

Adult Essay
Honorable Mention

Accessory Navicular
By Mark Keats

My podiatrist, a very tall and thin man, said, “I’m not sure how to tell you this—” and paused for what seemed an uncomfortable amount of time. If a window had been there in the small room, I would have gladly looked out. Instead, I looked at him, unsure what to do with his opening line. Can someone get foot cancer, I thought. But, then no, probably not. Or, not yet. I was barely 30, a consistent runner, eating less meat, and someone with no discernible medical history because I was adopted.

His words hung in the air, but he repeated, “I’m not sure how to tell you this,” and then added, “but you have an extra bone in your foot. An accessory navicular.” Extra bone, accessory navicular, I repeated in my head. What had brought me to him was an undeniable pain in my right foot whenever I ran and even when I walked which, despite resting and icing, waiting, culminated one day in my inability to put any weight on it. Now I had the reason.

“It’s not life threatening,” he said, and pointed to the bone in the x-ray. Given that I was a runner, he was actually looking for a fracture, tendinitis. A runner himself, he’d experienced firsthand and diagnosed a number of foot injuries, with overuse being the most common culprit. “You’ll be able to run in the future,” he said. “But, for now, you’ll need to stop running for at least two months. Rest it some. Get some stability shoes. Surgery’s an option, of course, but not necessary. A last measure kind of thing.” He smiled. “Don’t worry. You’ll be out there running again soon.”

When I got home, I researched those new words: accessory navicular. Congenital and genetic, present at birth. Somewhere in South Korea in 1980. A physical connection to my unknown birth parents. Which one, I thought, or both, also has this extra bone? Do they know about it? Have they ever gotten to the point where the bone has throbbed and throbbed intensely and been reminded—perhaps in that moment of extreme consciousness that pain often brings us to—that their child exists somewhere on the other side of the world? I do not know their names or any other physical description such as height or weight, only that I was begotten. And not from a rib like in that one familiar story but in my story with a bone that sometimes throbs, that sometimes, perhaps often even whenever I put my shoes on and begin running, reminds me of the only familial and physical connection to the past.