

are locked in battle with a demonic management team hell-bent on destroying us for reasons only they comprehend. Or maybe they don't, which could be why their motives are so impossible to understand. *Whatever.*

The point is that these early runs are stupendously helpful in getting me through some very trying days, and so I'm determined that they will continue. These runs are very odd though because the quiet and darkness of my home suburb is, at that hour, a weirdly different place. Barely a car can be seen or heard in the whole half-hour it takes me to punch out four hills reps and five kilometres of plod. And the only real signs of life are the strange-sounding frogs along the creek in Burgoyne Street, and the occasional flash of fur which could be cat, rat or rabbit – it's always too dark to tell.

And so the show continues. This morning's effort was pretty good. I felt much stronger and my time was a little quicker, so there are clear signs of improvement, which is welcome. I am still running very much slower than a year ago, but I keep telling myself pace doesn't matter (which is true); what really matters is getting out there and doing it and this is also very true, and is what lies at the heart of it all.

None of which suggests that I would willingly arise for a 4 a.m. run if there was any other choice, but then again, no-one is forcing me to do these runs I suppose, so it's a choice I make, and make very obviously alone.

But it is nice to have the streets to yourself. It's a sort of *Apocalypse*, 4 a.m. ... only without the Apocalypse. Erm ... look, just get out there and try it for yourself and you'll see what I mean. Don't rush the exits.

16th April 2014

9 p.m., the night before. I'm lying awake in bed listening to the ferocious drumming of heavy rain. It set in a few hours ago and is threatening to seriously dampen my pre-dawn run in the morning. Tomorrow's run is important, but I'm not thinking about that just now. Instead I'm transported in my mind well over four decades back to my youth in Tasmania; of lying in bed on cold winter nights with my pastel-blue AWA two-transistor pocket radio surreptitiously tucked under my pillow and tuned to stations hundreds of miles away, mainly rock and top-40 stations like 2SM in Sydney or 3AW in Melbourne, although often

I'd listen to a weird eclecticism of whatever was available: greyhound racing from Ballarat, Garner Ted Armstrong's oddly fascinating bible-bashing programmes from any of a number of church-owned stations, or country stations with terrible fake American accents playing Hank Williams tunes. I'd listen to *anything* that was a bit different and was from *somewhere else*. As long as it was a long way from the isolated, trapped-in-time island on which I lived I'd happily listen to it, and I flattened many an Eveready 9-volt battery (costing a whole week's worth of pocket money each) by falling asleep with my trusty radio still chirruping under my pillow.

The Australia of those days was a product of the resources boom of the '50s and '60s. Wool, wheat, copper and iron-ore had made Australia 'The Lucky Country' with an affluence that had enticed hundreds of thousands of migrants from all parts of Europe, including my parents who arrived in the antipodes aboard the *TV Fairsky* from England three years before I was born.

One of the icons of the resources boom was cheap, plentiful iron and steel; the most visible example of this being the ubiquitous corrugated-iron roof which adorned vast swathes of Australian housing. It was extremely popular, being cheap, lightweight and simple to work with, and it could be painted almost any colour you liked. As common as it was, the iron roof was singularly ill-suited to the Australian climate, being exceedingly hot in summer and bitterly cold in winter. It did have *one* benefit over tiled roofs which had nothing to do with structural values, and that was the sound it made in a rain storm. The heavy drumming of rain on a 'tin' roof lulled many an Aussie kid to sleep, and still does today⁶. As a youth I enhanced the effect by deliberately placing my bed next to the window so that I could have the double benefit of listening to the rain hit both the roof and the glass of my single-glazing. It also allowed me to feel the chill of cold air from the window on my face while the rest of me was toasty warm in my bed. On such nights I would turn off the transistor radio and instead of *Back to the Bible*,

6 Of course, today no-one refers to them as 'corrugated iron' or 'tin' rooves. Instead they are almost always called by their commercial name, 'Colorbond'. And yes, I'm sorry to say it is spelled without a 'u'.

the Rolling Stones or the Dapto dogs⁷, I would happily nod off to the sounds of nature reclaiming its sovereignty over mankind on my roof and window pane.

Now that I live in a house with a tiled roof, I miss it so much that on rainy nights, no matter how cold it is, I will sleep with the window open to better hear the rain, and always struggle with that bitter-sweet irony of wanting to listen to the rain but finding it sends me off to sleep in an instant.

Tonight however something is keeping me awake and I listen to the rain for ages wondering why I can't sleep. Eventually I do drift off, only for some reason to dream strange, restless dreams about unsuccessfully attempting to grow giant pumpkins in my backyard. It's all more than a little weird.

