you consider yourself happy? and Do you have close friends? I looked over my shoulder at the receptionist and other patients. They were morose and looked into the floor. After I had managed to assure the questionnaire that I was not on the verge of killing myself, I waited for my name to be called. Various persons approached the door dressed in loose fitting clothing. They called the names of other patients in just above a whisper. Eventually I heard a woman ask, Tyler? and look around the waiting room. I smiled and followed her through the hall to a small, windowless room. Along the way, I peered outside to the quad where a few university students straggled for the summer. As we sat down, the woman looked into my face and with a smile said, Hello Tyler, my name is LaDonna.
On the first day of my running colloquium, immediately after my first counseling session that summer, we determined each of our resting heart rates after a long bout of lying motionless on top of cool linoleum in a darkened classroom. I could feel the vibrations of the blood in my fingertips. It felt like liquid anxiety pooling in the back of my reclined head.

My heart rate was 69.
The next week, I visited LaDonna again before my summer barefoot running colloquium. She was still smiling and still staring intently into my diverting eyes. *Why did you decide to come to counseling, Tyler?* I opened my mouth but the force of the truth that I wasn't even sure cinched it tight again. I explained to her, as if I were asking a question, that in recent weeks, I had been filled with the overwhelming feeling of insignificance. I told her how I hated being around others. I told her that I hadn't spoken to Cory in months. I said this all with a smile. After she paused to look more intently into my face, she asked, *Do you consider yourself gay?* For the first time, I looked her into her eyes, into the darkness of her pupils and said, *Of course, but that has nothing to do with why I'm here.*
In my barefoot running colloquium, we discussed the art of falling. Because one does not run using a heel-strike while running without shoes, one's form is altered dramatically. Running barefoot requires the runner to lean into the direction of the run and let gravity pull her forward. In order to let this force act upon her body, the runner must lean to the point of falling. In essence, running is nothing more than the constant act of catching oneself.
I continued meeting with LaDonna for seven weeks. Each of my sessions was just before my barefoot running class. In the third week of counseling, I described my relationships with my family: my mother, my father, my sister, Cory. I could feel the knots in my muscles coil under my skin. Each story was being etched into my body like wood. In my running colloq, we lied prostrate on the ground and listened to a recording of a woman. She called attention to the aches in our muscles and our bones. I felt each tension erode through the soft places in the back of my neck.
As the summer sprinted through its home stretch, I listened to myself echo like I was talking to myself in the tiny room.

About myself, about my family, about my future, about my despair. But when I ran, the echoes of my frustrations sounded far away and were swept into the air by the breeze pushing the branches of trees above my head.
My final counseling session was also the same day as my final barefoot running class. My instructor had us review barefoot versus shod. Form, intent, discipline, benefits, possible pitfalls, etc. The art of falling. As I walked to my car and listened to the still of the campus in summer beat into my ears, I felt for the mighty force of gravity holding on to me and listened as each of my footfalls sent me forward and toward home.
My heart rate on the final day was 57.
"You would run much slower if you were dragging something behind you, like a knapsack or a sheriff."

- Lemony Snicket
After speaking with LaDonna for so many weeks about my situation with Cory, it seemed only natural that I reach out to him. Much to his surprise. Where I had, only months ago, felt myself being pulled across the distance between us into indistinguishability, I now felt a chasm stretching into bottomlessness. The conversations were sparse, short, and rigid with tension in the beginning. However, as the summer climbed to its most intense highs, it seemed Cory and I had begun to melt into each other as before.
The memory is of me smiling. Cory was hoarse as the darkest hours of the night crept into and out of our conversation. He told me he'd be coming to Indiana with a professor. Even in that moment, I had begun to count down the days.
"...there was some kind of connection between the capacity to love and the capacity to love ‘running’. The engineering was certainly the same: both depended on loosening your grip on your own desires, putting aside what you wanted and appreciating what you’ve got, being patient and forgiving and... undemanding...maybe we shouldn’t be surprised that getting better at one could make you better at the other.”

