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EDUC 111

Autobiography

I was born Andrew David Williams at Goshen General Hospital on August 18, 1987 at 9:02 a.m. I was the youngest of three children, which would leave me with a lasting legacy as “the baby” of the family from that point forth. Very little if anything can be recalled about my first few years in this world. It has been said frequently by my parents, however, that I was calm and reserved from little up. Being raised on a small farm between Middlebury and Goshen, Indiana, I felt that my world had no boundaries, except for the 10 foot imaginary bubble which one or both of my parents occupied and I felt compelled not to stray from. Some of my very earliest memories were of riding in the tractor with my father as he tilled the fields, inevitably falling asleep beside him. I caused little trouble, except when I apparently ate a bag of mouse poison while playing in the basement at age two... no harm done.

My grandfather on my mother’s side passed away when I was three years old and I regretfully admit that I cannot remember back that far. At five years of age, my grandpa on my father’s side passed away as well, and memories of him are a blurred part of my childhood. I remember the funeral and being sad that I would never see him again, while not completely grasping the concept of death. His absence throughout the following years would eventually allow it to sink in.

I attended kindergarten at Middlebury Elementary School. Mrs. Grindle, my first teacher, was the sweetest woman on the planet. While I enjoyed being at home with my family and effectively entertaining myself, the extensive playground usually made school worth my while. A new elementary school, Orchard View, was built in Middlebury the following year,

and that is where I attended first through fifth grade. My first grade classroom would ironically one day be where my sister began her teaching career. Orchard view was where I unofficially began my hobby as a long-distance runner. Our physical education teacher, Mrs. Davis, had a quarter-mile track built around our playground, and we were encouraged to run/walk the track during recess if we felt compelled. We were to keep track of our mileage on blue cards, and our names would be broadcasted on the morning announcements for each new “mile club” that we entered (25 mile club, 50, 75, 100, etc.). Some years I felt more compelled to run than others. For whatever reason, the mileage clubs that I became apart of by the end of each year are as follows: 1st grade 25 mile club, 2nd grade 300 mile club (not a typo), 3rd grade 25 mile club, 4th grade 175 mile club, 5th grade 525 mile club. I still do not recall why I ran. I enjoyed playing basketball, soccer, and kickball as well. Friends would frequently tag along beside me, so it was not an issue of being a loner. Apparently I was bestowed with an intangible inner drive, which may explain why 15 years later, I’m still running.

Despite how physically active I became during elementary school, I never felt that running was the focus of my life. I had a great academic experience as well, earning the Citizenship Award for our school as a fifth grader. Also during that same year, on August 16, 1998, I was baptized and became a member of Rock Run Church of the Brethren. I was taught at an early age to always give my all at whatever I was pursuing.

Middle school brought with it many changes, some good, some simply different. Heritage Middle School consisted of grades 6-8, and was the only middle school to feed into Northridge High School. I finally had a chance to directly compete with my peers at distance running when I joined the cross country team in sixth grade. After a rough start, I was able to get into a rhythm and ended the season with a third place finish in the junior varsity conference

meet. On the academic side, I was consistently on the honor role/high honor role, always feeling compelled to push myself in class. It was not necessarily a motivation to earn A's; I simply felt that I needed to follow instruction, and it usually ended up earning me a decent grade.

Apparently my demeanor was noticed, as I received another Citizenship Award for the eighth grade. Despite my classroom motivation, I often put equal focus on my athletics. Since my grades never seemed to suffer as a result this, it never became a problem. Besides running cross country and track throughout middle school, I also played basketball, making myself part of an elite group of individuals known as "three-sport athletes". Even though I took naturally to running, I thoroughly enjoyed the game of basketball, playing it every morning before school and after lunch. I was thrilled to make the varsity squad in my seventh grade year. I was never the big scorer, but I put in my time.

High school was a new adjustment which once again brought with it many changes, some better, others not so much. The addition of more freedoms and independence into my life was very apparent... we were finally allowed to chew gum in school! However, my goals and ambition were on the same path: running, basketball, and school. Our high school cross country coach was a legend in the running community, holding several Northridge High School records from ten years prior. He had a wonderful balance of being able to push and motivate you to your utmost potential, while still being your friend. He became a mentor to me, and had a profound impact on my attitude in running and life in general. The biggest adjustment from middle to high school running was the increase in training and longer race distance, from 3k in middle school to 5k in high school. My coach had me running close to forty miles a week. While my performances and ability improved drastically, my young body was not ready for such stress. I developed a metatarsal stress fracture in my foot, forcing me to give up my varsity position and

end the season early. It was a huge blow, both physically and mentally. However I was healthy in time for basketball, playing on the freshmen squad for my final season. After that I would focus on cross country and track, allowing me to train for these sports during the winter. It ended up being a wise decision.

A huge step in the direction of independence came in the fall of my sophomore year, when I obtained my driver's license. During the previous summer I had bought my first daily driver, a red 1986 Chevy 4x4 pickup truck. It was in poor condition, so my father and I spent the winter restoring the gem into a work of art. I added oversized mud tires, lift kit, and CB radio. I was rolling in style, and getting ten miles per gallon the whole way.

Around the same time, I was inducted into the National Honor Society at Northridge. We had a ceremony to honor those new individuals, and the group ended up consisting of about half my class. Apparently the only requirements were that you earn acceptable grades, and avoid getting into excessive amounts of trouble. This concerned me slightly. I felt that "honor" had much more meaning than that.

My junior cross country season was one of the most amazing times of my life. The team was running well, and we had a great chemistry. Everyone worked hard. Even though we did not win a single multi-team invitational race during the regular season, we were consistently one of the best teams in the state. We ended the season by winning our conference, sectional, regional, semi-state, and then the infamous 2004 Indiana state cross country title. I will never forget the moment they read off the results... perhaps one of the happiest moments of my life. It was a pleasure to see good people working hard, and getting the highest results. I ended up earning the Mental Attitude Award for our team that season, something that I considered a great honor.

The rest of high school went fairly unchanged. My senior cross country season went well, with our team winning every tournament race from conference to semi-state and placing 6th at the state meet. I graduated in the spring of 2006 with an academic honors diploma, planning to attend Manchester College in the fall.

College was once again a huge change in my life. Everything was more work, both in classes and on the cross country course. However, my drive remained. Over time, I was able to increase my volume of training until I was regularly running ninety miles a week. I ended my collegiate cross country career with four All-Conference awards, three Manchester Most Valuable Runner awards, two individual conference titles, and qualifying for the NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championship my junior and senior year, while leading my team to our first conference title in forty-six years. My balance between academics and athletics remained, and I managed to earn a spot on our college's Dean's List on several occasions. In addition to my academics and athletics, the relationships that I have developed with friends, teammates, coaches, and professors during my years at college will always be a significant part of who I have become as an individual.

My life has been full of ups and downs, but I would not have it any other way. Every experience, good or bad, has been a learning opportunity. My family has been the backbone of all my accomplishments, and without them I would be nothing. God has showered me with infinite blessings, and for that I will forever be grateful. Life has been an amazing journey, and I am anxious to see what the future has in store.