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POETRY

Run Again

BILL HART-DAVIDSON

For Jon Bush, in memory of Delaney.

I ran up Valley street. That hill was the last mile.
By the time I'd get to your house, at the top, I would be
in no shape to wave. Your place was in the back, anyway.
I was heavier then. And younger, I once thought.
Now, I don't know.

Our cells age at different rates.

We know this by accident.

Some scientists worked out that we can date the cells
in our bodies by trace amounts of radiation they carry.

The radiation comes from Trinity, where you once visited.

Brought back a coffee mug. "Hot coffee," we joked.

Only a few of our cells are as old as we imagine ourselves to be.

The rest come and go.

Some, the ones that play defense, have remarkably short lifespans.

We turn over our integument every thirty days.

Our gut lining even faster.

It's the cells that hold memories that hang on longest.

Everything else is replaced.

Muscle, nerve, bone and blood.

The cells that feel pain

don't stay.

I ran up Valley street to put those memories back in my body.

They live in the brain like

snapshots. An image. Still.

No sensation to go with it.

Running brings memory back into your legs and lungs, your blood and bone.
You called to say “bring a camera!” to the hospital.
We still needed cameras then.
The disposable kind, lens and film in one. I raced across town with them.
Little memory machines.
She was here, Delaney, in the world, in your lives.
She is here.
Middle age, I think, is the time when
we have only those very few oldest cells
and all the others are replaced.
Renewed, but inexperienced.
The cells with memories play static pictures on a loop.
The new ones yearn for sensation.
They need to feel it all: elation, exhaustion,
the pain the brain cells don’t, can’t feel.
I went for a run today. To teach myself a thing or two.
How it is to remember. How it is to feel. To put those things
back in my body for a while.
Am I the same person who ran up Valley street? Hardly.
Just a few small pieces remain. The ones with memories.
All the others have gone.
I have outlived them.
Maybe there is a moment early in adulthood when we are
our most coherent selves. When we have sense and experience.
It must be fleeting.
So hard to recognize in one’s own life.
We sometimes witness it in the life of another. Like a snapshot.
You will have to run, I guess. Run again and again.
It will always be that you are running with her.
Your old cells will insist. The new ones will need to know.

Bill Hart-Davidson teaches writing at Michigan State University.