

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will be about Rick Hoyt. Rick was born Jan. 10, 1962 with cerebral palsy. Several doctors encouraged his parents to put him in an institution as they predicted that he would never be anything but a vegetable. His parents, however, loved him too much for that. They noticed that his eyes followed them around the room and they held out the hope that someday he could get better. They faithfully took him every week to the Children's Hospital in Boston where, thankfully, they met a doctor who encouraged them to treat Rick like they would treat any other child.

Rick's mother, Judy, tried to do just that. She patiently taught him the alphabet and then taught him words by posting notes naming every object in the house. In spite of his physical handicaps, Rick had a good mind. At the age of 11 he was fitted with a computer that enabled him to communicate. With the help of his computer he was able to attend school. Rick not only finished high school but in 1993 graduated from Boston University with a degree in Special Education. Rick then got a job in a computer lab helping to develop computers for people with disabilities.

In 1977 Rick asked his father if they could run in a benefit race to raise money for friend. He was a lacrosse player at his school who had become paralyzed. Rick wanted to prove that life goes on regardless of your disability. His father, Dick Hoyt, was a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Air National Guard. Dick was 36 years old but was not a runner. For the sake of his son, however, he tried. After their initial five mile run Rick said: *"Dad, when I'm running, it feels like I'm not handicapped."* Dick was encouraged and began training every day. Since Rick was at school, he put a bag of cement in the wheel chair and pushed it as he ran. Dick soon improved to the point that he could push his son in a wheel chair and do a 5K run in 17 minutes.

Through March of 2016, the Hoyts had competed in 1,130 endurance events. This included 72 marathons and six Ironman Triathlons. For the swim portion of the Triathlon Dick had to learn how to swim pulling Rick in a boat behind him. For the cycle portion Rick rode on the front of a specially designed tandem bike. For the run portion, as always, his father pushed him in his wheel chair. They even ran the Boston Marathon 32 times. Thankfully, in 2013, when the two bombs exploded at the marathon they were not injured. Just for fun, in 1992 they biked across America covering 3,735 miles.

In 2008 Team Hoyt was inducted into the Ironman Hall of Fame. On April 8, 2013 a bronze statue in their honor was dedicated near the start of the Boston Marathon. ESPN honored them with the Jimmy V. Perseverance award on July 17, 2013. Team Hoyt was also featured on inspirational billboards across America. Dick said about his son, *"He's the one who has motivated me; because if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be out there competing . . . What I'm doing is loaning Rick my arms and legs so he can be out there competing like everybody else."*

Rick's mother, Judy, passed away in 2010. She was instrumental, however, in passing a state law allowing children with disabilities to get a public education. Rick's father died in his sleep at his home in Holland, Massachusetts on March 17, 2021. He was 80 years old. Rick continued to compete from 2015-2018 teaming up with a dentist named Bryan Lyons. Rick has now officially retired and is living in an assisted living facility in Leicester.

Jesus taught us to pray: **“Our Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:9)**. Jesus understood that most fathers are good and said: **“Which of you, if his son asks for bread will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt. 7:9-11)**. It is obviously wrong to stereotype all fathers as evil and abusive.

We should not be surprised that our Heavenly Father loves His children. John 3:16 states it clearly: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life”**. The Apostle John is known as the “Apostle of Love”. He wrote five inspired books of the Bible. They are: the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and Revelation. In I John 3:16 he explained: **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”**.

To really know what love is we need to focus on the cross. As John said: “This is how we know what love is”. Paul wrote: **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21)**. Isaiah predicted the death of Christ centuries before it came to pass: **“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:4-6)**.

Let us be like Jesus, Dick Hoyt, and many others as we find somebody to love!

Yes, and I love you too,

Granda Boyce