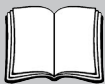


**Name:**



**Directions:** Read the following story and answer the questions that follow.

## Watching From the Sidelines

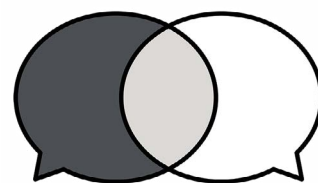
By Anonymous

*Names have been changed.*

When I was younger, most girls I knew were into dance, music or acting lessons. Since I found most of these hobbies boring, I was known as the wet blanket of the group and I got teased a lot. I told my friends they were just jealous of my uniqueness. But part of me was afraid that my friends were right.

I wanted to find a hobby that I loved and was good at. I tried to enjoy games and sports that my friends were into, like hopscotch and soccer, but I was still unsatisfied. I considered myself a lost cause until the day I watched some footage of the African-American Olympic runner Wilma Rudolph crossing the finish line on the sports channel when I was 7.

I felt like I was connecting with Rudolph as she lifted each long leg and passed the other runners like a charged-up coyote. I just wanted to go through the screen and run with her. When she won the race, I was so excited that I could hardly stand up. I felt inspired by this great athlete and I decided I was going to be just like her. At that moment I knew I had a passion for running.



This is a true story written by a teen in Youth Communication's writing program. To read more stories, visit [ycteen.org](http://ycteen.org). To find out more about YC, visit [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org)

I didn't waste a minute to start training. Every day after school, I made sure that I finished my homework on time so I could watch runners on the sports channel. I began jogging with my older tomboy cousin and I made it my daily mission to brag to everyone I knew that I would become the next Wilma Rudolph.

My friends eventually got tired of my bragging. "Talk is cheap. We want to see some action!" they said. So one Sunday after church, I decided to try to prove myself to them.

"Joseph, let's race!" I yelled as I walked toward a group of 9-year-old boys across the street. Joseph had a nice caramel complexion and though he was a little chubby, he was respected around the block as a fast athlete.

He looked down at my little red dress and my flat white shoes. He was a year older than me and at least two inches taller. "Sorry, but I don't race midgets. I could run circles around you," he said.

Everyone burst out laughing. I could even hear my friends across the street giggling. Despite my embarrassment, I stood boldly. "Then prove it! Unless you're scared of getting beaten by a girl."

By then he was already heading back across the street, but when he heard my fresh comment, he turned and pushed me to the ground.

Everyone expected me to cry and run home. Instead, I stood up, wiped the dust off my dress and said, "Let's race." I slipped off my shoes so they wouldn't get dirty, while Joseph stretched his long legs for the race.

Joseph giving me a head start was his biggest mistake. The minute the boy in between us said, "Go!" I didn't stop until I made it to the finish line three blocks away. I won by an inch. Everyone was shocked, and Joseph was furious. He argued that it was a tie. But everyone had witnessed my victory.

After that, I'd earned my respect around the neighborhood. I chased and raced boys just for the fun of it. Now when my girlfriends would brag about their dance and music classes, it was my pleasure to boast about how I ran circles around fresh boys on the block.

As I got older, running became more than a hobby to me, especially when I started high school. Whenever I felt pressured or depressed, I would put on my sweats and jog a mile or two along the Brooklyn Bridge. The more I thought about my problems, the faster I ran, until my anger or stress was completely wiped out of my system and I could feel only the pounding of my heart.

When my high school started a girls' track team in my junior year, I was thrilled and joined right away. The first few weeks were challenging. I felt a little intimidated because some of the other girls were pretty fast. Sometimes the boys would run with us, too, and that made me feel even more intimidated.

But there was no way I was going to give up now that we finally had a team. I karate-kicked all my doubts to the back of my head and focused on becoming a more competitive runner.

I started to train myself harder each day. I woke up at 6 a.m. to jog at least one mile of the Brooklyn Bridge before school, and I went to track practice in the afternoon. Even when the coach said I was fast, I was unsatisfied. I didn't just want to be fast. I wanted to be perfect.

There's a saying that "nothing lasts forever." I never thought that applied to my life until one afternoon. I was at school after track practice, feeling hyper and looking forward to my first track meet in two weeks. As I chased my friend upstairs to get my book bag, it happened.