- Christopher McDougall, Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen
The day Cory was coming to Indiana. I woke with a jolt and could feel my heart push gallons of blood colliding into the corners of my body. I waited for hours in my mother's house moving throughout its room erratically and unconsciously.
Perhaps no aspect of mind is more familiar or more puzzling than consciousness and our conscious experience of self and world. The problem of consciousness is arguably the central issue in current theorizing about the mind. There is a widespread, if less than universal, consensus that an adequate account of mind requires a clear understanding of it and its place in nature.
As the afternoon wore on and Cory still had not arrived, I slipped on my running shoes and half-stretched while peering through the window. I thought running around the small loop enclosing my mother’s house could ignite the excess adrenaline spilling over in my body. As I leaned into this run, I nearly collided with a car rounding a near corner. Sitting in the passenger seat was an image I had not seen in over half a year. The adrenaline collected into the pit of my stomach and exploded there.
One of my favorite aspects of running in new locations is getting lost. As I set out to find a route near the rental I'd just moved into, I remember the weightlessness of climbing to the peak of a hill and finding myself running with the river which splits this town down the middle. From here, I knew exactly where my route would lead me. From here the transition seemed effortless. I leaned forward and felt the downward force of the hill drag me headlong into the distance of the river streaming beside me.
At first, it was only when I could see the end of my route. In time, though, I began taking my shoes off earlier and earlier in my run until I didn’t need them at all. It happened, at last, that I was able to shed all layers of imagined comfort and support and run as nothing but a single body, without inhibition.
In the beginning of my junior year in college, I visited Washington DC with my immersive learning seminar to study memorialization. I weaved in and out of a number of our nation's most famous memorials feeling their strong foundation beneath my naked feet. I would lose myself in the raw connection I was making with the foreign land. It wasn't until I had mounted the grandiose steps of a museum or government building that I would procure my sandals from my bag and begrudgingly slip my feet into them. The feeling reminded me of my Christmas without shoes...
...Not long after my mother had moved to Indiana, my sister and I visited her halfway in Missouri for Christmas. The trip took us almost nine hours from home and it wasn't until I exited the car at the hotel that I realized I had managed to travel through several states without my shoes. The distance between us created the most exhilarating sense of freedom.
I shared the house by the river with two others. How I ended up with either of them is both a stroke of random and luck. I had been left the house as the sole renter when, in a sudden series of unfortunate events, my original two roommates backed out. While I vaguely knew my new roommates, the smell of weed wafting through the vents into my upstairs room was something I hadn't yet been acquainted with. The smell was instantly exciting, like sitting in the twilight of summer as my father lit his last cigarettes of the day. On the porch, I watched mesmerized as my roommates demonstrated the quasi ceremonial procedure to smoking weed. I took the pipe as it was offered to me and waited to feel. The memorial sound of heat dissipating into the hot twilight with my father overtook me.
Now Playing: “Blind” – Hercules and Love Affair, Hercules and Love Affair
Christmas in Texas looks like summer in Texas. I ran through the streets surrounding my sister's apartment complex and watched the brown grass and barren trees roll by me. I had begun to wear shoes again for protect my feet from the Indiana winter. But when one day, Cory decided to run with me, I let him use my shoes and was returned, once again, to the connection of barefoot running. The feeling was intimate. The feeling was natural.
It wasn't until after I returned to Indiana from a Christmas in Texas that I decided to purchase my first pair of minimalist running shoes. For the first time, my transition was cemented in the form of the new shoes, not 8 ounces in weight.
In my minimalist shoes and with ever growing distances, I began to feel a tight pain creep up the side of my legs, next to my shin as the green of spring began to creep back into the foliage. For weeks I continued to run on top of the pain but the pain only intensified with each run until eventually I was limping through campus. Only time could heal this pain.
In the summer between my junior and senior years of college, I move yet again. This time into my mother's house. The move makes me feel foolish as I unpack life across the hall from her room. My books, my underwear, my weed... I remember Cory carrying boxes and along with them the ease of yet another transition. His presence cushioned what I initially considered a rather difficult transition.
As I leaned into the first run I'd ever make from my mother's front door, I settle into the realization that this is also the last route I will ever make in Indiana, during my college career, before I undertake another, largely more significant transition. The pain in my shins burns dull.
It happened almost on a whim sometime during the first semester of my senior year. On May 05, 2013, I would run a marathon in Cincinnati. Almost without thought, I began running farther toward the distance where the date loomed. The decision came to me as if out of nowhere but was finalized in my ambition. At this point, there was no other option but to run the 26.2 miles. And so my training began.
"The miracle isn't that I finished. The miracle is that I had the courage to start."

