

IMAGERY

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11-3-2010

My father attended John Adams High School in Cleveland Ohio in 1924, the year after it had opened. Among other interests he loved to run and was on the track team. He had terrific endurance and was, hence, a miler.

My Uncle Ross also went to the same school and was very quick; he ran the 100 yard dash. In fact, he once competed against the future Olympic hero Jesse Owens in high school and family lore has it that my Uncle Ross beat him in a qualifying race.

It was only natural, therefore, that when I attended high school I ran track. Unfortunately, despite a great interest in training techniques and enjoying the camaraderie of being on a team, I had inherited neither my Uncle's quickness nor my Father's endurance. Therefore, I compromised: I tried to run the half mile. Although I did not make an absolute fool of myself, neither did I accomplish great feats on the cinder track.

My high school history teacher at that time was Mr. Mojeski. He once told the story of the 4 minute mile. For years runners would come close to running the mile under four minutes but no-one could break the 4 minute barrier. Medical schools even postulated that the absolute limit of human physiology was to run the mile in four minutes – it was impossible for the human body to run faster than that. No one could **imagine** themselves running faster than that.

That is until 1954. Roger Bannister was a medical student who trained vigorously. In 1954 in England he ran the first sub-four minute mile in history: 3 minutes 59.4 seconds. People went wild.

And then can you imagine what happened? About 6 weeks later the Australian, John Landy ran under 4 minutes and broke Roger Bannister's record. In fact, in the next 24 months after the first sub-4 minute mile 9 different runners broke the 4 minute mile.

“What” Mr. Mojeski intoned, “do you think happened that suddenly everyone was breaking the 4 minute barrier? -- was it radically new training techniques? No. The athletes saw it as **possible** and could **imagine it** in their mind.”

I can remember closely following Wide World of Sports on TV. Jim McKay was the commentator on the program. Once he was covering a track and field event and interviewing the famous high jumper Dwight Stones. Dwight would stand at the start of the high jump runway, rock back and forth for what seemed an inordinately long time while staring at the high jump bar and then suddenly **explode** in his run towards the bar. At the last second he would hurl himself over the bar which was sitting at what seemed like an impossible height. – and he cleared it. Unbelievable.

Jim McKay came up to him after the jump and asked “Dwight, what were you doing at the beginning of the runway before you jumped?” Dwight said “Well, I look at the bar and then try to see myself clear it. I keep saying ‘7 feet 6 inches.’ I don’t start my run until I can clear the bar in my mind.”

As I remember it Dwight Stones jumped 7 feet 6 and ½ inches that day for a new world record.

That made sense to me. What you see in your mind tends to happen. If you’re on the high dive at a swimming pool and keep saying: “I know I’m going to do a belly flop; I know I’m going to do a belly flop,” guess what? – you’re probably going to do a belly flop.

Shift gears with me for a moment.

Fr. George Lane, a Jesuit, in his book on Christian Spirituality, describes spirituality as a way to holiness, reaching out for union with God.

By the beginning of the fourth century many men and women in the East began to withdraw from the world and live in the wastelands of the interior of Egypt. From this group came the “Desert Fathers.” They believed you had to get away from the noise of the world and go out to the desert to find God. A life of contemplation was emphasized.

Later, in the West, St. Benedict organized monastic communities. Moderation, community, order, work, stability, and prayer were emphasized in order to attempt to unite with God. It was the image of God in their minds that the monks ideally were reaching for.

The Dominicans and Franciscans beginning in the 13th century reached out to others in society.

There were mystics such as St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. The mystics were, in a way, “grasped by God.” They often expressed their experiences in using sensory words such as “touch” and “taste.”

In the 16th century St. Ignatius Loyola emphasized spirituality not only of prayer and commitment but **action** and the realization of spiritual development through following the will of God while being in the world. That’s how you united with God.

When we think of spirituality, listening about the giants of spirituality may make us feel that we could not possibly reach God in this life as they have. But, let’s remember that they all started with the same way: they imagined God.

Maybe **we** need to start with an image in **our** mind -- an image such as seeing Christ walking and us trying to touch his gown.

Maybe us reaching up and touching the benevolent face of God.

We can do it.

Tutto e possibile. All is possible.

Don’t start by saying “I know I’m going to do a belly flop.”

Start by saying: “7 feet, 7 inches.”