One minute I was running, and the next thing I knew, I lost my balance, twisted my left knee and fell backward. I lay flat in the hall, holding my knee and trying to catch my breath from the pain. My friends

tried to help me to my feet.

“No! Don’t lift me up yet!” I yelled. The pain felt like a weak heart that was about to stop beating. “I think it’s broken,” I said anxiously.

“Try to move it,” my friend Mark said. When I tried to stand up, I felt a snapping sensation like a rubber band breaking in my knee.

As I sat back down and absorbed the pain, I worried that my knee was badly damaged. The thought of not running again scared me to death.

Still, I figured if I rested for a while, I could walk home. That was one of the biggest mistakes I’ve ever made.

As I walked to the train station five blocks away, every step I took was like a slicing knife in my knee. When I got there, my conscience warned me, “Don’t go down the stairs.” I ignored it. As my left foot went down the second step, my knee twisted again and I rolled down two steps. I sobbed so loudly I thought I was going to pass out, and finally an old woman had sympathy and called 911.

In the emergency room I went from ice pack to ice pack, hoping that it would decrease the pain. It seemed like a decade later when my stepfather finally arrived to sign the papers and I was allowed to see the doctor. He told me that my knee wasn’t broken. It was badly sprained, and I had to rest it for a while. He gave me crutches, prescribed some painkillers and advised me to cease track at least for a month.

I was pissed that I wouldn’t be able to race in my first track meet, but I figured staying off my knee for a week would be enough. It didn’t turn out to be as easy as I thought.

When I went back to school the next week, I was frustrated from the pain and having to catch up in my classes. I began to have a lot of mood swings because of the pain—I was hyper one minute and cranky the

next. I couldn't stand my crutches because they made my armpits hurt. But when I didn't use them, I paid the consequences in the middle of the night with everlasting pain starting from my left hip and ending in my foot.

After a week of suffering, I decided that if I strengthened my knee muscles, I'd heal faster. I stopped using my crutches, and I started taking the stairs instead of the elevator. But the more I exercised my knee, the more it hurt, until one morning I couldn't walk at all.

"You have some body fluids in your knee," my doctor said, looking at my MRI test results. "This is your last warning. Your knee needs several months or more to recover. The stairs are your worst enemy. You can't wear heels. If you don't listen, not only will you not run again, but you might damage your knee permanently. It's your decision."

It's every athlete's nightmare when they have to give up the sport they're on fire for. But after my doctor's warning, I knew that I had to give up running for my body's sake. It was a depressing moment for me because running had been my world ever since I was a kid. I didn't want to go out there again without it or find a new hobby to replace it. But I had no choice.

I decided I had to keep myself occupied. I rejoined some after-school activities that I'd been neglecting because of track, like French club and National Honor Society. I also got involved in programs outside of school like Youth About Business, a program for teens who want to learn about the business world, and I started writing for Youth Communication.

I purposely overwhelmed myself with activities so I wouldn't have to think about running. And it sort of worked, at first. All my activities made me feel that there was more to me than just track. If I felt depressed, I made sure I always had an interesting book to read or I called a friend to chat. But at the end of every busy, exhausting day, running remained in my thoughts.

And it still remains. It's been more than a year since my accident. My knee is much better now. I recently tried jogging again and I thought I did OK. But I can't run as fast or as far as I used to, and I don't think I'll be able to run track again for a long time.

Now what used to be my passion is my greatest fear. I'm scared to push myself harder because the last time I did that, I ended up watching the thing I love slip through my fingers. I'm afraid that if I get another injury, my knee will be permanently damaged this time.

I still feel upset and left out when I see other girls running track and enjoying it the way I used to. Although I find great pleasure in other things, like writing, going shopping and doing community service, none of those things can fill the gap in my heart where running used to be.



**Directions:** Answer the following questions about the story you just read.  
Use complete sentences.

State the writer's main idea.

List three supporting details the writer includes to get across the main idea.

1.

2.

3.

What's your opinion about what the writer wrote?

Continued on next page . . .

What connections can you make to the writer's experiences?

What's one question you have for the writer?

Below, write one phrase or sentence that sticks out to you. Explain why.