



August 2003

Reflections . . .

Vol. 6, No. 2

Running

By Jerry Horton

I turned 65 in May and Judy, wanting to commemorate the milestone, organized a surprise party for me. She knows that I don't like surprises and don't seek the limelight—unless it's an opportunity to talk about the Ranch. But it was nice. Friends and family gathered together under the ruse of picking wild blackberries—which some actually did. We had lunch, took a few pictures and then did what I like most: went back to work.

So now I'm a certified "senior citizen" and beginning to behave like one. Judy too. We both love food and good wine, but are cutting down the sugar, carbs and other fattening agents, and now take a long walk each morning. When Kelly was in school it became our father-daughter ritual to meet the school bus at 7:00 am, precluding early-morning exercise. But now we get up at 5:55 am, walk down and across the pecan bottoms, up the hill, over to the road and back to Gabriel House—a vigorous 1.7 miles. I can walk but I can't run or jog.

1942

When I got polio it initiated a seemingly endless series of encounters with hospitals, doctors and, I suspect, a few quacks. I was four years old and scared, but my parents were—I later learned—overcome with grief. One moment I was in the yard playing and in the next I couldn't get up. My right leg was like a piece of spaghetti, totally unable to support my weight. Off to the hospital I went.

Over the years, interspersed with surgeries at Shriner's Hospital in San Francisco, I behaved like most little boys. I walked—with crutches, braces, casts and finally on my own—rode bicycles and dreamed of playing baseball. I *did* play baseball and was darned good—quick, fast and with a strong arm. I might have pitched, but surgery #2 kept me short—they operated on my left knee to stop my adolescent growth—and not fast enough for the mound.

Worst of all. I couldn't really run. I limped real fast. But I couldn't really run and slide, like when you're going for a double on a long single. I think Coach Mason could have put me on the team (at my high school), but, hey, he was trying to build a good baseball team. He wasn't a social worker. I never made the team.

2001

Kelly was born in 1984 and was a big, fat, bald blob of baby. I went quickly from horror at being the father of a kid with a huge, intractable disability (Down syndrome) to being completely in love with my child. For years I danced and sang "Bye-oh, baby, bye-oh," as she fell asleep in my arms.

Years later Kelly was bonding with her Special Olympics pals at Taylor High School. They were the Comets (whereas I was a James Lick Comet in High School) and she ran the women's 100 meter dash. Judy and I had taken to going to "State" (Texas Special Olympics State meets) and bringing sandwiches, chips and drinks to our athletes. But, when it came to the competitions we abandoned food duty to watch and cheer.

I remember standing beside Ron Hennington, Heather's dad, as Kelly ran her 100 meter race in the finals. Kelly's running style won't win any medals, hampered by her chubbiness, short legs, and low muscle tone. But the runners were well matched and she led for the first 50 meters, when a tall, slender girl pulled ahead. We were all screaming like crazy and Kelly went into overdrive. Her legs pumped as she gave the race her all and won the gold medal. Ron shook his head and said, "I've never seen her run like that before."

Heather won the gold in her race, too, and Ron and I were two happy dads!

2003

Kevin Morse joined the Board of Directors at Down Home Ranch earlier this year. Kevin and his wife Katherine are both attorneys and have two sons: Mitch, and ten-year-old Robbie, who is disabled.

Kevin tells the story of jogging along Town Lake one day and wondering, "Why am I doing this?" The question arose from the facts of his life: He was a husband and father with a demanding job, a child with a major disability, and too much to do. Why was he indulging himself running along Town Lake? He found him-self drawn by the conviction that there should be a better reason for his activity, and soon a plan began to form.

It wasn't a welcome plan. Kevin, like me, is not a lover of the spotlight. He's not by nature an attention-seeker. But also like me, he loves his kid with all his heart, and he began to think of some way of translating his love of running into some benefit for Robbie. Maybe he could do something special in Robbie's name. But to what end? And then it came to him. He could run for the Ranch, where Robbie may someday live.

And not just run, he could do a triathlon—and ask friends and family to sponsor him. He would dedicate any proceeds to Down Home Ranch, taking on a 125 mile bike ride, a 26 mile run, and a ___mile swim wearing the Ranch colors! So he began to train, and to train with a mission. I took Danny down to Town Lake one day to run beside him. It was a work of art: Kevin with his big frame and muscular intent; Daniel with his smooth, gliding stride, one of a natural runner; in the background Town Lake and the Austin city skyline. So on September 27, the Gabriel House crew—Judy, Jerry, Kelly, Michael, Daniel, and Robert—will pile into the van and head for Missouri to watch and cheer Kevin on.

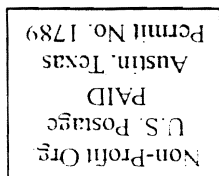
I had to find a different way to champion my daughter, and so I've worked like a maniac to build Down Home Ranch, just as Kevin is training for hours each day to run for the sake of Robbie. Men are like that. We've just got to *do* something. So I did what I could, and Kevin's doing what he can. We're nuts, it's true—nuts about our kids. We both believe that Down Home Ranch is the right idea at the right time, and we're both dedicating ourselves to see that it prospers and grows, to become the home we envision for Kelly, for Robbie, and for lots of other much-loved kids whose dads sang them to sleep, cheered them on, and who will do whatever it takes to ensure that they have a good, safe, and happy life.

About Down Home Ranch

Down Home Ranch is a working Texas Ranch for youth and adults with mental handicaps, and for those who share their lives with them. We offer homes, training, work, and recreational opportunities that serve over 200 people per year. The Ranch is non-profit, private, and independent. At the Ranch, all work toward self-sufficiency through business enterprises in horticulture, retreats, camps, and the rental of retreat facilities. Gifts to Down Home Ranch are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

For more information, see our website at www.downhomeranch.org, E-mail us at dhrr@flash.net, or call us at 888-926-2253

*Down Home Ranch
20250 FM 619
Elgin, TX 78621*



Down Home Ranch
20250 FM 619
Elgin, Texas 78621