3:50 a.m., the next morning. The alarm sounds and I'm out of bed and into my running gear before my comatose brain can even register that the rain has stopped. I'm still wondering about the giant pumpkins of my dream as I step outside, rubbing the sleep from my eyes and fumbling pointlessly with my Garmin GPS. The ground is sodden, and I see the sky is overcast so I don a water-proof layer and with a sense of reluctance over-written only by a dimly-sensed yet somehow keenly-felt obligation, I head off into the night.

It has to be said that it's a special morning to be running, but for the moment that's far from my mind as I head up the first hill, lungs barely coping with the sudden transition from their relaxed state in the arms of Morpheus to now frantically sucking in air as legs and mind struggle to understand the rude and inhuman rush from bed to hillside.

Slowly I start to remember *why* this is such a significant morning. In less than an hour; at 4:49 a.m. local (Sydney) time to be precise, it will be exactly one year since the catastrophic Boston marathon bombings occurred⁸, and I had wanted in some small way this morning to remember the occasion and register my own small act of defiance against those that wish to kill and maim innocent people.

A year ago, I had arrived at work at 6 a.m. to find the news services

7 'Dapto dogs' – a popular greyhound racing track in the town of Dapto, near Wollongong, south of Sydney.

8 On April 15, 2013 two bombs were detonated near the finish line of the Boston marathon, killing three people and injuring an estimated 264 others.

all crossing live to the Boston marathon, but of course for all the wrong reasons. For me the impact was not unlike watching the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack unfold. If Boston was on a smaller scale in terms of devastation and loss of life, its impact on me was magnified due to it being a *running* race terrorist attack of all things, and a marathon at that. It was also only a day after I too had run a marathon, albeit in Canberra on the other side of the world. And I knew as I watched the TV coverage a year ago that running, no matter where it was, would never be quite the same again.

In the aftermath of Boston, my desire and plan to *do* something about the tragedy had been to travel to Boston and run the race the following (i.e. *this*) year. Being hopelessly unable to run a qualifying time however I was going to have to rely on a charity entry and this didn't eventuate. *Plan B* was to run the Canberra marathon again, which is held within a few days of the Boston event, but work pressures in any case intervened and my training plan fell apart. I was left therefore with only this small token gesture of an early morning run at about the time the bombs went off. As small as this gesture may be in the bigger picture, for me at least it was not an insignificant one.

There is something almost dichotomous and ironic about the nature of my defiant run through the darkened streets of Sydney this morning. It's an almost perfect solitude at this time of day. There's absolutely no-one about at all other than myself, and anyone who knew me who happened to think of me at that moment could have no real clue as to where I was or what I was even doing. And so, as a gesture of defiance it seems a little ridiculous, but still I believe that somewhere there is a running God, and that She will somehow honour my small tribute.

Of course, it is very hard when you're running up and down hills in the dark to remain fully focused on the terrible events of a year ago, but as the appointed moment came and went and the universe carried on regardless, I at least felt pleased to have made this small effort. Terrorists, even if somehow they may have noticed my token effort would hardly be concerned by it, but despite that I believe it is doubly important in the wake of Boston that we keep running. The mindset that even these solo efforts bring about will meld with the minds of others at countless races around the planet with a heightened sense of the importance of standing up to terrorism everywhere.

And so onwards we run. Doubtless the victims of Boston wouldn't want it any other way.

Two days later. I've been puzzling over why I felt this strong connection between the dark rainy nights of long ago and the Boston bombing. There's an inherent loneliness I think in both my listening to distant radio stations in my youth, longing to be somewhere else, and in the act of long distance running. And like the Boston bombing, there's always a sense that dramatic events, both good and bad, only happen to other people, a very long way away.

But if the shrinking of the modern world says anything, it's that dramatic events don't only happen to *other people* and no-one is ever *that* far away. We're all inextricably connected and bad things happen much closer to 'home', even if they are physically on the other side of the world.

All I really know is that while the Boston bombers planted their bombs some 16,000 kilometres from where I live, I felt the impact at an oddly personal level.

Such is the bond among distance runners. May it remain always so.

18th April 2014 (Good Friday)

Now that I think about it a little more, my previous post about Boston does seem appropriate for Easter. The horror of the bombings and the resurgence and determination of runners everywhere to stand up to evil seems to work (somewhat tragically) as a secular motif for the Easter weekend.

This morning's long run through Lane Cove National Park seemed to prove that. The park was chock-a-block full of runners, walkers and cyclists today, many of the runners in 'Can Too' shirts, training for up-coming half marathon events and raising funds for cancer research in the process. I chatted to several of them as (unusually) I overtook them (woot!) and the air of confidence and determination they had was fantastic and a great boost to my own run.

Even though I overtook several runners today (and even more unusually was passed by no-one), my pace is still well down on that of a year ago. I certainly felt stronger though, particularly on the hills, so I know I am making progress, and indeed I was about ten seconds per kilometre faster than last time I ran this course. I just need to run quite