

Speech Delivered at the 2008 Cross Country Awards Night

By Andy Lindquist

Let me begin by saying that it is a great honor for me to be here speaking to all of you on this night. Back when I first began running on this cross country team, it seemed almost inconceivable that I would make it this far, that my entire way of life would change so drastically, that I would become such a completely different person.

When I stepped out onto the track on that first day of practice my freshman year, I was not the person you see before you. Back then I hated the entire idea of running and had for some time. I just couldn't understand why people would put themselves through so much hardship; it did not make sense to me. However, for some strange reason I stayed on the team, even though I never even beat more than a handful of people the entire season. And then another strange thing happened, I decided to keep running and do track.

It was during this track season that I was truly pushed to my limits as both a person and athlete, because just about every single day, it rained. I recall countless workouts we did in the rain; but there is one that I will always remember: Coach Walsh had given us a schedule for spring break that year with all the workouts we had to do that week. There was only one day where there was a mandatory practice. So I wake up that morning and it's pouring outside, and my Mom told me not to go, that no one would be there, but I went anyway.

So I get up to the track and its still raining really hard and at first I think he's not going to be up there, but much to my dismay he was, and there were only two other people there. So I did the whole workout and I felt horrible the whole time. By the end of it I was beyond soaked, even after I put dry clothes on I still felt wet, and a day later I got really sick and I was sick for the next week.

I had never felt more alive.

Never had I been pushed so far out of my comfort zone, and that would not be the last time I would go through such an amazing experience. However the situation completely changed when Chuck decided to take the position of head coach at the beginning of my sophomore year.

Out of all the coaches at this school, no one is more dedicated and passionate about their sport than Chuck. He has given up so much of his time over these past 3 seasons to come out every day and deal with a bunch of unruly kids; not just that, he sets up meets, makes all of the workouts, drills, plus plenty of other stuff. But most important of all, he believed in us. He knew that we as a team could go far beyond our limitations, we could do something that previous teams could not. And instead of just focusing on a select few athletes, he made sure everyone knew how crucial they were to the team's success. He made me believe in myself, that I could do great things, that I could be part of a team that actually cared about me.

It was not just me that bought into what he was saying; everyone gathered here today also realized that in some small way they could make a difference on this team. This year's team, more than any other team I have been on in my high school career, grasped that we had the potential to make history.

We did not disappoint.

From the outset all of the seniors, including myself, made it our mission to be the best team Campo has ever put on the starting line. We realized that we must set the example for the rest of the team, as runners, but more importantly, as people. And throughout the year, all of us were able to turn into something none of us would have ever expected, a family.

Still, people continue to ask me why I run. They say such things as: "you aren't even on varsity, you're a senior on JV, why even do it if you're not one of the top runners." I say to them: "Your right, I'm not the fastest and I never will be, but that doesn't really matter, because when you put your heart and soul into something, when you sacrifice day after day, month after month, year after year, you realize just how

grand the world and the people that inhabit it are, how valuable life itself is. How could anyone be dissatisfied with that.”

If there is one thing that you should take out of all that I have said it is that wherever you may venture in the world you will still always be part of this team. Remember that for one shining moment we put aside our differences and became legendary. And know that no matter what you face in life, you can be great, you can change the world in your own way, transcend your boundaries and go from being ignorant, overweight, out of shape and running 24 minutes in your first two-mile race, to being smart, thoughtful, expressive, and in shape to run two-miles in 12 minutes.

Why do I run cross country?

I run cross country because there are few things in life that are so rewarding, that can completely turn your life around. When you are out there day after day running you discover so much more about who you are, how beautiful and precious life is. When you finish that workout or cross that line, words cannot describe the feeling. It's like happiness, pain, hate, fear all rolled together into one. The friendships you make on the team are ones that you will always cherish; you form such a bond, such a love and admiration for those around you. It's impossible to forget.

My defining cross country moment:

At this year's league championship meet, the same course where my running career started, I crossed the line for the last time. All at once everything from the previous four seasons flashed before my eyes: all the lows and highs came over me in one big wave. In that instant I realized that it was all over and I could not help but cry. Cry because I never envisioned my life changing so dramatically in such a short period of time.