

One Of Us

The 2005 La Luz Trail Run up the west face of the Sandia Mountains concluded recently with rather predictable results: Simon Gutierrez won the event for the 7th time while Rachel Cuellar Dobbs won her 3rd women=s title. But elsewhere, there was another story to this year=s race, a story that began five years ago.

Five years ago, two Colorado mountain runners B both multiple winners of the Pike=s Peak Ascent, among other mountain races around the country B arrived for the 2000 La Luz Trail Run, Scott Elliott and Jeremy Wright. Elliott, however, was not registered for the race, a victim of its increasing popularity despite being named one of the most grueling trail runs in America. No matter, Elliott would run as a bandit.

But Elliott, then a six-time winner of the Pike=s Peak Ascent, trailed Wright up the mountain. Once across the rockslide, however, he made a move to pass only to slip on some fallen leaves. He finished 16 seconds behind his friend, bloodied knees and all.

Jeremy Wright, a two-time All-American cross-country runner and first team Academic All-American at Indiana=s Wabash College, won the 2000 La Luz Trail Run with a time of 1:20:08 in his only run up the trail. Wright was always pushing his body to extremes and never saw a mountain he didn=t want to run up. After graduating with an honors degree in chemistry from Wabash, he headed west to Wyoming and then Colorado, winning almost every mountain race he entered.

Along the way, he also earned a master=s degree in microbiology and was accepted into medical school at Indiana University. Then came September 11, 2001.

The quiet, respectful man with the fierce drive to excel had the world in front of him. He could have gone to medical school and been a doctor had he simply said the word. But he was nothing if not patriotic, a bed-rock Midwesterner with a deep-seated love for his country. He enlisted in the Army and quickly became a Green Beret.

In late 2003, Wright=s unit became part of Operation Enduring Freedom and was sent to Afghanistan. For Jeremy, that meant a chance to run up the mountain just outside the gates of his base near Kabul, an area that was considered safe and cleared of insurgents. Said college teammate Scott Gall, "Knowing Jeremy, he was running repeats on it."

The mountain was safe. The valley down below, it turned out, was not. In early January of 2005, Jeremy Wright was killed while on a routine patrol. He was 31 years old.

"He loved being outside," said Gall. "That's where God was for him, where he felt closest to God."

Many of us can relate to that. We often feel closest to God up in the mountains, on the trails and out in the beautiful weather with which we are blessed in New Mexico. Jeremy Wright touched us one time with his quiet calm and steely desire, and he died doing what he felt needed to be done to protect this country and our way of life. He was one of us.