

IN HIS STEPS

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Today, while traveling home from Chattanooga I heard a most inspiring story. It was about an 11 year-old boy named Ben who runs triathlons. Although he doesn't like to practice much, his mother says he is always inspired by the competition and really gets into it once he is in the race.

On this particular day, Ben had completed the swimming and cycling sections of the race and was half way through the running section when his right leg felt 'wobbly'. The screws in his prosthetic leg had come loose and before he knew it, he hit the asphalt with a thud. A young man named Matt, a youth volunteer for the event, saw what happened and ran to Ben's aid. He asked the boy if he needed help. When Ben said, "Yes," the young man hoisted Ben onto his back and started running. Ben held on to him with one arm while grasping his prosthetic leg in the other. Ben's parents realized something was wrong when the commentator of the race announced that one of the competitors, a disabled boy, had fallen. It certainly was a sight to behold when, amidst tears and cheers Ben crossed the finish line aided by his new found friend Matt, flanked by some of Matt's Marine friends who ran in formation alongside.

In August of this year, we enjoyed the Olympic Games and in particular the camaraderie of competitors. A Chinese hurdler fell early in the race and, determined to complete it, limped injured towards the finish line. To the crowd's cheers, another athlete ran and supported him across the line.

What do these inspirational stories teach us? Ben didn't expect anyone to help him and neither did the Chinese athlete. It takes a servant heart to see the needs of others. We believe that a successful family is one that is God centered, parent directed, family orientated and outwardly focused. Being outwardly focused means being observant and thoughtful towards others. It means anticipating others' needs and responding ... even before they ask for help. Sadly, I would have to say that with current technology we likely spend more time looking down at our phones and Ipads than looking around us to notice others' needs.

So, how do we teach our kids this important value? We need to get back to Mayberry! We need to be close enough to our neighbors and friends to know when they need physical help or when they just need a hug and a word of encouragement. We need to be good friends and teach our kids what being a good friend means ... that of being there no matter what, of being loyal, committed and caring. We need to be willing to lend our stuff, go the extra mile, to offer a hand and to pay forward.

We need to not only care for those we know, but also those we don't know. What happened to the whittling days on the front porch? What better way to get to know people than to strike up a conversation, invite them in, join clubs or volunteer?

When we show how much we care for others, even those beyond our own friends and family, our children will adopt the same value. They will see how simple thoughtfulness and caring profoundly affects others and they will want to do the same. They will see that instead of becoming selfish with our time, money and stuff, we, through simple acts of kindness can change the world around us.

It only took a moment for that young man to step out and help a young boy fulfill a dream. Sometimes it takes more time than a simple step. It might even take some real sacrifice, but the effort on our part means an immeasurable amount to the recipient.

Remember the story of the starfish? With hundreds of starfish stranded by a receding tide, a young man was seen throwing them one by one back into the water. When being told by a friend that it was a useless exercise, the young man threw yet another one into the sea, smiled and said to his friend, "Yes, but it made a difference to that one." We can make all the difference to those around us by offering simple acts of kindness.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.