

~~Exercise:~~ The Inside Track

Amid slamming doors and jangling keys, there is no room for peaceful reflection. But then a voice screeching from the guards' control ~~room~~<sup>booth</sup> presents an avenue ~~to~~<sup>for</sup> relief:  
*Upper tier, Yard's open! Yard's open!*

Methodically, two by two, we leave our cells and descend the stairs, corralled into the housing unit's ground floor sally port and eventually thrust out into the brilliant sunlight. Blinking, we emerge surrounded by structures that pierce the sky like rogue icebergs drifting in tranquil waters: man-made concrete structures designed to incarcerate. The track they enclose is less than ideal: jagged stone protruding from asphalt, broken every few feet by cracks and crevices. By midsummer in the desert southwest, sweltering temperatures routinely exceed the century mark. Today is no exception.

I ignore the substandard surface and the blazing heat. I will run.

For me, brisk runs exceeding thirty minutes stimulate cognitive skills, concentration, and sleep quality. They relieve stress and liberate anxieties. Even more important, running satisfies my fervent passion to elude reality, if only temporarily. To reflect, to dream, to feel free.

As I circumvent the ~~monotonous~~<sup>only</sup> one-way oval track, each lap inflicts escalating discomfort, straining my knee ligaments, provoking fatigue. But like runners before me and after me, I keep going and eventually reach a wondrously harmonious place of physical, mental and emotional balance known as the runner's zone.

I have ~~twelve~~<sup>forty-five</sup> laps in, with just one to go to complete a half-marathon. With the last leg in view, I unleash a parting burst of energy, a final kick. The spurt propels me across the invisible finish line, a triumphant smile playing on my lips as my clenched fists are flung skyward.

Still panting, I conclude my half-marathon in ample time to hear the squawking announcement from the guard tower: *Yard recall! Yard recall! Take it home.* If health and peace are my home, that is where I have arrived. —Mark A. Jarosik, California