

# RUNNING IN

ROB KRAR HAD TO EMBRACE INCREDIBLE PHYSICAL PAIN TO WIN ICONIC ULTRAMARATHONS LIKE THE LEADVILLE TRAIL 100 AND THE WESTERN STATES ENDURANCE RUN. BUT THAT'S A FORM OF SUFFERING HE CAN CONTROL—UNLIKE HIS DECADES-LONG STRUGGLE WITH DEPRESSION.  
BY CHRISTINE FENNESSY

# THE DARK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSE RIESER



## “I WAS AFRAID TO LEAVE HIM. HE DIDN'T TELL ME, I'M THINKING ABOUT KILLING MYSELF.”

But I didn't want to leave him alone during a several-week patch.”

Christina Bauer sits with her hands clasped, and her posture is perfect. She's worked all day in an office advising community-college students. It's a job she never expected to love, but back when she was in college and having a hard time, she took a semester off to do Outward Bound, the outdoor-leadership program for youths. She learned how to read a map and navigate without trails, how to find water and leave no trace. There was something about doing hard stuff outside that changed how she saw herself. At first she thought she'd seek out a career in policy and protect the wild places she loved, but then she worked at a camp doing conflict resolution with troubled kids, and that was it. She's been a counselor, in some capacity, her entire adult life.

She was the first person Rob Krar told. About going in the hole.

Krar is sitting next to his wife, and his shoulders are hunched forward. In the red metal chair around the small metal table on their impeccable garden patio, which is lined with flowers and herbs and vegetable plants, not a weed in sight, the man who has repeatedly dominated the most competitive 100-mile trail races in the country looks small. As if his body is closing in on itself, compensating for how exposed his mind feels.

He is trying his best to explain the worst part of himself, but at times there is a heartbreaking absence of energy in his voice. Sometimes he gives a short laugh, like you do when you know that what someone is saying is exactly the truth. Or a short exhalation, like you do when you know—have known your entire adult life—that something is true and you still can't quite believe it.

They are looking at each other. The sun is setting, and it's getting cooler. There is a soft glow coming from inside the house. Occasionally, one of the cats meows, begging to be let out.

It had been the perfect storm: Issues in their marriage. The knee injury. The looming question of whether he'd run again, let alone

compete. The worry about what might come next. The singular, circular devastation that comes when you're most unkind to those you love and you hate yourself for it. He fell so far down the hole, there wasn't a sliver of light.

She sits even straighter, her voice is stronger. “I was just really afraid.”

“Yeah,” he says softly. “Probably justifiably.”

KRAR RARELY GOES into the hole during his ultrarunning camps.

It's the fifth year that he and Bauer, 40, have been hosting them in their adopted hometown of Flagstaff, Arizona: a seven-day summer experience, a five-day retreat in fall and winter, and now, in June 2019, a new three-day version.

During the weeks leading up to the camps, while they're happening, and for a while after they're over, Krar is focused. In the moment. Engaged. He's not thinking about the powerlessness and the hopelessness and the despair. He's not thinking about ending his life. He's checking boxes. Swag: check.

Maps: check. Foam rollers. Beer. Folding side tables for the beer, and for the plates loaded with Bauer's “grains and greens” lunches, which taste straight off the menu of a farm-to-table restaurant. Check, check, check. His brain craves this kind of organization. It's logical. It's practical. It serves a greater end. And it helps keep the darkness away.

So when the campers, as Krar calls them, arrive at the June install-

ment—the inaugural three-day All-Comers camp—the tables in the conference room, with the spectacular views of Arizona's San Francisco Peaks, are all meticulously set. A bag of granola, a box of bars, a water bottle, and a lip balm are all precisely positioned around a branded swag bag at each place setting. Pens are offset just so from each arrangement, writing ends pointing to the left.

