This morning I went for a run around the town of Middlebury and on some of the beautiful (and hilly) trails in the area. For old times sake, I took a little loop of the famous (or should I say infamous) Chipman Hill. It took me back to my freshman year, when I first came to Middlebury, and from the first day of preseason, heard ominous rumblings about this mysterious place called Chipman Hill. I had done hill repeats in high school - how hard could it be? As I was reminded on my run today, Chipman Hill is hard, really hard. I'm pretty sure I struggled to complete two hill repeats, and by the end of the year, I probably did 3. Fast forward to my senior year and on our last Chipman Hill workout ever. We had just finished four repeats, and were trotting back down the hill, feeling pretty satisfied with our achievement. We got to the bottom and were greeted by Terry, who had a bit of a devilish grin on his face. One more repeat he told us. I had rarely done 4 loops, and never really considered doing five. My legs (and lungs) were feeling pretty spent, but we lined up and off we went. Most of you in the room likely have the terrain of Chipman Hill engraved in your mind forever. We struggled up the loose dirt terrain of the first steep part, then made the turn and started up the wide road. And as if appearing out of thin air, there was Terry. I was struggling at this point, but he ran beside me, encouraging me - come on Kate Irvin, you can do this. You're tough, you're doing great.

That moment personifies Terry’s coaching style. He always pushed us, in the most supportive way, to reach deep within ourselves and achieve that which we thought was impossible. For me, a Southern belle from Atlanta, GA, this includes even attending college in far away Vermont. During my senior year, Terry assured me that I was going to love it here. I had no idea what I was getting into – my idea of a winter wardrobe was literally a wool miniskirt. So, you can imagine how nervous I was for our regional meet my freshman year, when we drove through a snow storm to the meet in Maine. That morning, they plowed the course so that we could race through narrow tracks with about 6 inches of packed snow underfoot. Guess what, after having finished a disappointing 3rd at NESCACs in beautiful conditions two weeks earlier, we won the meet and advanced to nationals in Boston at the well-known Franklin Park. I am fairly certain that the conditions at Franklin Park that day were the worst that I have ever run in. The mud was calf deep at points, and the temperature dropped dramatically during the race, so that the rain turned to pelting sleet and hail. But our team pushed through to finish 3rd, our highest placing ever at NCAA’s.
I should emphasize, though, as Terry so often did, that our focus was not always on how we placed at a meet. The night before a meet, when we were changing our spikes and going over the next day’s race plan, Terry would always tell us not to have outcome goals - sure, it was always a bonus to beat Williams or a DI school, but as Terry would remind us, we could never control how others performed on any given day, so we should just focus on performance goals - running our best race as individuals and as a team. We understood better the lesson that Terry had been trying to teach us when we traveled to Carlisle, PA my sophomore year focused on our national ranking and on finishing on the podium. We had great freshman talent and experience under our belt from the year before, so of course we would be able to equal or top our finish from the year before. It didn’t work out that way - we got 7th and it was devastating. But when I crossed the finish line after a mediocre race, Terry was there smiling, supporting us, and that night, we went to celebratory dinner with our cheering squad and had a great time, then took a dip in the hotel pool in our uniform, which made a pretty good stand-in for a bathing suit.

Lesson learned, the next year we went to nationals and focused on running our own race. We finished 2nd, and then, my senior year, we ran through snowy fields in Spokane, Washington to win Middlebury's first national title in cross country. It was truly a great day to be a Panther. Since then, it's been amazing to watch the program develop into such a dynasty since my graduation, and to think that each crop of freshman that comes in meets the same smiling Terry with the same token phrases – smelling the barn, good and bad little doggies, money in the bank, AST (Aldrich Standard Time), let the dog off the leash, and of course, we're from VT, we'll park where we want. As a post-collegiate athlete, I’ve tried to carry Terry’s lessons with me when I step up to the line to race. I remember after one of my first post-collegiate track meets, I called my coach to tell her what time I ran, how the race went. She interrupted me to say, “ok, but what place did you get?” I remember thinking to myself, why does it matter? I ran my best. And it is an attitude that I have needed to have as I’ve continued as an athlete, when I find myself racing professional athletes and a PR might still result in a mid to back of the pack finish.

Looking back, Terry was such a great coach because above all, he always emphasized that we have fun. He didn't blink an eye when I suggested we have theme practices and the entire team showed up in superhero outfits. He pulled over to the side of the road in Wisconsin so we could take photos with larger than life plastic cows. On the track, the girls
cheerily chirped catchphrases to begin each interval: five alive, four no more, three and free, two and through, one and done. Inspired by Remember the Titans, we approached the starting line at nationals my senior year with a choreographed warm-up dance. Looking back, we were probably pretty dorky, but it made running fun and it took the pressure off. In contrast, I've trained with athletes from other running programs since graduating, and running was much more of a job for them. One coach did not allow athletes to study at meets, and had an edict against the three "B"s for her girls - no bagels, no beer, no boys. I think we all can imagine how well that would have worked out at Middlebury. But it would never have occurred to Terry to implement those kinds of rules. He recognized that we did not just come to Middlebury to run, but to grow intellectually and socially – to learn in and out of the classroom. I can honestly say that Terry Aldrich taught me as many valuable life lessons as any of my academic professors. He taught us to work hard, to persevere, and to believe in ourselves, and to have fun while doing. As one of our Midd cross country shirts proclaimed, “Success is a journey, not a destination.”

Terry made running into something that we could do for life. Since graduating, pretty much all of my former teammates continue to run recreationally or competitively. I see many of them at races, whether in Central Park or across the country at national competitions. In fact, although I said after that last repeat of Chipman Hill that I was happy never to run it again, about seven years later, I found myself back in Vermont with my husband, and believe it or not, I made him do Chipman Hill repeats. I only did 4, but maybe if Terry had been there, I would have let the dog off the leash and done a fifth interval. Each time I rounded the corner, I could hear Terry in my mind, urging me on. So Terry, thank you, not just for pushing us to be our very best while we ran for you at Middlebury, but also for making running such a fun, joyful experience...a sport that for so many of us has continued beyond our four years as a Panther.