

# THE EXTRA HALF-MILE

By Shane Boehmer

(Based on a true story)

*"I'm happy as can be when I am helping others"* (Children's Songbook, 197).

**M**ikel signed his name at the bottom of a clipboard titled "Junior Runners." A man handed him a bright red number, and Mikel ran back to where his mom, dad, sister, and baby brother sat in the bleachers.

"Ready?" Dad asked.

Mikel pinned the number on his shirt. "I think so." He had signed up to run in his town's mile-long race. His family had trained together for weeks, but he still couldn't believe how far a mile really was!

"I'm ready too!" his sister, Isabella, said. She had a bright yellow number on her shirt. Since she was only in kindergarten, she would run in the half-mile race.

"Junior runners to the track!" the announcer called over the speakers. Mikel felt his stomach do a flip-flop. Dad patted him on the shoulder and smiled.

Mikel smiled back, then turned and headed toward the track. It was time to run.

When the buzzer sounded, Mikel ran just like he had practiced. The mile was long, but Mikel knew he could do it. Even when his shoe fell off during the second lap, he put it back on and finished the race as fast as he could.

As Mikel crossed the finish line, Dad gave him a big hug. "Great job! I bet you're ready to rest!"

Mikel only nodded, too busy gulping down air to answer. He had a cramp in his side, and he was hot and sweaty.

"Pee-wee runners to the track!" the announcer called.

Isabella bounced up and down in excitement. "My turn!" She jogged to her place at the starting line and waved at Mikel. "I'm going to run just like you!"

Mikel gave a tired wave back. He walked back to the bleachers with Dad.

The race started, and Isabella began her first lap

around the track. Mikel settled down on the bleachers. It was nice to sit. His legs felt like rubbery spaghetti noodles.

Isabella was on the opposite end of the track now. They couldn't see her very well in the crowd of other runners.

As she finished the first loop, Mikel squinted to see her. "Is she okay?"

Isabella was stumbling slowly down the track. It looked like something was wrong.

Dad stood up from his seat. "What happened?" He called to Isabella as she got closer.

The rest of the runners were far ahead. Isabella stopped running. "I fell down on the other side of the track, and I got scared!" she said as she started to sob.

Dad ran out on the track. "Come on, Isabella! We can do it!" Taking her hand, he started running down the track with her.

As Mikel watched them, he felt his noodley legs get stronger. Hopping off his seat, he ran onto the track and took Isabella by the other hand. "Yeah! We can do it together!"

Isabella looked up at Mikel. She wiped the tears away from her cheeks and smiled. Dad let go of Isabella's hand, and Mikel continued running down the track with her. They were already catching up with the other runners.

Mikel's legs were burning, and he was out of breath. But he was running—running more than he had ever run before!

Mikel looked over at Isabella as he continued to run. She was grinning from ear to ear.

He smiled and tightened his grip on his sister's hand. The race was getting easier with every step. ♦

The author lives in Hawaii, USA.