There are ten campers, four women and six men. They come from Kansas, California, Colorado, Canada. Four live in Arizona. One travels the world and lives out of her backpack. There is a firefighter, a nurse, and

a Ph.D. student. Two have suffered traumatic brain injuries, one from a fall over a waterfall, another—the traveler—from a baseball line drive to the head.

Most of them are new to ultrarunning, but they all want to improve—to learn how to avoid bonking and how to pace themselves, to better negotiate tricky terrain and ascend monstrous climbs. They could learn all this at any number of training camps. They're here because they want to learn it from Rob Krar.

KRAR, 42, IS SLIGHT and coursed with lean muscle. His otherwise closely shaved brown hair is peaked into a fauxhawk, his beard is trimmed short, and he has the kind of smile that feels rare and special, even if you don't know his story.

Krar grew up in Hamilton, Ontario, and started running in sixth grade. He got good fast. He ran in high school and raced triathlon during the off-season; he was good at that, too, twice representing Canada as a teenager in the ITU Junior World Triathlon Championships. He was a quiet kid, but mostly he was a happy kid. He loved traveling to meets with his friends and really loved how running pushed both his body and his mind.

In 1996, he got an athletic scholarship to attend Butler University, a Division I school in Indianapolis, where he ran cross-country and the 800 and 1,500 meters. In his sophomore year, he was accepted into Butler's demanding pharmacy program, and when he wasn't running he was studying. The pressure mounted. He was soon overwhelmed with the demands and time commitments of his studies, and it was during that year when something inside him changed. Running wasn't carefree and it wasn't fun anymore, his course load was oppressive, and there was no time to be a college kid. He wasn't happy, but it was more than that. Happiness began to feel like an elusive thing.

After his final track meet at Butler, he threw his spikes in a trash can, relieved that he wouldn't have to run again. When he graduated one year later, in 2002, he moved to Phoenix to work as a pharmacist. But he hated the heat, customers' tempers were short, there was always a line at the counter, and when you do the kind of job where a mistake could harm or even kill someone, the stress builds quickly. He started working the more relaxed flow of the graveyard shift—9 P.M. to 7 or 8 A.M., seven days on, seven days off. He had few friends in the area, a relationship that wasn't working out, and a growing realization that he'd chosen the wrong career. So when the low-grade unhappiness that had started at Butler seemed to get worse, it was easy to rationalize. He rarely ran, and when he did think about run-

ning, he sometimes thought it might make him feel better. But it was just so hot.

When his three-year contract was up in 2005, he took a graveyard shift in the mountain town of Flagstaff, where he'd been a few times to ski and mountain bike. The cool air and tight, competitive endurance community got him excited about running again. Soon he was logging 80-mile training weeks around his 72-hour workweeks, and 100 miles on his off weeks. Eventually, at age 30, he ran the 2007 Boston Marathon, during a nor'easter, in 2 hours 25 minutes 44 seconds.

After that, Krar ramped up hard, training with guys who'd been running professionally for years. He was still working nights at Walgreens. “He'd come into the shop and be like, ‘Dude, my feet are killing me,’” says Vince Sherry, 39, Krar's friend who worked at the running store Run Flagstaff and now owns it. “We would fit him with shoe after shoe, trying to figure out what he could wear during his shifts and still be able to go run with guys who literally run, nap, run, eat, go to the gym, then go to sleep.”

Sherry remembers Krar getting crushed in a local event after working all night, by a guy who had no business crushing him. “He was so bummed,” Sherry says. “I said, ‘Dude, you just worked ten hours with no sleep, then came out to run a 10K at nine in the morning!’ I'm thinking, How are you still standing?”

In 2009, Krar started preparing for the TransRockies Run—a six-day, 120-mile partner stage race—with his friend and roommate Mike Smith. After years of pounding the roads, Krar loved how training in the mountains placed him in front of forever views that stopped him in his tracks; how sufferfests in the Grand Canyon were transcended by the sheer scope and beauty of the place, once bringing him so close to a soaring California condor that he swore he could hear the wind in its feathers. He and Smith won the TransRockies, despite Krar's near constant pain from Haglund's deformities in his heels. The visible bumps irritated his tendons and altered his stride so much that he developed sciatica. The race wrecked his body, but it introduced him to Christina Bauer.

