

My second year at Oceana Middle School started in the morning when my mother woke me up.

"Arya, it is time for school. Woohoo!"

The morning was so fuzzy because I was sluggish and not ready for the new school schedule.

I practiced running and jumping over nature; hurtles (weeds) in my backyard all summer. I wanted to be ready to run cross country when seventh grade started.

Finally, it was the first day of school. I went to my locker where I brought my school supplies in my green pouch and notebooks to first hour. The rest of the day went by as fast as the hours just came and went. I was as nervous as a jumping bean as I pushed open the library door into the school library for the first cross country meeting.

People were everywhere signing forms to be in cross country. That was how I spent my first hour of cross country - signing forms. What a Wednesday. I even had homework. But on Thursday, we were out and running with the team. I found out that I could not do a curl-up and was the slowest person on the team. The next thing, I had to get into a line where the fast people were in the front and slow people in the back. I went to the back of the line but there was a blond 8th grader behind me.

"I should be behind you." I said feeling sad I because I was convinced I would be too slow.

"We shall see once we start." She responded.

We introduced ourselves and she told me her name was Kalea. We headed off running from Oceana to the elementary school. Overall, I ran 2 miles in 24:48 and Kalea was a few seconds behind me. I knew we would be cross-country buddies.

Each day flew by like a bird as I loved my teachers and learned something new every day. Every evening, I ran with Kalea. I got better at curl ups and ran faster. I remember my first of the 8 cross country meets was on 9/11, 2013. All of the runners had to sing the Star Spangled Banner. The day was so hot hence the run was canceled for the first half hour. I ran two miles in less than 24 minutes! I was so surprised at how much I improved with practice. Parents made sure there was always food for us after all of the meets.

My birthday was the day after, September 12th and on that day, we didn't run that much. But the next day was Friday the 13th... I was worried that something would go wrong. Amazingly, nothing did, all that worry for nothing!

What I noticed in cross country was people were organized into two tightly knit groups. There were the athletic people and the rest of us including Kalea too. I really wanted to be part of the athletic group but I had so far to go to be a better runner. I practiced hard and did my best to be at every practice. At every meet - those athletic kids were so supportive and cheering me on every time they saw me that I wanted to do better and I was faster by the end of the season. They said "Yeah Arya! Go Arya! Great job! You are doing great! Keep going! Go Arya!"

I sprinted every time they saw me.

Some old habits are hard to break - sometimes I still did things to get attention that I really didn't need to do. In mid-September, I sang a song for

some people on the team and they were smiling in this *horrific* way. I was singing an old song in a funny Elvis Presley voice on the ride back to Oceana. My voice was never good so, no wonder. I recorded my voice and it sounded like a five year old singing vibrato. My team mates thought it was strange so I won't sing in public anymore.

In the end of September, the team ran a mile to a huge rock that people come by to paint birthdays and other important stuff. Right next to it was an ice cream place called Twister's. The boys got ice cream first and painted the rock white. The girls got their ice cream next and painted the letters "CC TEAM 2013" The back of the rock was painted with names and so much paint. The c's had an arrow through them. One girl spray-painted her hand and stuck it on her leg. I was wearing shorts so I spray painted my hand gold and slapped my hand on the side of my leg. We had to walk back to prevent throwing up the ice cream.

The days cooled some from sunny September to cool October. There was one meet that was freezing where Coach said how good it was to be cold when we run, so we didn't sweat! Coach also taught us the fine art of running to win - things like encouraging team mates, how to run really fast downhill and take it easy going uphill and most importantly - leaning into the finish line by pushing out your chest just before crossing to get there a 10th of a second earlier.

I asked, "Why not put your hands out so some parts of the human are across the finish line?"

"The people count your chest instead of an arm or leg" said my coach.

One day, Coach told us about how a person got into the finals because that person leaned into the finish line! I remember cheering at the team to LEAN - LEAN - LEAN as the Oceana boy runners came in to the finish.

I was doing so well in school. I liked my teachers and was getting so much exercise. I had health in seventh hour; gym every other day and ran to the girls restroom to get dressed into shorts and a sports t-shirt. I grabbed my Adidas sports backpack for Cross Country and ran to the cafatorium (cafeteria and auditorium combined) where I met up with everybody every day. The Cross Country team would run outside for our daily 3 laps around the soccer field, and then we would complete 4 sets of 10 curl-ups followed by 15 push-ups. There were 40 curl-ups and 60 push-ups so 100 total. It was exhausting.

Before every meet, we would run a mile around the old graveyard near the school grounds. At the beginning and end of every day of Cross Country, we would stretch and finally be heading home. Each day after practice, my brother picked me up and I rolled my window down so I could stick my arm out to pretend to be an "airplane." It cooled me off from running in the hot sun. After meets, I would gasp for 5 minutes and be ready to run another mile! This was because my lungs grew from taking in so much air every day. On the weekend I was sore around my calves from not running for two days. I grew a little bit from my tiny size and I ate more meat and a lot more vegetables (I love veggies). Yum!

One thing I really liked about Cross Country was filling out this tiny red book that we recorded what happened every day in cross country. That tiny red book we called the logs. It was filled out about every 2 weeks. We ran different distances so every week, we totaled up the miles ran up to the last day of Cross Country of

how many miles ran total. I ran about 30 some miles and Coach was very impressed! I lost my log after two trimesters of no Cross Country. I loved that book! I wrote ARYA LYYRIA in huge letters.

A least favorite was wearing jerseys. We wore these blue and gold jerseys for meets. They were t-shirts with short shorts and on the shirts were the letters CROSS COUNTRY OCEANA MANATEES. Then a picture of a Manatee for that was our schools mascot. My jersey was so big on me that the pants had to be pinned on both sides and my shirt was hanging down so my undershirt was seen. Someone took a picture of me and I looked ridiculous and my eyes were half closed! I at least got a shirt that still fits me for Cross Country ended in early November. I regularly wear it to school.

Even now I am still in the middle about Cross Country. I am as close to the top as I am to the bottom about running Cross Country next year. I am not that fast and I am not sure if I want to do Cross Country next year in eighth grade. I got a t-shirt, slideshow, lowering my personal record to 17 minutes, meeting new people, ice cream, and getting exercise, wow. I will do Cross Country next year.