

First, I want to thank all of you who replied to last month's essay about the loss of my father. I appreciate the outpouring of support and love you have given me during a very challenging personal time. I would love to keep in touch with all of you who read these essays via e-mail correspondence. Please feel free to provide any feedback to me on anything I write at the following e-mail address. [durunrunner@yahoo.com](mailto:durunrunner@yahoo.com).

I also want to mention that as the Five Star "Senior" ambassador, I will be setting up a team specifically for those 50 and over for as many upcoming races as I can. The name of the team is "isn't life grand." It is kind of a play on words, as once you hit 50 years old, you enter an age group called Grand Masters. The more people who join this team, the more of an opportunity to get some money back on your registration, based on the number of people who actually sign up. And the best news is you don't even have to be over 50 to join. You just need to think that overall, even in tough times, you think that life is grand.

A couple of years ago, I talked Lowell into providing awards three deep in both Grand Masters and Senior Masters categories, as well as keeping the original 5 year age groups in the following categories:

50-54  
55-59  
60-64  
65-69  
70-74  
75-79

If you are 50 or over, this awards structure gives you an even better chance of earning a placement award. My goal is to make sure that every award in every age group above 50 is earned at each race. In order for this to happen, you don't have to join my team, but you DO have to come out and run, walk, or crawl the race. Remember to register as part of the existing team "isn't life grand" when you sign up for any five star race.

I've rambled enough, and I still have an essay for the month. So without further delay, I present it to you now. It's one I wrote many years ago, but I hope it still has meaning today.

### **When the Old Man Died**

The old man poked his head out the front door to be sure that the coast was clear. He looked to his left, then slowly to his right to be sure there would be no witnesses. He was about to do something drastic, and he preferred to do it in anonymity. Perhaps, he was a little embarrassed about what he was about to do, but he was frail and weak, with seemingly nothing to look forward to in his future, and he was fully aware of this fact. So the old man decided it was time to end his sorry old life. And he was going to do it by running.

He peered out to the neighbor's houses, there was nobody else stirring in his well-

maintained neighborhood, and so he knew that his time had come. So the sorry old man slowly closed the front door behind him, and sheepishly ran out to the street. And he attempted to put an end to a life whose dreams had left him long ago.

As he slowly jogged down the street, he felt as though his legs would fall off and his heart would explode. Was this how it was going to end? He felt way too old for this kind of exertion, and the old man could feel the blood rushing to his head as he pushed on. He wondered just how long it would be before his demise would come. His legs were screaming for a break, but he ignored the body's pleas to stop. He was an old man on a mission, and he pushed relentlessly on.

He ran for less than a mile, a single loop around the neighborhood, and finally, he saw his house coming up on his left. When he reached it, he stopped, gasping for air. He could go no further, and so, right where he started the attempt, he stopped, stepped back inside his house, and collapsed motionless on his living room floor and just lay there. His whole body was pounding with every heartbeat, and he felt sick to his stomach. His chest hurt, and his legs throbbed, but that day, the old man didn't die. He lay on the floor, his mind racing, wondering if he was making a big mistake with his attempt to kill himself off.



For the next couple of days, he was too sore and too defeated to ever think about trying what he had just done ever again. That one attempt seemed like it was enough to discourage him from ever making even a second attempt. He hurt all over, and he was close to resigning himself to settling on just being old and miserable forever. But by the third day, he was starting to revisit the thought of eliminating his sad and pathetic old self again.

On the fourth day, he revived his attempt, and ran again. Just as the first time, he closed the door behind him, and he ran another mile. And a funny thing happened. Though it wasn't nearly enjoyable, he found it didn't hurt quite as much, and he actually felt a little better a little sooner afterwards. And the next day, the thought of

trying again that day was not so far out of his mind.

The old man found that each time he ran, it became less and less painful, and now, instead of collapsing in the middle of the house after a run, he was actually starting to plan the next one. He purchased himself a running watch, and downloaded a running app, and actually started monitoring his progress. As time went on, he found that his pace started getting a little quicker, and his runs started getting a little longer. And all of a sudden, he was having dreams of the future. They were hazy, but they were there. He was starting to feel younger than he did before he started his quest to kill off the old man he once was. But in reality, the old man was succeeding in his mission. The old man was slowly dying.



The old man started entering races. At first, he could not run one all the way without stopping. There were often very few people, if any, behind him, but the old man didn't seem to mind. After all, he was an old man, so it was positive that he was doing this at all. He continued running, and he continued racing, and as he improved, he paradoxically was continuing to experience the slow death.

His weekly mileage increased to 15 miles, then through the 20's, and even into the 30's some weeks, and his race times dropped. 40 minute 5K times dropped to 35 minutes, then 30 and even 25 minutes and lower.

The old man was now 6 months into his running, and in one action, was getting in better and better shape, and simultaneously inching closer to the inevitable death he had meticulously planned a half year earlier. He was actually starting to feel very good. But his running indicated that he still had a serious death wish. He ran more than ever, and was still getting faster. His life was becoming full, and his dreams were starting to appear in vivid color.



As he drove to a race one Saturday, he said to himself “This is going to be the day.” When the race started, he took off like a jackrabbit, his heart pumping faster than it ever had before. He actually went through the first mile in under 7 minutes. He held his pace as well as he could, his legs screaming the same way they did during his very first mile all those months ago. As he approached the finish line, he attempted one last burst of speed. He quickly glanced down at his watch one more time. As he pushed to the finish line, his watch read 22:10. Never in a million years did the man dream of running such a fast time. As he crossed the finish line, with one last big push, he went to stop his watch to immortalize this race. Then he looked at the watch, just to be sure it was true. The watch was blank. Just as he had drained his body during the run, the watch battery was also drained. He had forgotten to charge it before the race. It was as dead as he was.



At the awards ceremony, the medals went three deep in each age group. He waited and wondered as they announced the awards in the youngest age groups first. Finally, they announced the winners in his age group. First place, and then second place in his age group were announced. His name was not called. Then they announced the third place winner. It was him. The old man had won third place in his age group. ***The 25-29 year age group.***

He beamed from ear to ear as he went to pick up his award, and as he proudly carried it back to display proudly to his young wife and kids, who were jumping up and down in joy for their father, he knew that he had finally accomplished his goal. He had finally killed off the old man, and replaced it with the fit, youthful 26 year old he had wanted to become when he first started running. Looking back, he realized it was a slow, and sometimes painful death, but he knew the old man would not be missed. He liked who he had become much better.

He gazed at his blank watch one more time. How ironic, he mused, that at the exact same time that his watch gave out that he know once and for all that this is when the old man died.