Bauer was also racing the event, and he talked to her a few times after the stages. Krar learned that the tall, lean woman with the wide smile had through-hiked the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails solo, and that she had worked as a field counselor in Utah, sleeping in a tent for weeks in the wilderness, helping kids who were struggling with depression or drug use or self-harming behaviors. She is such a badass, he thought.

They e-mailed for a few weeks, then he drove nearly nine hours to Salt Lake City to see her, and shocked himself by telling her

Krar near SP Crater, north of Flagstaff, Arizona, in October 2019



about the hole. The darkness that began at Butler and followed him to Phoenix hadn't lifted, and he knew something was wrong. Because now he loved his town and had good friends and was running well, yet he struggled to feel joy. But there was joy on that drive back to Flagstaff.

“It sounds almost too corny to believe, but a part of me was like, Holy shit, I think this is the woman. I think I'm falling in love,” Krar says.

AS JILL WHEATLEY crests the steep pitch, she takes one look at the panorama to the east and thinks, This is why I run in the mountains.

It's day two of All-Comers, and the trail took the campers from beneath towering Ponderosa pines to this clearing at 8,500 feet, with its perfect view of snowcapped Mount Humphreys.

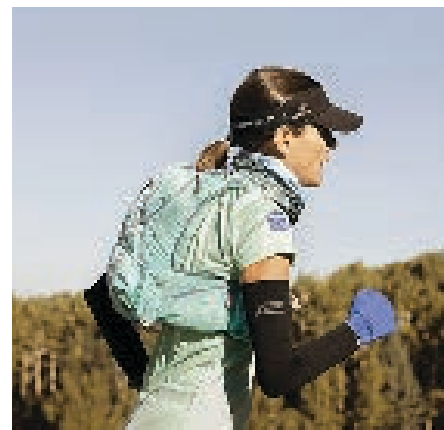
The faster runners have long since passed through, but Krar is waiting for Wheatley and the others in the rear. He likes to start at the front of a group and make his way back, spending time with each person.

When he first started his running camps, his main focus was the organizational component, making sure everything happened exactly as he planned it at exactly the right time. The camp and his role in them was

simple: talk about training and nutrition and racing, and lead kickass runs. But then three men wept during a run at the very first summer camp in 2015, and Krar was completely taken by surprise. What's going on here? he thought. He continued to market the events as running camps, but he began to realize that he was drawing runners who were coming for other reasons, too. That he was, however inadvertently, creating a safe place where people could open up.

Wheatley walks over to Krar, who turns to check out the view of Mount Humphreys with her. “We're just so fortunate to be out here, in these magical places, doing what we're doing,” he says. Then he turns to face her. “I just want to thank you for coming to camp, and for trusting me.”

Like Krar, Wheatley is also from Canada. Her long brown hair is in a ponytail, and her eyes are hidden behind sunglasses, as they almost always have been since she was struck with a baseball in 2014, when she was in her mid-thirties and working as a teacher. She spent two years in the hospital, recovering from a traumatic brain injury, and her right eye never reopened. Since getting out, she's been running mountains around the world, immersing herself in nature to help her heal. Social anxiety made her hesitant about attending the camp, but she came in part



because she wanted to learn how Krar navigates his own dark times.

Krar started talking publicly about those times in 2014. In a video titled “Depressions,” he runs through the Grand Canyon and talks about how the disease and running go hand in hand, and how the dark place he enters at the end of a race echoes the darkness of his depression. In 2018, he did a haunting video with the Movember Foundation, a charity devoted to preventing suicide and other mental and physical health issues among men. In it, Krar runs through a barren, otherworldly landscape outside Flagstaff. He reveals how he thought about ending his life after a devastating knee injury in 2017, and how opening up to Bauer about his struggle made him a better person, more true to himself.

