

Eulogy of Tom Osler by Ed and Michael Dodd (given by Michael)

My Dad (Ed Dodd) first met Tom Osler back in the summer of '62. He had just finished his second year in high school and was running his second road race. They had a back-and-forth battle in that five-mile race along Kelly Drive in Fairmount Park.

He doesn't remember which one beat the other (Cough "Tom"), but after the race Tom introduced himself and said he was impressed with my dad's skills. They talked a bit, and he invited my dad to come over to his house on a Sunday morning for a long run. So, the following Sunday dad drove from his house in Drexel Hill to 2010 Broadway in Camden. They ran down Ferry Ave. to Cooper River, and then out along the river to the old Camden County Music Circus and returned the same way to his house. A 16-mile route. By far the longest he had ever run.

Thus began a more than 60-year friendship. Through the years, they took hundreds of long runs together, often with their other running friends from the area. They raced against each other many, many times. Dad always found racing with friends to be a lot of fun. So did Tom.

By his second year at St. Joes College, Dad had improved quite a bit thanks to his training with Tom. So, for the first time, he beat him, in a six-mile track race. Great fun. But for Tom, it was motivation. Their next race was going to be in Farnham Park in Camden. The race was several loops, with a longish hill each loop. So, for the next two weeks Tom went to the course and ran loops. Each time he came to the hill he did an acceleration all the way up the hill. His plan was to do the acceleration each lap until he broke Dad – or himself. Well, it took only one such acceleration and my dad was toast. Tom beat him easily and doesn't think he ever beat him like that again at anything under 24-hours.

This was the genesis of the "Oslerian Pickups".

On their many long runs they would talk and talk as they ran, sometimes even singing. Tom had a little ditty he would sing towards the end, when Dad, but usually not Tom, would be getting tired. It went like this:

"Going down the road feeling bad, feeling bad. I'm going down the road feeling bad."

The formula they used to decide how far they had run was very simple;

Take the total time (T) and divide by 7.5, because, of course, they were running seven and a half minute miles. $T/7.5 = x$

Tom also invented the concept of EQM's. This represented Equivalent Miles and was used whenever they had to run over snowing, slippery terrain. They still took the total time and divided by 7.5 and just wrote in their logs EQM's. They'd essentially inflate the distance they actually ran with what they would have covered if the roads were dry.

They ran all over South Jersey. Dad's favorite run was a 20 miler to Almonesson Lake through Westville and down Almonesson Road, past cows grazing peacefully in the fields. These fields no longer exist and Deptford Mall now makes such a run impossible. Tom was the reason Dad ran his first marathon in 1965 and his first Boston, that same year.

In the fall of 1966, Tom came to teach at St. Joe's College where Dad was a junior math major. Dad selected math as a major also because of Tom. His senior year Tom taught him a two-semester course in Complex Variables. After sitting in Tom's class for that year, Dad decided, again because of Tom and his teaching style, that he too would get a Ph.D. in mathematics and teach in college. That plan did not work out, as Dad dropped out of graduate school that October and got a high school teaching position. He taught high school for the next 39 years.

Tom's influence on his career, however, was not yet done. Five years later, Tom was then at Glassboro State College, called my dad and told him the Math Chair at St. Joe's had asked him if he wanted to take an adjunct position in the night school. He told him no, but recommended dad for the position. The chair remembered him from his Set Theory class and offered him the position. He was an adjunct there for the next 41 years. For him, there was no better career than teaching. We all know Tom would agree. They both loved what they did every day.

After Tom broke his hip Dad asked him if he had thought about retiring. He said, "Why would I retire. I love teaching. The students make me feel young. I come out of class feeling better than when I went in. I will teach as long as I am physically able. I can think of nothing better than to die teaching. Especially, since I won't have to clean out my office."

Dad ran marathons because of Tom's influence, went into teaching because of Tom's influence, and ran ultramarathons, again because Tom ran ultras. Dad told Tom that he felt so beat up after a marathon that there was no way he could double that distance and survive. This was about the time Tom came up with his run/walk idea of covering ultra-distances. Following his advice once again, Dad tried it and sure enough by using this technique he was able to run 50 miles, 100 miles, and more with a recovery time that was not as long as the time to recover from a hard marathon.

Many, many ultra runners have embraced the run/walk method and it has allowed many to keep going even as they got older. Dad, of course, is not the only runner or math student to be so wonderfully influenced by Tom. His several books on training have influenced and encouraged at least two generations of distance runners. In fact, Amby Burfoot, who won the 1968 Boston Marathon, told dad that he read Tom's small 1967 book "The Conditioning of Distance Runners" and changed his training, using the "Oslerian Pickups" method, I mentioned earlier. He said that change was responsible for his Boston victory. Tom gave all the proceeds to Browning Ross to support his monthly publication "The Long Distance Log." At the time, Browning published the full results of every road race held in the United States.

The first National 50-mile Championship was run in Poughkeepsie, New York around Thanksgiving in '67. Tom won the race and defeated one of the best ultra-runners in the world – John Tarrant of England ("The Ghost Runner.") Dad handled Tom during the race stopping

every few miles to give him highly sugared tea. There were no carbohydrate or electrolyte drinks at the time. Sugared tea was the fuel.

Tarrant had come alone to the race. Early on, Tom said check on John and see what he needs and go get it for him. So, Dad made several stops to get Tarrant his “biscuits and tea.”
The Moral is: Tom wanted to win fair and square.

Enough stories from those halcyon days of the 60’s when (to steal a line from the movie “Chariots of Fire”) “We had hope in our hearts and wings on our heels.”
Those wings have long since dropped away.

But hope remains. Dad hopes we all remember Tom fondly in the coming days, weeks, and years. He’ll think of him every day. Dad hopes we all have found or will find those to love, like Tom did his wife Kathy, his sons, Eric and Bill, his grandsons Gabe and Zack, and his great granddaughter, Zoey. My dad hopes we all have or will find a way of life that fills us with joy and happiness, like Tom did with running and teaching.

Dad hopes that that way of life will make this world just a tad bit better off for us having being here for our short time. Dad knows the world has been made better by the life of Tom Osler.
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