**What are you Learning from This?**

I was looking back at the blogs I wrote a few years ago, when I came across the following and thought *how relevant it was right now* (I encourage you to take the 2min to read this).

COVID-19 has affected us all. We are all experiencing fear and anxiety. Our lives have all been disrupted in some shape or form. We are all feeling the sadness and the void of not being able to connect in person with our loved ones and even our running comrades. We are all facing the uncertainty of what might come…or not come. Now more than ever, we need to be practicing kindness to ourselves and to each other.

Trying to look at the glass half full, I see this time as an opportunity to deepen our relationship with our running and to look more into what running can provide for us.

This is perhaps the best time to ditch the Garmin and to ditch the expectations. Instead, perhaps ask yourself “what can this experience teach me about my running?” With races being cancelled, the absence of group practices, no more access to physio/chiro/massage therapists etc. perhaps now is a good time to refocus your running intentions. Instead of training for a specific race, what if you are simply training for yourself? Run because you can. Not because you are training for something specific. Instead of running to hit certain pace or volume targets, run for the sheer pleasure of it, with full gratitude and sheer appreciation for what it has to offer.

It is hard to find meaning behind COVID-19 when we are literally in the eye of the storm. I, personally, HAVE to believe that only goodness can come from this. And whereas it may be too difficult to imagine what this goodness may be on a global level, I find comfort in focusing on the smaller, more tangible, and more personal elements—including my running.

Right now, I am using this opportunity to focus on how grateful I am to have a strong body that allows me to run most days of the week. Running has been my savior.

Running has grounded me –it seems to be one of the few things that has remained constant right now.

Running has given me the opportunity to let it all out- there have been many runs where I have let the tears stream down my face without fearing any judgment or shame. I need this outlet.

Running has allowed me to tap into the “feel good hormones” that are so necessary right now.

Running has given me a chance to deepen my beliefs and my spirituality. Although I may be running alone, I feel connected to the people I pass (including their dogs) and to Mother Nature. In this time of isolation, this is needed more than ever.

And whereas I have always appreciated these aspects of running, it has been easy to get caught up in the other elements of running—can I get faster? Stronger? Push myself more? Train towards a particular race?

So right now, I am taking this opportunity to give thanks to my running. To appreciate what it has to offer in terms of its physical, mental and emotional offerings.

Thank you running, for keeping me a little bit stronger right now. xo

**Each Season Has Its Own Learnings**

When I stated to train more seriously again last year, I was asked the following question after a race: *what did you learn from that particular experience*? At first I was stumped, as I usually reserve such questions until the end of the season (or at least that is my intent, as in reality this only occurs about 50% of the time). I have since tried to think of such questions after each race, and even after challenging workouts, as I am now a true believer that our training experience holds a tremendous amount of wisdom. We just need to create the opportunities for such learnings to unfold!

Now that it is the end of the season, I encourage you to take 15 minutes and reflect on what your past training season has taught you. Sometime the answers are pretty obvious and straightforward. For example, drinking 2 cups of coffee immediately before your long run may lead to numerous interruptions and nature calls (guilty!). Not giving yourself enough time for a small warm up before your race could make the suffering that much worse (guilty again). I also found out pretty quickly (during the 5 Peaks Whistler Trail Race) that I can’t expect myself to race well on a particular type of surface that I haven’t trained on (lesson learned: mix up the terrain when practicing running descents).

Others lessons are not as evident and require more reflection. Whereas the more obvious ones tend to be more focused on the “what not to do”, sometimes the greatest learnings come from focusing on what you did do well, or what work in your favor. For instance, although I didn’t realize it at the time, I can now appreciate the fact that competing in 11 races this past season really helped my mental game-more specifically it helped with my pre-race jitters and the mental conversations that goes on in my head during a race. I also realized that part of this mental calmness had to do with meditating before each race-something that was not part of my original pre-race routine. It is important not to lose sight of what has worked well for you so that you can incorporate them into your plan next year.

And then there are those lessons that extend beyond one’s training.

I always knew that one of the reasons why I love trail running is because it is fun, it is easier on my body and it allows me to play in nature’s backyard. But I have come to learn, and appreciate, that running the trails has also served as a vehicle for self–exploration, reflection and calmness. In fact, it is not the running per say, but simply being out there, surrounded by the trees, the leaves, the rocks and the streams. This realization became more evident in a recent discussion with my coach when I showed her a picture of the spot where I spent a few minutes meditating last week. I only had a few minutes to spare in between running errands in the city, so I parked the car, climbed down a small bank off the side of the road, and simply sat and pondered by the little stream. After explaining to her that I often take a few minutes out of the day to go and find such a spot, she pointed out the obvious to me: That being in the trails is part of who I am. That the enjoyment that I get out of trail running is not limited to just *running* in the trails. That it is simply about *being* in the trails. That the trails is where I feel most at peace with both myself and with the world. Why not hang onto that connection, even after the season is over?

Now that trail running is becoming more limited due to the shorter hours of daylight and the (eventual) snow, it is important that I continue to find ways to stay connected to the trails. Maybe this means bringing a blanket to sit on once the snow arrives, so that I can continue to find a quite spot for meditating. Perhaps it means that I take up snow-shoeing this winter, in addition to my weekly cross-country skiing excursions. Or maybe I display some favorite photos of the trails in my office so that I am constantly surrounded by the outdoors. What’s most important is that I make a conscious effort to stay connected to the trails.

So what are your learnings from this past season? What do you want to hang onto versus what do you want to let go off?