

Can't get Boston off my mind

April 21, 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

Forgive me for first offering a caveat. The words that follow are not cool or objective in tone. That may sound odd, given that this column appears on page 4 of the China Post. Page 4 is, after all, the commentary page of this newspaper. Commentary pages exist for the sharing of opinions. And, of course, opinions tend by their very nature to be laced by the subjectivity and first-hand experience of the writer.

We will turn in a moment below to the enormous sadness that the explosions in Boston bring these days to so many of us, even we who live half a world away from that gutsy and now grieving city.

When I was a child, I suffered from asthma.

"The doctor says you're allergic to some type of pollen the air carries, Honey. It goes down into your lungs when you breathe." I can still hear my Mom explain my asthma to me. I doubted the theory even then. Was pollen chasing my lungs in the baseball season, too? I thought it only came in the spring.

Any type of vigorous exercise was impossible. Running was absolutely unthinkable.

When I played baseball with local all-stars like my pals John Finnegan, Danny Jaworski, Mike Shea, and the Bingle brothers, someone had to run the bases for me. I could bat not so badly. Oh, I could hit! Running the bases, however, was just too dangerous. I might get an asthma attack and croak right here, I told myself at the time, right here on the diamond at the west Toledo YMCA. That would have been bad news for a Catholic boy who wondered early on if he might be a priest one day.

On a routine check-up before entering high school, the doctor threw a curve ball at us. He told Mom that recent journal articles he had read claimed that in some cases, asthmatic teens might overcome their asthma by slow runs of a brief duration (2 – 3 minutes), followed, gradually, by additional longer stretches of running. At the age of 13, then, for the first time in my life, I began to run. No, that's not right. At the age of 13, I fell in love. I fell in love with running. .

This is partly why what happened last week at the Boston Marathon affects me as it does. When I was a young and handsome graduate student (long, long ago), I ran marathons. I was never good enough to qualify for the Boston Marathon but, comically as it sounds, some of my best friends were. Did I enjoy training with them? You bet I did.

I know how it feels to keep my feet moving over 42 kilometers of hard road, sometimes with hills and valleys, and I know the thrill of cheers from loved ones waiting for me at the finish line. I also know all about going out too fast, blowing a game plan, and dropping out. I did that once in St. Paul, and again in Chicago. I did it in Cleveland, too.

I limped up to the 18-mile mark that day, a bag of aching, dry bones, ashen-faced, pooped, and disappointed. I said to brother Joe, "I've had it. It's not my day." His oldest, my niece Leah, looked up at me and said, "Uncle Dan, I think 18 miles is still pretty good!"

Leah is married now. She is a psychiatrist. I am so proud of her. She is a marathoner herself. She lives in Boston. Leah was not in the finish line area when the bombs went off.

There are millions of people just like me, and probably a few thousand of us right here in Taiwan. Running either was a life-giving hobby for us in the past or still is. We may or may not have done marathons, but we have feelings for our sport that will never end. Our hearts go out to the people of Boston, and especially to the victims of this ugly and evil act of violence.

We know profound changes in security precautions at athletic events are sure to result. The cost and aftermath of Boston 2013 will be hugely grave.

Runners at all levels of ability, however, will go on running. Marathons will not come to a halt. There will be no stoppage of games, be they baseball, football or whatever. Crowds will continue to gather for the joys of music, the sharing of faith, the celebrations of academic success. Imagine: Those explosions could just as easily have occurred at a concert, a worship service, or a graduation ceremony. We cannot allow the forces of violence to control us.

We can't stop running now. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points:

1. The explosions at the Boston Marathon that killed 3 and devastated the lives of at least 130 other people, including a young Chinese woman, touch even our feelings in far away Taiwan. Why does this news event touch us so deeply?
2. This column may be interesting beyond its sad contents because of the writing techniques. Consider "story within the story," a very subjective and personal tone, and the use of some humor. What maybe happens for readers with these techniques?
3. Maybe you like to jog, and maybe you don't. BUT, is physical exercise a part of your present life style?

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