

Vertical Yellow Lines

By Mason Savikian

The first time I stepped up to the line, I'm fragile, short, skinny, and most certainly not a boy. In fact I'm the only "non boy" on this vertical scratch of yellow paint. Eyes all around me make me feel smaller than I already am, and I'm still not sure why my parents are making me do this. Their eyes go right through me. My dad is holding up a watch. My mom is standing there with her arms crossed. I almost didn't realize that a gun had gone off, and my feet were pounding against the ground, pushing me forward.

When I cross the finish line, I am 17. I'm strong, still short, I'm not skinny, and I am feeling less like a girl. The scene has changed, and I've now stepped up to a hundred yellow vertical lines. I still feel different than anyone else on that line, but I ignore it, and focus on the long stretch of track before me. Over the years, I've made myself a set of rules. I've learned to block out the eyes of strangers and teammates. Do not look at my parents in the front row of the viewing. Take a puff of my inhaler. Close my eyes when you see the gun in the air.

When I open my eyes, I'm 20. I'm still strong, I'm still short, I'm muscular, and I am definitely not a girl. There have been a thousand yellow lines. A thousand watching eyes. And a thousand gunshots into the air, signaling for an event that would be over in less than twenty minutes on a good day

However this time around, I woke up, and put on my running shoes. And for the first time in my life, I step up to that line as Mason. When I cross the line, I'm finally free.