

FROM LAZINESS AND FEAR TO A FIRST RACE

A memoir by Fatou Ndiaye

My name is Fatou Ndiaye but my friends and acquaintances call me Zahra Fatima or just Fatima.





I came from Senegal in West Africa,
precisely in Dakar.

When I lived there I did not have any
interest in sports. I was very lazy and did
not practice any sports, even at school.

Maybe it was not laziness, but fear.
I probably was afraid to hurt myself, or to
be mocked by students.



In fact, I was often mocked by my classmates in relation to my weight. I was all the time called “Fat” rhyming with the first three letters of my first name.

But that was not the intention, they nicknamed me as well because I’m big.

I did not take it badly at all, on the contrary I laughed at it, not because it was funny but I just did not want to show them that they hurt me. Of course sometimes if I think about it I feel sad, but I did not want to be weak in front of them.



Since coming to the United States four months ago, my life has totally changed.

I've been here in Cincinnati, and at Aiken High School too, for one month and a half. I started asking myself questions about how I'm going to adapt to this new environment, but things ran pretty well contrary to my apprehension.



My vision of sport has changed.

I started to try to figure out what kind of sport I would like to do at school. I did some research about different sports available at Aiken, but none of them suited me except the Cross Country Team. In my heart I really wanted to do it but in my mind I was saying “ running, really it’s difficult I’m not sure that I can do it”.

I said to myself, “Why not try and just do my best”, and that’s what I did.

As expected I joined the team.

I started practicing and I found it so hard but I did not want to give up. Luckily we have the best coach in the world who worries more about our comfort than the results we have to give.

I went to each meet not for running but for supporting my team.



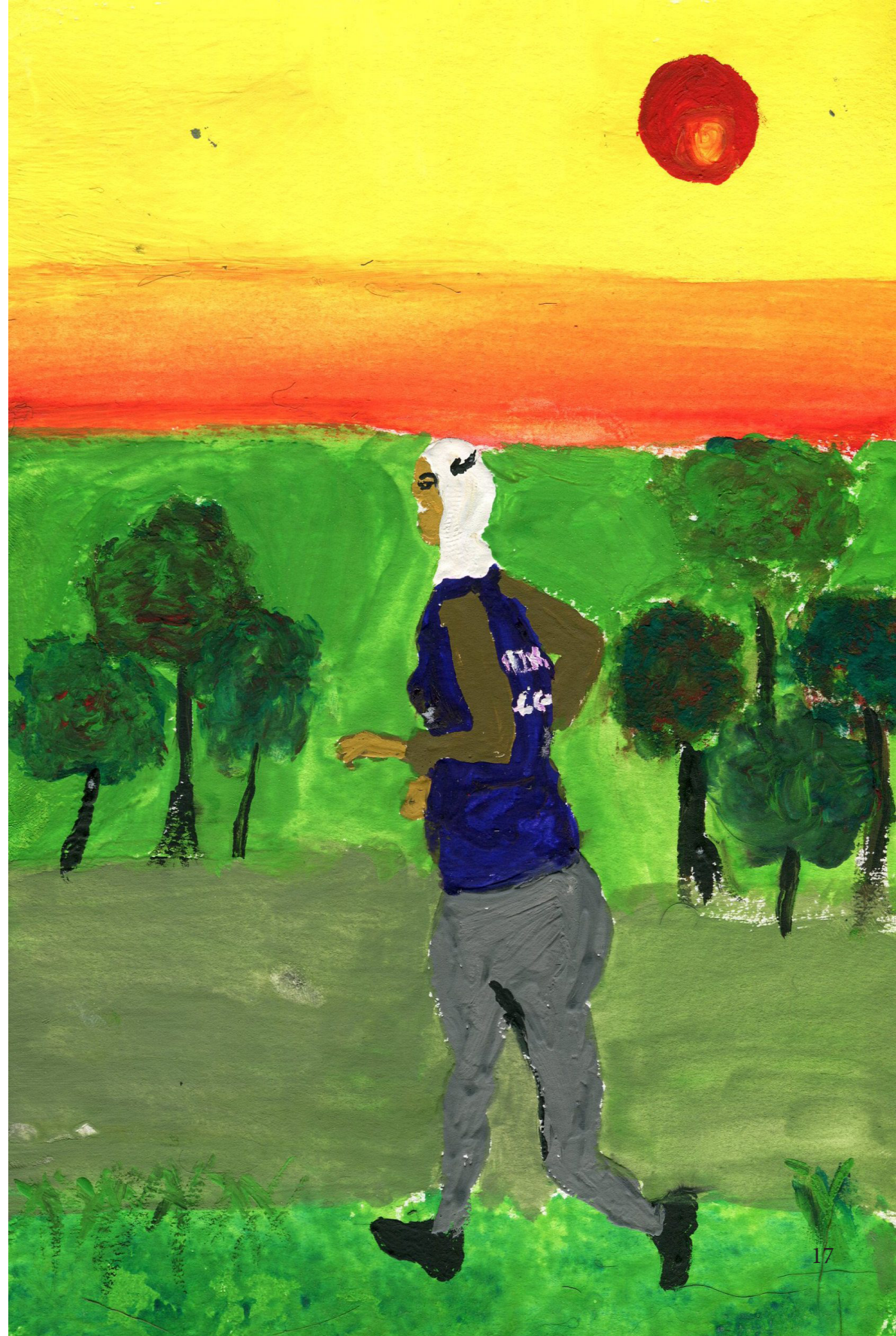
Departure

Direction: Seven Hills

A day arrived and I was ready to experience a race. My coach told me that I did not have to finish that race, but my goal was not to be in front but to finish the race.

At 11:30, at Seven Hills High School, came the moment for me to run. At that time I could swear that people who know me would probably say that I'll never do it, I'll give up, I'm not strong enough to do it.

Here I am on the starting line, ready to change my life, to decide what I want to do and how I want to be involved.



The referee whistles and we ran on the gun.

It was hard, very hard.

I ran a long time before starting to walk, not because I gave up, but just because I was tired. I wanted to run but my legs did not want to move. The race was hilly and hot. I was exhausted but I did not want to give up, no, it was unimaginable.

Many people were supporting me even though most of them did not know me, they were with me, they gave me their support, telling me to not stop, to keep going, and that's what I did.

Time passed, minutes passed, and I was still running.

In my mind I know that I will be the last one in that race, but I was not confused, my main goal at that time was just to finish it.

I was tired and ready to let go, but I see my coach next me, supporting me, reminding me that I have to do what is good and comfortable for me. I know all he wanted was the best for me, but my desire was to finish what I started.

I was thirsty, my heart seemed to let me go, get out of my chest, but I did not give up because I was so close to the finish.

I continued to run, pointing toward the end mountain, where my pain will disappear.



I was sitting, all of my body
shaking, comrades around me,
asking how I was feeling,

I heard them, but I was not able
to answer them, because I was
shaken by my tears, tears of
tiredness, tears of joy, tears of
surprise, and finally, tears of pride.

Cross country has been a key motivator for me. It helped me and still helps me be confident with my body.

It not only kept me mentally and physically healthy, but it also helped me build new relationships with my peers and opened doors for new opportunities.

For those out there, just like I was, believing that you're unable to make it, let me tell you that you are wrong.

There is nothing in this world that can keep you out of being successful in life.

Everything you need is self confidence and self esteem. Believe in yourself and I promise, you'll make it happen.

With courage, determination and resilience, you'll be high up where you see yourself to be.

