

# **DOWN HOME: 60 seconds that changed my life**

September 11, 2010

Do you ever remember an exact moment that changed your life?

More than likely, you didn't realize it at the time. But you've been different ever since.

I recalled one of those instances the other morning. It was dark-thirty, and I was out running through our community. Suddenly, it was 1970, and I was 13 years old and in the seventh grade.

Before I go forward, back up a year. One day, our PE teacher announced all the sixth graders were going to run. I think it was half a mile, but maybe it was 660 yards—a lap and a half.

I barfed. At the finish line, all over the track.

"Too many Oreos for ol' Knox," our teacher announced. I don't know which pain was worse, my stomach cramps or the humiliation. Simultaneously, I wanted to die and thought it might be possible.

Now, jump up a year. Coach Lackey had selected every member of the Perryton Raiders seventh-grade track team, except one. Three boys could compete in each event, and Coach Lackey only had two quarter-milers. So, he announced a run-off for the third slot.

By that time, I'd already been beaten out for all the good stuff: Too tiny to throw the shot putt and discus. Too earth-bound to high jump or run hurdles. Too slow to run the 100-yard dash.

But for seventh graders, the quarter is a hybrid event. A kid needs a bit of

speed and a smidge of endurance. And since my athletic skills were measured in bits and smidges, I signed up.

“I have to win this race,” I thought as we lined up on the track. Otherwise, no shiny satin track suit, no Saturday road trips with my friends, no adulation of seventh-grade girls. Plus, I didn’t want my sixth-grade spewfest to mark the zenith of my track-and-field career.

Nobody was more surprised than I when I won that race. Afterward, standing on that track, I realized running wasn’t so bad. It doesn’t require size, which I was pretty sure I’d never have. It doesn’t require coordination, which God had determined would not be one of my gifts. Mostly, it required desire, which just about anybody can muster up.

Then and there, I decided I actually liked running. Looking back I realized that strong emotion sprang from the thinnest of soil—the modest success of making the very last slot on team of 13-year-old boys.

Through the years, like blossomed into love. Now, 40 years and thousands of miles later, I cannot imagine life without running. (OK, I know. At my age, it’s probably jogging. Humor me here.)

Running has kept me healthy. Many times, it’s kept me sane. It’s provided hours and hours of solitude, much of it absorbed in prayer and reflection and gratitude for legs and lungs, just enough balance, and decent shoes.

So, I thank God I didn’t come in second in that seventh-grade quarter-mile run-off.