

REMEMBERING TOM

By Shawn Deal

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REMEMBERING TOM

A Dramatic Monologue

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SYNOPSIS: Before adolescence emerged and my focus became girls, sports, and school—in that order—was a time of innocence, where it was just fun to hang out with friends. It's been forty-five years, and I still think about Tom Springsteen, the friend I had when I was twelve.

TIME: Present, yet looking back on the past.

SETTING: Past track experiences.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male)

NARRATOR (m)

PRODUCTION NOTES: This can be done very simply: bare stage, no costuming and no props.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES: The main character goes through a variety of emotions in this play: Sadness, regret, remorse, and depression, as he searches to understand and still grieves after many years. The actor should try to interweave as many of these emotions throughout the beats of this play. The last thing you want to do is to only focus on one of the emotions.

DEDICATION

For Tom and the people that still miss him.

NARRATOR: Here I am at fifty-eight years old [*Change age as needed*] and I've had a full good life. I graduated high school and attended college, where I received a degree. I travelled around the world for a few years to places like Canada, Mexico, Japan, Peru, Panama, and Costa Rica. I taught abroad for those few years, came back home, and got married. I have three wonderful adult children—hopefully grandchildren on the way someday soon—hint, hint.

I've had a full life with very few regrets. Yet there are times—a surprising amount of times—when I let my mind wander (most often when I'm relaxing) that I think about a boy I knew when I was twelve. His name was Tom Springsteen.

It's funny how, more than forty-five years later, when I haven't seen him in all that time, the impact he had and has had on me is substantial.

I can still picture him, in my head so clearly.

If he, as a twelve-year-old boy, were to walk down the street past me, I would know him in an instant. I'd run right up to him and immediately declare: I have missed you.

You never know the impact some people will have on your life. I would have never guessed, at that time, that I would even remember Tom this many years later. There are kids I grew up with on my own street whose names I don't remember.

My fortieth high school reunion is coming up this year, and I can't remember most of the people in my class. In fact, I'll bet I haven't thought about ninety-eight percent of them since graduation. And yet, a boy I knew for only two years in middle school, I think about all the time.

Tom was a gifted runner. Really. He was just phenomenally amazing, especially at distance, any distance over two miles and Tom was competitive. The longer the distance, the better the odds Tom would win. In the two years I knew him, he never lost a race.

I first saw Tom as he ran past my house at like six in the morning on a Saturday. I was awake, preparing to go fishing with my dad. I didn't like fishing. I was being made to go. You know quality time with Dad. I was never willingly awake at that time in the morning.

So, I was simply flabbergasted that here was a boy my own age out running, on purpose, that early in the morning. I came to find out he indulged in this ritual every morning before school, rising at the unholy hour of four a.m. to be running by 4:30.

It was a different time back then. We were the generation of latchkey children. Children who were turned out of the house during the summer and told not to come home before lunch or dinner. During school days, we came home to empty houses, where we would start on our homework and begin preparations for dinner. There was not the constant worry of dangerous people out there or us kids getting into trouble. It was just a different time back then. This fact becomes important later on.

I searched Tom out that next day of school. He was new and didn't know too many people and was happy to say hello. I said I saw him out running two mornings before. We started talking about running and the track team itself, and from there, we became friends.

Tom was the coolest kid I ever met. He had long blonde hair, which was the fashion at that time. He was taller than most of the other boys and surprisingly muscular, not in a weight-lifting sort of way, but in a lean runner, athletic sort of way.

The middle school girls loved him instantly, especially Trina Olsen, who had a schoolgirl crush on him to rival no one.

There were always girls around Tom everywhere he went. Amazingly, he had this ability to talk to them. While others of our age struggled just being around girls, Tom communicated effortlessly. The rest of us boys were already growing self-conscious about everything female, but girls were still an enigma to us. For Tom, it was easy... in fact, almost everything there was about Tom's life was easy.

It didn't take long for me to start running with Tom.

Not every morning, as I wasn't crazy about being anywhere other than bed at four a.m. But I would often join my friend for the final hour of his run when he came striding by my house.

I started to get much more competitive in track and field races because of the extra practice and Tom's encouragement. To the point where I could get a top five finish or even second. Don't let me kid you, Tom won all those races, and none of the rest of us were close. He was winning by football fields, 200 to 300 yards ahead of everyone else. To be honest, I think he could have won by a lot more. He held back a bit.

Tom competed in these huge marathons. The ones in all the big cities close to us. He wouldn't win the marathon, but he would win in his age bracket and often with a record time. There was no question in my mind that Tom would win the marathons when he got older. I expected him to go to the Olympics. And I expected him to win there in grand fashion. My expectations of my friend were high.

He was just that good.

The one race he wanted to win (more than any other) we all called the "big race." It took place near the end of the school year. All middle schools and high schools in the city competed in the big stadium downtown.

Tom was competing in the longest distance race. It was prestigious. If victorious, you received a medal and a ribbon and your name on a trophy that stayed at the stadium. It was a pretty big deal back then.

Tom won it two years in a row. I competed and was in the pack where any of us could have finished second. Of course, Tom had won the race some five minutes beforehand.

That summer, Tom had finally convinced me to run every day with him. Since it was summer, we didn't have to get up at four a.m. to do it. So given that, I agreed.

Right after the last day of the school year, his family was going to their lake house for two weeks to start off the summer, but the day he got back, we were going to start running. I planned to run during those two weeks anyway, as I knew he would be doing so at his family's lake house. I didn't want to be all out of wind when he returned, so I had planned to run at least ninety minutes every day he was gone. Granted, it wasn't as long as he ran, but it was something and more than I had done any previous summer.

I was ready. I wanted to get good enough, strong enough to actually challenge him this coming year, or at the very least, keep up with him.

It didn't happen though and it's because of that that I still remember Tom Springsteen.

The first time I ever cried for sadness rather than pain was for Tom.

Remember, it was a different time back then. There weren't nearly as many laws for safety as there are now. Some of the safety measures we take for granted now simply didn't exist back then.

Tom was riding in the back of his dad's open pickup truck with a couple of his cousins. There was an inflated inner tube in back, one of those you float down rivers on, with a rope tied to it. Once the

pickup got up to speed, the inner tube flew out the back. Somehow the rope had entwined around the legs of Tom and pulled him out with it. Tom landed headfirst onto the road and pretty much died instantly.

I never saw Tom again, but I saw his grave.

I only ever went there once. The family had a graveside service for him. Very simple, very short. I just stared at the ground the whole time. I didn't make eye contact with anyone until the end. I fought to keep back tears, but they ran down my cheeks anyway.

Tom was the first person I knew well that died. Tom was the one to show me death for the first time, and I have grieved and struggled with his loss ever since.

At the end of the graveside ceremony, a hand gripped my shoulder. I had yet to look up and thought it was my dad's hand, but it turned out to be Tom's dad instead.

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