

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 475

Dearest grandchild,

One of my favorite books is *The Heart of a Champion* by Bob Richards. The first printing came out in January 1959. I once purchased them in quantity to give to people who needed encouragement. Bob was a devout Christian, a preacher, and an outstanding athlete. He is the only man to win back to back gold medals in pole vaulting at the Olympic games (1952 and 1956). He also won a bronze medal in 1948. Richards was elected to the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 1983 and the United States National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1975. Sadly, Bob passed away Feb. 26, 2023.

The point of his book is that life does not determine a champion, but a champion determines life. To prove his point he provides a long list of individuals who overcame great physical barriers to become champions. They did not become champions because they had great bodies, but great hearts.

- **Glenn Cunningham's** legs were so badly burned at the age of five that doctors predicted that he would be a hopeless cripple. One doctor even recommended amputation. Glenn overcame this handicap and set the world's record for the mile run in 1934.
- **Johnny Fulton** was run over by a car at the age of three. His hips were crushed, his ribs were broken, and his skull was fractured. He also suffered compound fractures in his leg. No one thought he would live, but he grew up to run the half mile in 1:49.5.
- **Walt Davis** became the Olympic champion high jumper in 1952 even though he was totally paralyzed by polio at the age of nine.
- **Shelly Mann** was paralyzed by polio at the age of five but overcame her handicap to claim eight different swimming records for America. She also won a gold medal at the Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia.
- **Howard Connolly** won the Olympic hammer throw despite a crippled left arm that had been broken 13 times.
- **Babe Didrikson Zaharias** was so poor that she trained for the hurdles by jumping shrubbery in the neighbor's back yard. She won a gold medal in the hurdles in the 1932 Olympics.
- **Bob Mathias** broke the Olympic decathlon record despite the handicap of a pulled muscle.
- **Károly Takács** was the pistol shooting champion of the 1952 Olympics but later lost part of his right arm when a grenade exploded in his hand. He refused to give up, trained for years with his left hand, and won his second gold medal at the Olympic Games in Melbourne.
- **Tenley Albright** had crippled legs and the experts predicted that she would never use them again. She went on to win the World's Figure Skating Championship.
- **Ben Hogan** won the National Open after struggling back from an automobile accident.
- **Roger Banister** broke the four-minute mile for the first time in history despite the fact that the track was soaked by five hours and rain and the additional handicap of a blustery cold wind.
- **Bill Nieder** broke the world's record in the shot put after being told by his doctors that the many operations on his stiff right leg would keep him from competition.
- **Keith Forbes** set four American swimming records in spite of a crippled hip that prevented him from kicking normally.
- **Lou Gehrig** was once a fat, bungling kid who made so many mistakes that a team mate begged him to quit the team. Gehrig didn't quit but determined to make "one less mistake every day." With a champion's heart he went on to Baseball's Hall of Fame.
- **Rocky Marciano's** arms were once so weak that he could only fight two rounds. Instead of quitting, however, he determined to grow strong. He trained by shadow boxing under water

forcing his muscles to develop against resistance. He became the heavy weight champion of the world and retired with a perfect record of 49 wins and no losses.

This is the story of every champion! The difference is not in the body but in the heart. A champion's heart in a crippled body is better than a champion's body with a crippled heart. Paul was a champion in the Christian race. His body was worn out and weak but his heart was strong. He wrote: **"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."** (2 Cor. 11:23-28)

In spite of these handicaps Paul refused to quit and kept his eye on the goal. He wrote: **"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."** (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

Please do not quit or be overcome by discouragement! Don't worry if you do not have a champion's heart for if you will only surrender to Jesus He has promised to give you a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27). With the help of Jesus you too can be a champion and receive the victor's crown for **"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."** (Romans 8:37)

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce