

I'm a New Englander, and I'm wicked pissed

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I'm a New Englander. Colorado is an adopted state and Denver's been my home for over 15 years, but my soul resides somewhere north of Boston, where the air is thick with the smell of the ocean on certain mornings and the memories are so powerful they sometimes make me sit down.

I'm also a life-long runner, making this week's bombing at the Boston Marathon a particularly stinging insult.

When I was a child, we had family friends who lived very close to the Boston Marathon route, and like so many other New England children, we celebrated Patriot's Day with a reprieve from school and a trip to the sidelines of one of the world's oldest marathons to hand out water to runners, eat hot dogs, and cheer like crazy in the long-awaited sunshine of a New England spring day.

I don't doubt that those memories made me lace up running shoes for the first time at the age of 12. I know they made me train for, and run, the Boston Marathon as a non-registered "bandit" runner in my early twenties in 1994. And I'm even more certain those memories prompted me to put on annual "mini-marathon" parties for my kids, friends, and their families on Patriot's Day for the better part of the last decade. Preschoolers and pacifiers were all too soon replaced with giggling preteens as children grew up and race routes lengthened. But always the essence of the festivities remained the same.

Homemade chowder, Boston baked beans, lessons about Patriot's Day which celebrates the first battles of the Revolution, the Dropkick Murphys, Sam Adams, and delight in all things New England – including Fluffernutters, indescribably delicious peanut butter and marshmallow sandwiches. These mini-marathons" often resembled the size and enthusiasm of a wedding. We all rejoiced in celebrating a holiday few in the nation

recognized or remembered. So much to enjoy – running, Boston, American History, the onset of spring and, most important, kids.

It's hard not to remember 60 plus kids running around my block with homemade numbers pinned to their chest and holding custom made ribbons without imagining those children who were killed or wounded at the blast in Boston this week. Our motto at the parties was always "Everyone's a Winner!" Why does it have to be that in life's harsh realities some kids win and others lose?

Regionalism is an unspoken, hard to define, religion. With its immense power it guides secretly and effortlessly, and can lie at the root of all that is good about pride for an area. Being an expatriate of Massachusetts, sometimes reluctantly, I know this all too well. At times I've wished not to have such affection for my home state to make the burden of my absence lighter. But it might be that those ties that bind us, regardless of how painful they become at times, also offer the greatest reward.

I've spent time at some revered athletic sites. Cooperstown, Fenway, Wrigley, Michigan Stadium, Steve Prefontaine's memorial, Hayward Field. Maybe you have too. Perhaps your list is different than mine. Like these sites, the finish line of the Boston Marathon is sacred territory. Arguably more people have anticipated this finish line than any other in the history of foot racing. Detonating a bomb at this site, to disrupt this event, is like someone desecrating your church and shooting your congregation. It is your temple. Your mosque, that has been sullied with vicious rage.

For the running community this is devastating, and for Boston this is personal. The city isn't just grieving for the dead, wounded, and traumatized. It's also, as they would say there, "wicked pissed."

So am I.

Pissed for the runners who labored all the way from Hopkinton to arrive at a war zone. Pissed for the people who will never be the same, visible wounds held by their bodies, invisible ones held in their minds.

Pissed for linking this grand event with tragedy, and this first of all American holidays with senseless brutality.

Watching my first footage of the explosion I noticed something surprisingly peaceful. After the flash of light, the cloud of smoke, the deafening boom, and just before the screams of the people began, a string of yellow helium balloons slowly ascended from the assaulted crowd and floated away.

Let go by a child? Unleashed from its tether to a barricade?

Whatever or whomever had held it to the ground had relinquished it, and that string of balloons was rising, escaping from the disappointment, horror, anger – the bloodstained sidewalk. Finding freedom like those Patriots of old may have done shortly after the

battles at Lexington and Concord that defined and began our nation.

Those balloons were off to the open sky, far away from the desolation and what it meant.

If only we had the ability to do the same.

Rick Ginsberg is a licensed psychologist in Denver. He was a member of the 1999 Colorado Voices panel. Colorado Voices is an annual competition among writers vying for the opportunity to publish columns of regional interest in The Denver Post.

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