- John Bingham, No Need for Speed: A Beginner's Guide to the Joy of Running
January 14: First official day of marathon training
The farthest I had ever run was in high school: 12 miles.
January 27: 10 Miles.
As a blistering February snow pelted the window in wet globs, I ran with rhythm on my mother's treadmill. I watched as mile after mile was counted off before me. I rounded 3,4,5,6,7 miles easily and listened to each deep intake of breath as I continued on. As I mounted the 10th mile, I began to notice a small prick in the side of each of my feet. It felt small until it bloomed microscopically with each footfall. As the pain began to overtake the whole side of each of my feet, I peered through salty sweat at the number rising before me: 12.5, 12.6, 12.7. I looked into the imagined distance ahead of me and clenched my teeth through the pain in my feet. Grinning, I ran through my first ever 13th mile.
February 10: 13 miles.
When I peeled back my socks after my first 13 miles, a pink concoction of blood and sweat dripped down my arm. Two blisters, one for each foot, had bloomed, grew, and ripped open. The sacrifice had been made.
"Running isn't a sport for pretty boys...It's about the sweat in your hair and the blisters on your feet. It's the frozen spit on your chin and the nausea in your gut. It's about throbbing calves and cramps at midnight that are strong enough to wake the dead. It's about getting out the door and running when the rest of the world is only dreaming about having the passion that you need to live each and every day with. It's about being on a lonely road and running like a champion even when there's not a single soul in sight to cheer you on. Running is all about having the desire to train and persevere until every fiber in your legs, mind, and heart is turned to steel. And when you've finally forged hard enough, you will have become the best runner you can be. And that's all that you can ask for."

- Paul Maurer, The Gift - A Runner's Story
My sister’s voice is loud in the phone. It sounds close, connected, as she explains, *I'm running a 5K in Houston!* And with those words, with the sound of her voice after its months-long absence, I could feel the remote gravity pulling at the core of my chest. A gravity which I had assumed dissipated in the force of a chaos and absence. In that moment, the distance of spiraling outward seemed much less far. *That’s great,* I said.
I was visiting Cory in New York City over spring break during my final semester. The marathon threw an ever larger shadow over me and its pressure sat heavy on my chest. As I wove in and through crowds of runners and walkers in Central Park, I let the sweet bitter aroma of the city fill my lungs. I threw myself headlong into the belly of the city where I felt confident. Where I felt the pull of desire yank me toward the towering buildings surrounding me.
Even when a gray snow evacuated Central Park of most other runners, I was dragged downstairs and into the crisp afternoon by an unabashed need to run. The slush of Central Park crept into my shoes and I could feel the cold weight create drag in my feet. And even as the cold wind slapped at me, a rigid smile was frozen into my face.
Back in Indiana, as the daily sun progressively burned off the harsh chill of a dying winter, I began to shed my layers. Beneath even a mild sun, my pale skin did not transition well. Back in my house, I could already see the red of a burn as blotches across my chest and arms.
Easter, March 31: I was determined that this was the day I would run 20 miles. The final milestone of my training would be this accomplishment. I set out slowly and cautiously. As I rounded into the final stretch of my usual 15-mile long run course, I could feel the electric synapses of my brain firing the signals of defeat throughout my body. When eventually I galloped to a walk, I watched as still five more miles sprinted into the distance ahead of me. I was left behind.
I could almost time the countdown until the marathon with the blister spreading across my foot. As the days were counted away, the blister grew across and under my foot.
April 07: 20 miles
April 15: The Boston Marathon bombings
Convinced that my blisters would be my failure, I purchased an antiseptic sealer. The pain as I applied it to my blisters ignited a shockwave that traveled into my bowels and made me sick. And the electric heat of the pain cooled, so too did the sealer harden into an artificial skin about my foot.
Now Playing: “Stress” - (Cross), Justice
Just weeks before my marathon, I decide that I cannot run in my current shoes. My first pair of minimalist shoes had been the key to an intimate transition in my life. But they could not carry me across any finish line now. The new shoes were stiff and foreign and I could sense the work ahead to mold them into a vehicle necessary to aid me in striding through one of the most difficult trials I could foresee facing.
May 04: Graduation. The day before I am to run a staggering 26.2 miles. It seemed only necessary that I would walk across the stage of one accomplishment into the running strides of another.
May 05: The Flying Pig Marathon, Cincinnati, OH
- The Marathon -
"It was being a runner that mattered, not how fast or how far I could run. The joy was in the act of running and in the journey, not in the destination. We have a better chance of seeing where we are when we stop trying to get somewhere else. We can enjoy every moment of movement, as long as where we are is as good as where we'd like to be. That's not to say that you need to be satisfied forever with where you are today. But you need to honor what you've accomplished, rather than thinking of what's left to be done."

