

THOSE MAD PEOPLE THAT RUN

I know them.
I've seen them many times.
They are weird.
Some leave early morning and strive to beat the sun.
Others get sunburned at noon, or they get tired in the afternoon, or try not to get hit by a truck at night.
They are crazy.

In the summer they jog, run, sweat, dehydrate and finally get tired... only to enjoy the rest.
In the winter they cover up, bundle up, complain, quench, get colds and let the rain soak their faces.
I have seen them.

They speed by the promenade, slow down through the trees, by winding trails,
They climb cobbled slopes, jog on the side of a lost road, dodge waves on the beach, cross wooden bridges,
step on dry leaves, climb hills, hop over puddles, run through parks, get mad at cars that do not stop, sprint to
get away from dogs and run, run and run.

They listen to music that matches the rhythm of their legs, listen to the birds and gulls, listen to their own
heartbeats and breathing, look ahead, look at their feet, they smell the wind that goes through the eucalyptus,
the breeze that comes from the orange tree, they breathe the air that comes from the pines and they stop briefly
when they run by the jasmines.
I have seen them.
They are insane.

They wear sneakers with air, brand name shoes, they run barefoot, or worn out shoes.
They sweat shirts, wear caps and measure again and again their own times.
They are trying to beat somebody.
They jog keeping their body loose, pass the one with the white dog, sprint after the phone pole, looking for a
faucet to cool off ... and keep running.

They sign up for all races... but do not win any.
They start running it the night before, they dream they are jogging, and on the morning they rise as children on
Christmas Day.
They have prepared their clothes, which lay on a chair, as they did in their childhood on the eve of vacations.
The day before the race they eat pasta and don't drink alcohol, but reward themselves with a feast after the
race.
I was never able to figure out their age but probably they are between 15 and 85 years old.
They are men and women.
They are not sane.

They register for five or ten kilometers races and before the start of the race they know they won't win, even if
nobody shows up.
They show anxiety at each start and just a few minutes before the start they need to use the bathroom.
They adjust their stopwatches and try to locate the four or five they must beat.
They are the race references: "Five who run like me."
Defeating one of them will be enough to sleep at night with a smile.
They enjoy when they pass another runner... but encourage them, tell them the finish is near and not to slow
down.
They ask for the hydration station and they get mad when it does not show up.
They are crazy, they know at home they have all the water they want, without having to wait for a volunteer to
raise up a glass as they go by.
They complain of the killing sun, or the rain that makes it hard to see.
They are not well, they know that near by is the shade of a willow or an eave.

They don't prepare them ... but they have all the excuses by the time they reach the finish line.

They don't prepare them.... they are part of them.

The head wind, there was not a drop of air, the new shoes, the circuit badly measured, the ones ahead that just walk and don't let you pass them, the birthday party they went to last night, the blister on the right foot, the seam of the new sock, the knee that betrayed me again, I started too fast, they did not give out water, I was going to sprint but I didn't want to.

They enjoy the start, they enjoy the run and when they arrive to the finish line they enjoy lifting their arms because they say they have succeeded.

That they have won again!

They don't realize they barely lost by a hundred or a thousand people... but they insist they have won again. They are lunatics.

They set a goal for each race.

They beat themselves, those looking from the sidewalk, those who watch on television and those who do not even know that there are crazy people who run.

Their hands shake when they pin their numbers to their clothes, simply because they are not ok. I've seen them go by.

Their legs hurt, they get cramps, have difficulty breathing, they feel side stitches but still....keep going.

As they move along the race their muscles suffer more and more, their faces distort, sweat runs through their faces, the side stitches start again and one mile before the finish line they begin to wonder what they are doing there.

Why not be one of the sane ones who cheered from the sidewalk?

They are nuts.

I know them well.

When they arrive they hug their wife or husband that fake by pure love, the perspiration of their face and body. Their children and even a grandson are waiting for them, or a grandparent shouts their name as they are crossing the finish line.

They carry a poster on their forehead that turns on and off and says "I arrived, mission accomplished".

As soon they arrive they drink water and wet their heads, they lay on the grass to recover but stand up immediately because they need to greet those who came in before them.

They lay back down only to stand up again, because they need to greet those who finish after them.

They try to tear down a wall with both hands, they lift up their legs from the ankle, embrace another crazy one who arrives more worn out than them..

I've seen them many times.

There is something wrong with them.

They look fondly and without any pity the one that arrives ten minutes after them, they respect the last one and the one before last, because they say they are respected by the first and and by the second.

They enjoy the cheering even when they are arriving just before the ambulance or the guy on the motorcycle.

They form teams and travel 100 miles to run 5.

They buy all the pictures of them taken on the race and fail to notice they look the same as those of the previous race.

They hang their medals around the house where guests can see them and ask about them.

They are not well.

"This one is from last month" they say trying to use their most humble tone.

"This is the first one I won" omitting to say that it was given to all runners, including the last one, and the transit inspector.

Two days after the race they are already up very early, hopping over puddles, climbing hills, moving their arms rhythmically, greeting cyclists, high five-ing the peers they come across.

They say few people these days are capable of being alone -by themselves- one hour per day.

They say only the fishermen, the swimmers, and a few more.

They say that people cannot withstand so much silence.

They say they enjoy it.

They say they plan projects, balance accounts, make regrets and congratulate themselves, they question themselves, they plan out their days, while running and chat by themselves without any fear. They say everyone else looks for excuses to always be in company. They are crazy. I have seen them.

Some just walk... but one day... when no one is looking, they dare and jog a little. In a few months they will begin transforming and in no time they will end as crazy as them. Stretching, looking, rotating, breathing, sighing and sprinting. Sprint, slow down and sprint again. I think they want to beat death. They say they want to beat life. They are completely mad.

By the Uruguayan author Marciano Duran.