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Review

Boulder played role in author's growth

By Michael Sandrock

For the Camera

POSTED: 08/01/2014 03:50:34 PM MDT
UPDATED: 08/01/2014 03:55:19 PM MDT

If you go

What: Robert Andrew Powell signs and reads from his book, "Running Away: A Memoir"

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 12

Where: Boulder Book Store, 1107 Pearl St.

Tickets: Vouchers to attend are \$5, which is good for \$5 off the author's featured book or a purchase the day of the event

Info: 303-447-2074 or [boulderbookstore.net](http://www.boulderbookstore.net) (<http://www.boulderbookstore.net>)

Robert Andrew Powell was 8 years old when his father ran the Boston Marathon in less than three hours and was only a year from taking up jogging and giving up a 3-packs-a day smoking habit. It was an admirable achievement that was featured over six pages in the Boston Globe Sunday magazine.

His father's Boston race was viewed as a "superhuman achievement" by Powell, one that hung over his life and set a high standard he could not possibly reach as he progressed along a career in journalism. Divorced and living with his dog in a Miami apartment, Powell compares himself to his dad and finds himself lacking: no house, no wife, no children, no steady job, not much motivation.

Powell was stagnating, his life on hold in a kind of "wasteland," as the poet T.S. Eliot put it in his eponymous poem.

How could Powell heal and begin anew? How else but to move to Boulder, start running and attempt to qualify for the Boston Marathon within a year, just as his father had done at exactly the same age? A lofty goal for a non-exerciser who "hates running" and weighs 215 pounds and has 22.5 percent body fat.

In his new book, "Running Away: A Memoir," Powell deftly describes his Boulder sojourn, giving us an outsider's insight into our town and its running community. It is a book that deals with difficult issues — father-son relationships, a failed marriage that was his fault, a lack of motivation — all woven through his transformation from jogger to marathoner.

"I moved (to Boulder) because I wanted to place a new story in my head," Powell writes. "A story about applying myself and stripping away everything inessential and finally living up to the standard my father had set."



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In this new story to be written, Powell is "no longer the shiftless son or the floundering son or the son adrift. In the new narrative, I finally become a son without adjectives."

Powell does indeed write his new story, with the help of Rich Castro and Carl Mohr of the Boulder Road Runners.

I found much to like in the book and in Powell's mordant observations of Boulder, his family and his past affair with "Mrs. Wisconsin." Others, women especially, might find that the affair drags on a bit. (I found myself wanting to yell out, "Come on, Powell, let her go!")

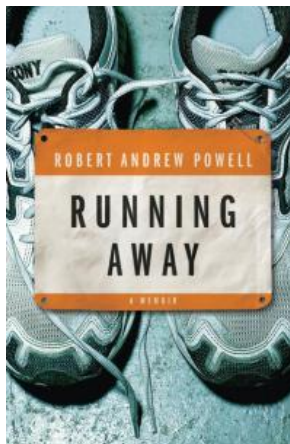
Powell enters the local running community through the Road Runners, showing up at the group's monthly First Monday social. There, he connects with group founder Castro, who becomes his coach, and Mohr, who becomes Powell's mentor and training partner.

"Running Away" is a book that will evoke a wide range of reactions from readers, depending on their position and stage in life. Those athletes in Boulder, especially males — yes, I'm referring to *you* — who themselves are "running away" from full participation in life in whatever way, likely will understand Powell's dilemma, his lack of commitment in relationships and, perhaps, appreciate his drive to change his life.

Runners will like the book's culmination, Powell's report of his Boston qualifier attempt at Myrtle Beach S.C. All the rest fades away, as I found myself rooting for Powell to hit that time of 3 hours, 15 minutes, 59 seconds. His father and mother have come to the race, as has Mohr, who paces Powell.

I won't tell you how Powell does in the marathon, but I will tell you of his father's response as he cradles his exhausted son's head on his shoulder:

"I'm proud of you," his father whispers to his weeping son. Writes Powell, "He held my wet and salty skull right on his shoulder. My chest heaved. He tapped my back with his other hand, his lips still close to my ear: 'I'm proud of you.' "



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"Running Away: A Memoir," by Robert Andrew Powell. New Harvest, 272 pages.



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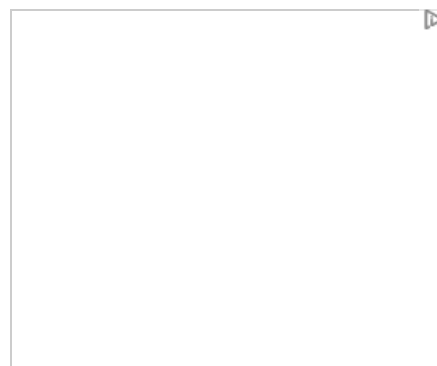
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