- John Bingham, No Need for Speed: A Beginner’s Guide to the Joy of Running
My ears seemed clogged as I tried to orient myself to the
gaggles of runners stretching and jumping and shaking out
familiar anxieties at the starting line. I heard the muffled
voice of a man speaking into a microphone far away. The vi­
brations of his speech settled in my chest next to my racing
heart. This was the beginning.
Now Playing: "All My Friends" – Sound of Silver, LCD Soundsystem
An enormous countdown sent we runners into the hours-long distance before us. As the herd of us began to inch forward, the adrenaline in our veins rippled through and into each other like a sickness. At the front of the crowd, I leaned forward. And I was falling.
I had kept myself from timing any runs during my training process. My only goal was to finish a full marathon. As I neared the halfway point of the marathon, 13.1 miles, I saw a digital clock declaring one hour and thirty-three minutes. A shockwave of goosebumps erupted up into the base of my head. The time was excellent. I bounded forward into the final half of my trek.
As we entered an inner-city park, a hill greeted us. It rose without warning and ended out of sight. Even before I stepped onto it, I could see the miniature silhouettes of runners against the rising sun falling out of pace, taken down by the force of the uphill climb. When I approached the base, I looked to my feet and leaned into the angle and prayed for other forces to carry me onward.
Near mile 17, I could feel familiar synapses in my brain fire
to abandon the run. My stomach churned full of water and
Gatorade and synthetic supplements as the blood drained
from my head into hopelessness. Perhaps this was too
much. I raised my head to the sky as I backed off my lean
and felt many other runners beating into my back, passing
me. I watched as my unprecedented pace diminished into a
much smaller one. But still, I would run this marathon.
Mile 20: The Wall
The finale of the marathon is an enormous stretch of highway which allows runners a tantalizing view of the finish line, still over a mile away. The muscles in my legs began to twist and wrap in and out of themselves in convulsions of cramps. Lifting my knees took effort beyond the matter of muscle. It came from an other-physical place.
When I approached the finish line, the roars and hoards of people on the sideline grew into immensity. Beyond my body, I called to lift my legs higher, to lean deeper as I collided into a mounting pain. Into the end. From somewhere distances behind me, I could hear the phantom shouts of my first running experiences. Finish it. Finish it. Finish it.
At just over 4 hours, I had run my first marathon.
When I staggered to a halt past the finish line and my muscles ceased and rolled in convulsions of cramps that ached into my back, I could see through a haze of exhaustion my family. Cory, Sis, my mother, and my father stood huddled together as a unit into which I found myself gathered in the center of.
- Epilogue -
“Trust no thought arrived at sitting down.”

- Dr. George Sheehan, Running and Being
It took over a week after my marathon to run again. The desire came unexpectedly like a phantom burn spreading in my legs. The feel of my shoes as they slipped over my feet, the rhythm of my hands as they tied their double-knots, the pull of my muscles as I stretched into them came as a dream upon waking. Outside, I looked ahead of me, not to a coarse or a time or even a goal, but to the warm embrace of everything running has accumulated into. Under a climbing sun with the marathon in the wind on my back, I leaned forward and fell into the indeterminable distance before me.
Works Cited


McDougall, Christopher. Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe,


