

The Darkest Night of My Life

The night was close and very warm for a Minnesota late September evening as I stood in the dark with a group of people, whose names I did not know, going for a walk or a run with me. Soon they were no longer visible as the night deepened.

My friend who was running beside me at one moment, in another moment was gone. I felt alone.

The darkness would have been as suffocating as the humidity were it not for the soft luminaries guiding and winding on the path ahead. The rhythm of my breath connected to its familiar pattern as I ran, my thoughts shifted to how beautiful the night was; the dark in split seconds interrupted by heat lightning in the clouds from a distant storm. I knew behind me hundreds of people were running and walking *for* something.

I thought of the homeless youth on the streets of the north metro suburbs, knowing they were likely running *from or to* something much more elusive, much more challenging, than my finishing 2.5 miles.

I thought of the same sky and sounds I was in awe of could just as easily produce anxiety and fear about the coming storm -Where to find shelter? What was hiding in the shadows about them- demons with and without names. Terrible things.

More than once I stumbled a bit, but quickly found sure footing. I thought of those youth again, how they may stumble and perhaps fall helplessly and without hope. The people without names around *them*, leaving them there, those who used to care, no longer near. Their friends, once beside them, now gone.

I thought as I completed the end of my night run how theirs was just beginning.

"What can I do?" I wondered.

Be a luminary, I heard back. Provide even the faintest marker of hope and light along an otherwise dark path, in whatever way I am able. Assure those running to or from something that night that they are never alone, even in their deepest darkness.

The HOPE for Youth Darkest Night 4K invited me to think beyond a single night toward a way to make a lasting difference. I know more dark nights are coming.

- Written by Michael Finch