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## Olympic Fever

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# Olympic Fever



## -By Dale Hill

May signals for most students and teachers the end of the school year. Not so for us. We were loading "our kids" early, getting ready for our annual trek from Anadarko to the Oklahoma Special Olympics. For the Special Olympian, the event represented three fun-filled days of awards, good food, and much love; to the sponsoring teachers, it represented seventy-two hours of non-stop supervision, fears of lost students, and plain old fatigue.

Our students were excited as we loaded their baggage into the supplied school bus. Always before, I had ridden in the bus with the team, but this year I had been assigned a trailing car, which would allow the sponsors more mobility while trying to tie up loose ends during frayed times at the Special Olympics in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Oklahoma State University has a beautiful campus—huge when trying to keep up with twenty or so olympians among five thousand.

As the bus pulled out, I thought about the many other times that I had sponsored these students—the 1985 Special Olympics representing my fifth, and my thoughts went back to the very first one.

Oh yes, I volunteered, but it was more of an assignment than an offering, and I resented it. The olympians had to have one male sponsor for every eight boys who attended; and

as an elementary counselor with no set classes, I was a natural. Leaving my wife and four small children was difficult. Anything could happen to my own family while I was gone some 150 miles away tending to someone else's children. I hated the thought. I vowed before I left that first year that this would be my last Special Olympics. Now here I was doing it all again.

As I watched the bus pull up to the turnpike toll near Oklahoma City, I wondered about our olympic team. Would we have any youngsters who wanted to go home after the first day? How about any bed wetters? I wondered what special situation might come up that would make this Special Olympics special, as they all were.

I remembered the senior on my first trip who hated the thought of being with all of "those" other olympians and hardly smiled. Then I thought about the smiles and the happiness exhibited by the same girl after she had experienced her first Special Olympics. As her attitude changed, so had mine. Special Olympics was

worth the sacrifice that the many volunteers make, hundreds of them from Southwestern Oklahoma.

As our small caravan met the rigors of the big city life, represented by thousands of cars, my thoughts returned to the seriousness of the proposition at hand. The city was no place to daydream. Spring and summer represented a season of construction for highway workers



"Photo finish!" Photograph submitted by Dale Hill

and engineers, and they were out in full force on this day.

The I-35 construction was horrendous for our small caravan consisting of one bus and one car trying to stay together. We struggled for several miles through the myriad of construction signs, workers, and vehicles until we were within only fifteen or twenty minutes of leaving the Oklahoma City area by way of I-35, which emptied its travelers onto the lucious plains of Northern Oklahoma. Suddenly my intense concentration was interrupted. Our bus was in big trouble.

What looked like a huge cloud of billowing smoke came from the engine compartment of the 64-passenger bus. We were still in a road construction area that was devoid of any workers or equipment, and it was difficult for the bus driver to maneuver her bus onto a safe shoulder. As I pulled up behind the bus, smoke seemed to be gushing from the engine, and I could envision a busload of elementary students being burned to death. An electrical fire? A blown engine? Our trip for sure seemed to have come to an abrupt end.

As I opened my car door and stepped out, I heard a booming voice seemingly coming out of nowhere. "Move your car off the roadway. Get back into your vehicle and move your car off the roadway."

Instinctively I looked up, expecting to see my Maker and offered a quick silent prayer; but then I realized that the omnipotent voice was actually coming from behind me and possessed a human quality—not at all Godly. I turned to see an approaching Highway Patrol car; my feet were frozen to the newly laid asphalt. The patrolman repeated the command with authority, and my feet quickly thawed.

While the bus driver and I figured out what the problem was, the patrolman entertained our

students, and they were excited. There were several sponsors and a bus driver thankful for the Oklahoma Highway Patrol that day.

A busted radiator hose! The smoke was nothing but steam coming from a hole in the heater hose. We were relieved and quickly left to get a monkey wrench and find an auto parts store that could supply us with a new hose.

As we returned to fix the bus and get on the road again, we were stunned by the scene that was awaiting us.

Evidently an Oklahoma City television station, KTVY (now KFOR)—Channel 4—had picked up the patrol dispatch and sent a team of crack newsmen down to film

our disaster. The camera was rolling with the reporter interviewing our excited youngsters, some of them hanging out the windows.

We fixed the hose only to find that it had been gashed by a flying fan blade which needed to be replaced. A bunch of Special Olympians and sponsors had to spend some time in Edmond letting their bus mechanic replace the blade while we ate at one of their large schools. To my knowledge, the Edmond Public Schools never charged us a dime for labor or parts.

We made it to Stillwater a little late with the KTVY team there waiting for us—it was their special, human-relations clip of the day. We made it on the six o'clock, ten o'clock, and the next morning's news as their headliner.

Excitement? You bet! But on the way home that year, I asked our Special Olympians what their favorite part of the trip was, and it was unanimous—the medals and a job well done.

*(DALE HILL has been to the Special Olympics, first at Central State University many years ago and then to Oklahoma State University for the past ten years. The Oklahoma Special Olympics held each year during May in Stillwater is one of America's great festivals. Hill is an Elementary Counselor for the Anadarko Public School System.) \**



*"A rewarding end" Photograph submitted by Dale Hill*