For many of Krar’s campers, including Wheatley, those videos finally put words to how they felt. They know about overwhelming hopelessness. How it has a weight to it that’s so immense they feel rooted to the ground. How life feels like it’s happening in slow motion, and the simplest tasks—sitting up in bed, emptying the dishwasher, putting one foot in front of the other—are overwhelming. They know after they finish a race, or anything they’ve worked hard for, that they should feel happiness, a sense of accomplishment. Relief. Joy. *Something*. But all they feel is emptiness. And often, if

**Clockwise from top left:** camp soup prepared by Christina Bauer; camper Anna Davis; Krar and Bauer; camper Jennifer Arrowsmith; campers after a run; Krar near SP Crater

they do feel something, it’s anger. Or sadness. Or shame. There’s nothing to point to, no trauma to blame. And so it becomes this terrible additional burden of feeling awful about feeling awful.

Standing next to Krar, Wheatley feels none of the hopelessness that on her darkest days seems insurmountable. He reached out to her prior to camp, assuring her he could accommodate whatever she needed. Her anxiety subsided that first morning.

“From the moment I met Rob, then sharing time on the trail with him, I felt connected and comfortable,” she says.

The legendary runner standing next to her feels like a friend.

“Hey,” she says, “do you mind if I get a photo of us together?” Then she smiles mischievously. “Just a couple of Canadians getting high in Arizona.”

BEFORE KRAR could dominate the ultra scene, he had to quit running.

In 2010, at age 33, even walking hurt, and he finally had surgery on his heels. But he tried to come back too soon, and when the pain returned he figured the procedure had failed. So he stopped running. Bauer moved in with him that summer and taught him how to sport climb, and they both started ski mountaineering.

After all that time skiing up and down mountains, Krar got very fit, and his feet fi-

nally healed. In 2012, he dropped into a 33K just to see what would happen. He won that race, then won three out of five other events he ran that year. That same year, in June, he and Bauer were married in a meadow. He kicked off 2013 by winning the Moab Red Hot 55K. “This guy was just prancing over the slickrock,” says John Trent, 56, a journalist who has covered the ultra scene since 1987. “He’s so light on his feet, and he’s got textbook running form. He gets his chest out in front of him, with his arms down low, and his legs just eat up ground, not overstriding, but just going incredibly fast. A lot of times you look at fast people and there’s not that nimbleness, that ability to shift with the terrain. Rob’s got that. I was like, Wow, he’s gifted.”

Just over two months later, Krar, then 36, lined up for the Leona Divide 50-miler in Santa Clarita, California, on the hottest day in the race’s history. It was 110 degrees, but Krar was so fast he reached one of the aid stations two hours earlier than volunteers anticipated, and all they had to offer was water.

“The volunteers were blown away, because all he did was thank them,” says Keira Henninger, 43, race director of the Leona Divide. “He’s just very humble and incredibly kind.”

Krar ran 5 hours 53 minutes 51 seconds, crushing the course record by nearly seven minutes and earning himself an entry into the Western States Endurance Run, the most competitive ultra in North America. In that race, his first 100-miler, he ran next to the guy whose record he’d destroyed at the

Leona Divide.

Dylan Bowman was ten years younger than Krar but had been running ultras for several years. He’d raced Western States once before, and when he and Krar fell into a similar pace early on, he started giving Krar beta on what to expect from the course.

“I could sense he was the stronger runner,” says Bowman, 33, who like Krar is now sponsored by the North Face. “He’s very efficient, and at the aid stations he’s incredibly methodical. He’s not coming in thinking, Maybe I should change my shoes and socks. He knows he’s going to change his shoes and socks, and he does it without wasting time or energy. And he’s got this silent intensity. We spent hours together, but I did 90 percent of the talking. He pulled away from me around mile 60, then absolutely kicked my ass and beat me by over an hour.”

