

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 104

Dearest Grandchild,

Today's letter will involve a page from the past. The first woman to win three gold medals at the Olympic games was the late **Wilma Rudolf**. She was famous long before you were born, but her journey to fame did not come easy. It never does.

Wilma was born prematurely and with complications. She weighed just over 4 lbs and was the 20th of 22 children. As an infant she contracted double pneumonia twice and also had scarlet fever. It seemed that she would not live to see her first birthday. Somehow, she survived. Later, at the age of 4, she suffered from polio which left her with a crooked left leg and a foot that twisted inward. She wore braces for over six years. Because she was "different" and spent so much time in the hospital, she suffered many cruel remarks from her peers.

By the age of 11 Wilma began to believe that someday she could discard her braces. The doctors said she would never walk, but her mother said that God would help her walk someday. Fortunately, she believed in God and her mother, more than in the doctors. For about a year she secretly removed her metal braces and learned to walk without them. Her doctors were amazed and so was everyone else..

At the age of 12 she started playing basketball. Still handicapped, she persisted until they felt sorry for her and let her practice with the team. They even let her wear an old uniform. As incredible as it seems, she began to dream about becoming a world class athlete. Her prospects did not seem good. She was six feet tall and weighed only 89 lbs.

At the age of 14 she joined the Tigerbelles' track team and began serious training at Tennessee State University. By 1956, at the tender age of 16, she had made the United States team and won a bronze medal at the Olympic games in Melbourne, Australia. She returned to America determined to "go for the gold".

Her schedule at Tennessee State was demanding. In order to participate in athletics, she had to take at least 18 units and maintain at least a B average. She did both! But even more than that, she went beyond what was required and slipped down the fire escape at night for a couple of extra hours of workout. She maintained this grueling schedule for 1,200 days.

This hard work paved the way for her rendezvous with destiny. It came in Rome in 1960. With nearly 80,000 fans screaming her name she turned in three electrifying gold medal performances. She won gold in the 100 meter and the 200 meter dashes, and also in the 400 meter relay. Historians place her in the select group of champions like Jesse Owens, Babe Didrikson, and Olga Korbut. She was designated the "Female Athlete of the Year", and also received the Sullivan Award honoring her as the top amateur athlete in the nation. A book about her life was turned into a TV movie.

Here is a link from the 1960 Olympics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqI8NyZtCmo>

Paul wrote: **“We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.” (1 Cor 4:9)** In order to be a “spectacle”, someone has to be watching. Someone is! You may think that no one is watching, but in reality, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, both physical and spiritual.. The writer of Hebrews put it like this: **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb 12:1-3)**

In Hebrews 12:22 - 24 we learn that this great cloud of witnesses includes not only humans around us, but God, Christ, millions of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.

Whatever you do, don't quit the race. You cannot go wrong doing what is right!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce