*“CHICKEN HILL”* by Coach Doug Watts

The early morning fog just lifting over the “tree”.

Strip off your sweats,

Double knot your racing flats.

“Runners Set? Go!”

You head south down Perry Lane.

Much too fast, you know.

Left at Kinter, hitting the 1 mile mark closely bunched.

Upperclassmen admonishing the frosh to stay up.

Right at Arneman, blowing past the 2 mile,

Seconds faster than your high school PR.

Kline Hill on the left where in your freshman year,

You seriously considered transferring during the third “rep” up it.

The van is at three.

You basically ignore coach’s yelling,

So focused you are.

You already know it’s fast.

The sun hits you, then shade.

A doe, white tail flashing, bounds into the evergreens.

A stupid woodchuck stands tall in the field to view,

The crazy, much too skinny kids running past.

“Van”, wheezes a runner behind you,

Seconds before Watts zooms by at 60mph dusting all.

You share an unspoken experience with teammates,

Knowing the developing runners behind,

Were left without being given their split.

Functional punishment –

Better run farther and faster next summer,

Or be left behind again.

A lesson learned years ago.

You crank mile 3 to 4 and then 4 to 5.

Clearly dreading the too long mile 6 that seems to never end.

Right onto Rice, over the bridge and up Chick Hill,

The horrendously steep incline at 7¼ imploring you to walk.

But, no, never.

Water at eight, throw the cup aside,

Begin the severe pounding downhill to 9.

Let yourself go, long strides, steal seconds from the finish result

Move up on “The List”.

Left on the highway.

Lift a middle finger to the car that refuses to yield at the light.

You’re in tired rhythm now, near maximal oxygen consumption,

“Rags” long faded, survivors not smiling now, strung out a quarter mile.

You turn left -- to engage --

Chicken Hill.

Domestic fowl long gone since 1980.

But the tradition not to “chicken out” drives you up, up, up,

Refusing any falter.

Quads ache, breath severely labored.

Miss the pain of it, miss the joy of it.

By 12 you are down,

The finish line inevitable.

Fear of failure dissipated,

A moment of reflection available?

You know what?

You are a Goddamn Edinboro Cross Country Runner.

Is there anything better in the world?

We will always wonder

Maybe not outwardly voicing how much we loved those runs.

The effort, the competitive results

The tradition of toughness and success.

BORO XC,

It’s a part of who I am.