

A Finish on Crutches

In her book *Bird by Bird*, writer Anne Lamott tells of the time she was asked to write an article on the Special Olympics. She had long had an interest in the event, but didn't have a sense of how to begin the piece or what the finished article should look like.

She writes: "The last track-and-field event before lunch was a 25-yard race run by some unusually handicapped runners and walkers, many of whom seemed completely confused. The race took just about forever. And here it was nearly noon and we were all so hungry. Finally, though, everyone crossed over the line, and those of us in the stands got up to go when we noticed that way down the track, four or five yards from the starting line, was another runner.

"She was a girl of about 16 with a normal-looking face above a wracked and emaciated body. She was on metal crutches, and she was just plugging along, one tiny step after another. Inside I was going, 'Come on, come on, come on,' swabbing at my forehead with anxiety, while she kept taking these two- or three-inch steps forward. What felt like four hours later, she crossed the finish line, and you could see that she was absolutely stoked, in a shy, girlish way."

The girl taught Lamott something important. "I kept replaying the scene of the girl on crutches making her way up the track to the finish line – and all of a sudden my article began to appear out of the grayish green murk. And I could see that it was about tragedy transformed over the years into joy. It was about the beauty of sheer effort."

The story Lamott tells is a classic illustration of the power of determination to succeed. What is it that we want in life – in both our personal and professional pursuits? What is our goal? How badly do we want to achieve it? What adversity must we overcome to get where we want to go?

Those are certainly introspective questions begging for answers.

One fact is obvious, however: The degree of difficulty of the journey influences the extent of the elation arising at its conclusion.

– Beecher Hunter