Krar ran the race in 15 hours 22 minutes 5 seconds, finishing second, less than five minutes behind the winner.

Bowman’s part in his 100-mile debut convinced Krar that the ultrarunning community was unlike any other. “I was just overwhelmed with how kind my fellow competitors could be in a race,” says Krar. “All he wanted to do was help me.” That fall, Krar signed with the North Face.

In 2014, he won three 100-milers (Western States, the Leadville Trail 100, and Run Rabbit Run) in less than three months. He was still alternating 72-hour workweeks on the graveyard shift. The following year, however, at the age of 38, he left Walgreens for good, won Western States again, and cemented his reputation as one of the best ultrarunners the sport has ever seen.

“He’s obviously very talented, but there are a lot of very talented people who don’t win Western States,” Bowman says. “You have to have the willingness to go to the deepest, darkest places in order to pull out victories in the most competitive races. Rob has been really open about his depression, so it could be that he’s just not afraid to put himself in a dark place. And when you pair that with a unique talent, you’ve got an absolute world-class athlete.”

That ability to push through the darkness led to Krar’s singular performance at Leadville in 2018. The previous year, a misstep during a race dislocated his kneecap and sheared the cartilage off the back of his kneecap and upper femur. It was a rare injury for a runner, and it required a novel surgery with no protocol for recovery—and no promise of a comeback. Unsure of whether his body could withstand 100 miles, Krar didn’t commit to starting the race until four days before it. Then he ran a stunning 15:51:57, less than ten minutes off the course record and more

than 90 minutes ahead of second place.

“It’s one of the great performances in ultrarunning history,” says Trent.

The darkness Krar went through to get to that point, however, was profound. It was his knee injury that contributed to the perfect storm. The storm that plunged him so deep in the hole that one weekend, when Bauer went to visit her family and left him alone, after all the years of thinking about ending his life, he actually spent time Googling just how he might do it.

“WHEN I’M having my worst episodes, it’s a very dark, dark place,” Krar says. “But I think a good way to describe my depression is an inability to feel happiness. It’s just this gray zone. I have this beautiful life that I can’t appreciate.”

He has his friends, who have crewed all his 100-milers. Who drive for hours to lay out everything he might need at each aid station per the photo references he sends them: gels, lube, bars, socks, shoes, water, wipes—all exactly positioned so he knows within an inch where everything will be. Who pace him and know exactly how much to talk and how much to push.

He has friends like Ryan Whited, Krar’s trainer, who went to every doctor’s meeting with him after that knee injury in 2017. Who knew Krar was slipping into depression again and wasn’t afraid to get up in his business. “I think a lot of people tend to leave him alone, which is what I used to do, because he’s so private and can look so brooding,” says Whited, 46, who also owns Paragon Athletics, a gym in Flagstaff. “But you need the annoying friend who cares about you and sends you annoying texts and ridiculous GIFs.”

He is still competitive. “Rob has had problems with injury, so he hasn’t raced a lot in the past couple of years,” Bowman says. “But if he shows up, he’s somebody you have to take very seriously as a contender.”

He has his sponsors, like the North Face and Gu, who enable him to travel the world. He has a beautiful home and three cherished rescue cats, Mo, Little Bit, and Bee. He loves fast cars—can in fact talk at length about IndyCar, NASCAR, and Formula One. (“When you’ve got 30, 32 cars all flooring it, whew! It vibrates your body.”) He owns a superfast

2019 Mustang Bullitt. (“This is the funniest part—he just likes to accelerate quickly and then go the speed limit, because he’s Canadian,” Bauer says. “That’s not true!” Krar says. “There are spots where I’m very confident there are no cops and I drive extremely fast.”)

And most of all, he has her.

When Krar told Bauer about his depression in 2009, he couldn’t even say the word. It was the first night they’d ever hung out. He’d spent the day helping her move to a new place in Salt Lake City, and he’d been amazed at how disorganized she was. All she had were a few boxes that didn’t have flaps and couldn’t be stacked. It was hard to wrap his brain around how she operated. What was this woman doing? But he rolled with it, got her some proper boxes, then spilled

worm juice all over himself trying to move her compost. It was a shit show, but it was fun. He felt comfortable with her. She had a big, joyful laugh and a quiet confidence.

They were sitting on her futon, and he had the hood of his sweatshirt pulled down low over his face. He felt sad, embarrassed, a little angry. “I go into the hole sometimes,” he said. He’d never told anyone that before, but she deserved to know what she might be getting into. She listened. It was all he wanted.

Things were mostly good until 2015, when he started talking about what it would be like to end his life. She knew he often thought about it, but now he was saying it out loud and in a way that worried her. He began talking about how they should pick a date to die.

“It started as a joke,” she says. “Because Rob is so logical and we were talking about retirement planning. He was like, ‘If we knew when we were going to leave, we’d know exactly how much we can spend’—she laughs—“every year.”

“I said, ‘Then we can retire earlier,’” Krar recalls. He laughs softly. “It kind of makes sense.”

“It was a joke for a little while,” she says. She’s no longer laughing. “And then it just got this underbelly that wasn’t a joke.”

Something had to change. He was willing to try medication but not therapy. She got him an appointment with a psychiatrist, who diagnosed him with depression, and he’s

**“I THINK A GOOD WAY TO DESCRIBE MY DEPRESSION IS AN INABILITY TO FEEL HAPPINESS,” KRAR SAYS. “IT’S JUST THIS GRAY ZONE. I HAVE THIS BEAUTIFUL LIFE THAT I CAN’T APPRECIATE.”**

been on meds ever since. He doesn't have a great answer for why he doesn't want to go to therapy. "I just don't want to do that," he says.

The refusal is tough on Bauer. "I still think it would be helpful, but I know I can't push it," she says.

She recognizes the signals well by now. There's the bitter sarcasm. The shorter fuse. It's a silly example, but she's always putting the toilet-paper roll on wrong. (We all know it goes over the top.) When he's in a good place, they can laugh about those things; when he's not, they take on a harder edge.

"What's tricky is, when he's in a bad place, he's sometimes not very nice. And I don't know if that means he's slipping into a place that's not good, or if he's just really fucking annoyed with me," she says. "I try to stack up, How often has this happened lately?"

Mostly, though, she feels his darkness in her gut. Which was why, during that perfect storm in 2017, when the two of them were trying to work through stuff in their marriage, when recovery from his knee injury seemed uncertain, when he was getting stuck in what she calls the black-and-white thinking that goes something like, *Well if I can't run, I'll have to go back to pharmacy, so what's the point of being here?*—she felt, in a visceral way, like she always does when he's going through a hard time, that she shouldn't leave him alone. And when she

headed out that one weekend, she texted him repeatedly and insisted, like she often does, even though neither of them likes the phone, that they talk every evening.

She found out later, after a story was published by *Runner's World*, that while she'd been gone, he'd Googled how to kill himself with a gun.

Krar is frustrated now with how others have used that fact to characterize him. "This has been blown way out of proportion," he says with impatience. "It's not hard to look up on Google how to kill yourself with a gun. Sure, that was the first time I did it, but it's not like I hadn't thought about it before. I had a rough night. I don't want it to be bigger than it was. I think a lot of people think about how to kill themselves. Every article since is like, 'Rob, who suffers from suicidal tendencies... I don't believe that I do. There needs to be an agreeable gray-zone definition of that thought process.'"

Because of who she is, Bauer can understand his frustration. When she talks about mental health and suicidal ideation, she is firmly in her wheelhouse, and she is dispassionate. But she is also talking about the man she loves.

"But, like, I often—" she starts to say, then pauses. "Often, when I'm away, I feel a little bit worried, and I frequently send texts, and I often use a joking tone. But if I don't receive a message back within an hour or two, I get concerned."

