

IGNORING FINISH LINE

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Should I give up a chance to help my team—and help a total stranger instead?

By Heather Laverty

As told to Michelle Nagel

I stretched my legs in eager anticipation as I waited for the starting gun. I had been training hard for this first cross-country invitational of the season, running up to eight miles every day but Sunday, followed by weight training. Day after day I dragged myself home, muscles aching.

“The whole team is counting on you to claim a ribbon or even a medal, Heather,” Coach told me. “Don’t let us down.”

I glanced around at the other 39 girls at the starting line and wondered who would be fastest.

At the sound of the gun, I darted forward. Choosing a spot I was comfortable with, I watched as some of the girls ran ahead. My chest began to tighten, so I slowed down, letting more girls pass. I wasn’t worried. I knew how to pace myself.

After about a mile, I could see a girl on the ground to the side of the course. Other girls called out encouraging words and then flashed by her. As I approached, I could see the girl was having difficulty breathing. Instinctively, I ran to the girl and dropped to my knees.

“Come on, you have to get up,” I gasped, trying to help the girl sit up.

She whimpered through tortured breaths. Her body was stiff and shaking; her eyes clearly frightened.

As I watched runner after runner speed past us, I knew my hopes for a winning time were slipping with every second. But I couldn’t just leave her on the side of the road, alone and sick. I spoke softly to calm her down.

After a few minutes, an official came running to help. About that same time, a woman in a red car pulled up.

The woman knelt beside the shaking girl. After a quick inspection, she said, “She’s hyperventilating. I’m a nurse. Let’s get her back to the school.”

I felt I couldn’t abandon the sick girl. With a silent prayer, I climbed into the car with her. The woman handed me a brown paper bag. “Keep it over her face,” she commanded. The girl was shaking so badly that it was difficult for me to keep the bag positioned over her face and mouth as the woman drove the twists and tight corners to the school.

I fought the tears that threatened to spill out. Here I was in a strange town helping a girl I’d never even laid eyes on before. Coach would be furious, my teammates would think I was crazy, and I had missed my chance for a medal.

I felt somewhat relieved as the car pulled into the school parking lot. We laid the girl on the couch in the teacher’s lounge. The girl’s mother came into the room and touched the girl’s forehead.

“How are you doing?” she asked.

The girl answered, weakly, “I’m better.”

The mother smiled at me. “Sisters helping sisters, I see.”

I wondered what she meant by that. The girl’s grandfather came in. The mother whispered, “Dad, she needs a blessing.”

“Are you LDS?” I whispered, startled.

“Yes,” came the simple reply. “That’s what I meant about sisters helping sisters. I saw your CTR ring.”

After saying good-bye, I went looking for Coach. When I spotted him, I swallowed hard at the stormy look on his face.

“Coach!” I yelled, running to his side.

“I’m sorry I didn’t finish the race, but there

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was this girl, and she needed my help.”

“I heard,” he said stiffly.

“What happened?”

I hurriedly sketched in the details. The coach’s expression didn’t change.

“I commend you for what you did,” he said frostily. “But I would have preferred that you’d stayed in the race. I was counting on you to win.” I nodded and then turned away so he wouldn’t see me cry.

At home that night I told my story again. When I had finished, my dad gave me a big hug. “We’re so proud of you,” he said. “You did the right thing.”

“But I could have won a ribbon or maybe even a medal,” I protested.

“You did something more important and longer lasting than a medal instead,” Mom said.

That night, as I prepared a sacrament meeting



talk on “The Family:

A Proclamation to the

World,” I was still troubled.

Maybe I should’ve run past the girl like everyone else. The

official would’ve taken care of her, right? My stomach turned as I thought

about letting the team and my coach down, and about losing my medal.

When I read the proclamation, the second paragraph stood out: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents” (“*The Family: A Proclamation to the World*,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129).

“That’s why I had to stop and help,” I said. A warm feeling chased away my confusion. “She’s a daughter of God. She needed help, and I was there.”

Although it had been hard, I knew Heavenly Father approved, and that was the most important thing to me. **NE**

The author lives in California, USA.