She stops, and for a long moment looks at him. Before they got married, she came to terms with the fact that someday she might lose him. She chose to build this life with him. This beautiful, hard life.

"I'M AFRAID OF heights," says Kiley Reed. "And I don't like to hike!"

Reed, 35, is bent over, hands on her knees, laughing at herself. She's only 20 feet from the rim of the volcano, but for every two

steps up through the ankle-deep cinders, she slides back a step. Krar told the campers earlier this morning that the stretch up the 800-foot SP ("Shit Pot") Crater would be "the slowest 0.2 miles you've ever run."

Krar knew the climb wasn't easy for Reed, so when he passed her on the way up, he made sure he said something that wouldn't require a response.

"Looking great!" he told her. "You're almost there!"

Now Reed is nearly at the top, and the entire crew—campers, guides, Krar, and Bauer—are rallying for her. She straightens up and looks out over the treeless, undulating world of extinct volcanoes and jagged mountains. Above it all hovers the moon, a faint spot in a cloudless sky. This is amazing, she thinks.

Reed is an emergency-room nurse who recently moved to Flagstaff with her husband and three young kids. She has short, dark hair and blue-green eyes, and jokes about how she doesn't like running ("I want to be a runner, but it hurts"). But since moving to Flagstaff, Reed has seen how connected her husband feels to the ultra scene, and she wants to be a part of it. "The whole community just draws you in," she says.

She takes her final, plodding steps to the rim, and when she gets there everyone cheers and starts high-fiving each other. "We did it!"

Some of the recent arrivals wander off to stare into the 300-foot-deep crater at the center of the volcano. Others are engaged in the endlessly amusing (for runners, anyway) topic of GI issues—in this case, farts—and are laughing like crazy.

"Let's get together for a group photo," says Krar. As he waits for everyone to grab a spot on a boulder, Krar starts nerding out about the upcoming anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing.

"Do you know that every human who has ever set foot on the moon has trained in northern Arizona?" he says, delighted to share this bit of trivia. "It's true! Just below Sunset Crater, right over there, because apparently the landscape is similar to the moon's." He pivots to point at the moon, then drops his arm and stares at the sky.

"Where the fuck did the moon go?"

Maybe it's the heat. Or the exertion. But that line slays everyone in the same way. The moon that was there just minutes ago is gone, and nobody knows where the fuck it went, and for some reason that's utterly hilarious.

It's a moment that exemplifies what Krar delivers with his running camps—trails, community, and connection. Sometimes to profound effect.

"This camp literally saved my life," says Jim Mollosky, 44, a massage therapist, trainer, and strength and conditioning specialist from Buffalo, New York. Mollosky wasn't at the All-Comers event, but he's been to four of Krar's camps. He initially started coming simply to get better as a runner. He never discussed his depression until he met Krar.

"To see the openness and freedom that he lives with, even while struggling with depression, made me feel like I wasn't alone in this," he says.

After that first camp, Mollosky wrote a Facebook post, apologizing to his friends for times he's been distant. He told them about his struggle, and about how much it meant to him knowing that he wasn't alone. Some of them thanked him for sharing, he says, and the post has had a ripple effect. "They said they feel more comfortable dealing with issues themselves now."

Mollosky now tries to stick around longer after races and socialize. He practices meditation and writes a lot. He runs, of course, because on the bad days that's something he can accomplish. Most important, he allows himself to feel hopeful.

"Before that first camp, I wasn't sure how much longer I was going to live, to be blunt about it," he says. "But after going and meeting everyone, I feel that even when I have rough days, I can make it through. I do see there's hope. If I can just keep one foot in front of the other and keep moving."

"The most important thing is letting people know they're not alone."



KRAR'S BIGGEST FEAR has long been that his depression will get worse. And it has.

The past 12 months or so were his darkest yet. He spent more time in the gray zone, more time in the hole, and about a month prior to this camp, he says, was his single worst week since the perfect storm of 2017. According to Strava, he ran only ten miles that week. Before it hit, he had traveled nearly seven weekends straight. Krar enjoys traveling, but it also wipes him out. He likes routine and loves being home, but being on the road for races and appearances is part of his job. When he returned to Flagstaff after those seven weekends away, he was exhausted and wanted to shut down and be alone. It made total sense to Bauer, but she'd missed him and wanted to talk. He'd missed her, too, but he just didn't have the energy to engage, and that made him feel bad, and it all just sort of snowballed from there and dropped him in the hole.

A line Krar often repeats is, "I love running once in a while, I like it a lot of the time, I dislike it a lot." Because it's his livelihood, it's a double-edged sword, he says.

"More commonly, when I'm running well, my mental health is better, and when I get injured, I'm more likely to go into it. But

they're not joined at the hip," he says. "I can be having great times and still fall into the hole. That's the pressure of being a professional athlete."

But in running—specifically, running 100-milers—he also finds meaning. There are few other times when he can be in the moment, not thinking about the desperate, awful powerlessness. And when it gets emotionally dark and really starts to hurt late in a race, he chooses to stay with it. And he's grateful for the ability to make that choice. Grateful that he's able to work his ass off to get to that moment.

There will be more such moments. Krar says he plans to race a competitive 100-miler in 2020. "I'm also laying the groundwork for an attempt at a well-known fastest known time, which will push me well beyond anything I've attempted in the past," he says.

It's not always clear what pulls Krar out of the hole. But during this most recent descent, as is often the case, it was this camp. There was so much to organize. So many boxes to check. The momentum built and the focus sharpened and it carried him out of the darkness. He had to craft an experience—an experience, he has come to learn, that has layers of meaning for others, and for himself.

ON THE LAST night of All-Comers, the runners are sitting before a screen inside Paragon Athletics. Krar is barefoot and drinking a beer. Bauer sits on the floor near him, and she's barefoot, too. For 45 minutes or so, he shows slides and tells his story. Then he plays the Movember video, the one featuring the same lonely landscape and volcanic crater they ran just hours earlier. When the video is over, Krar stands up.


He tells them he doesn't have the answers. But he feels fortunate to have the platform that allows him to share and connect.

"There's still a strong stigma around depression and mental health," he says. There is not a sound in the room other than his voice.

"I think it's OK to reach out to someone and have a conversation with them. Talking about it is going to make a difference in removing that stigma. The most important thing is letting people know they're not alone."

Krar thanks them all for coming. Then, as most of the campers start getting up, Krar walks over and sits next to Ben Kammin, who is trying hard to hold it together. Kammin, 45, is a Ph.D. student in ethnomusicology in Boulder, Colorado. He's lean, with a bald head and a graying goatee. He's thoughtful and not much of a talker, and right now, with Krar sitting quietly beside him, he can't say a word. If he opens his mouth, he'll lose it. And there's so much he suddenly wants to say.

He wants to say he's struggled with manic depression for around 15 years. That when he's going into a bad place—"absolute hopelessness"—he can feel the darkness crawl down the back of his neck. That hardly anyone knows this about him, even friends he's had for 25 years. That a year ago he started running, and while it's not a cure or a substitute for his meds, he calls it his miracle drug, because it gives him hours of clarity and productivity. He wants to say that sometimes he weeps when he runs. That he just gets overwhelmed with gratitude for this thing that does so much for his body and mind. He wants to say that he thinks his illness is getting worse, but he's doing everything he can to be healthy, because he knows his time is precious. He wants to tell Krar that after just three days, he feels like he found his people. That the runners he met are imperfect just like him, and that they are the most amazing, beautiful people because of those imperfections. And that soon he will start thinking of life before camp and after camp.

But he doesn't have to say these things. Because Rob Krar gets it. 

CHRISTINE FENNESSY (@CHRISTINE FENNESSY) IS A FORMER EDITOR AT RUNNER'S WORLD. THIS IS HER FIRST FEATURE FOR OUTSIDE