



## “AND NOBODY TRIED TO WIN!”

Edited by Wally Wood

NOTE: In the summer of 1972, this column was written by a sports reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* and syndicated to newspapers across the nation, dealing with the Special Olympics held at UCLA. It was read over the air by [Dr. Mouzon Biggs](#), then-associate pastor at First Methodist Church in Houston, Texas. In 1980, he became senior pastor of [Boston Avenue United Methodist Church](#) in Tulsa OK. He retired in 2013.

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“I guess if all of us could have one wish, it would be to remain at age 7 – a magical time when the world seemed good and we believed it was peopled by creatures like the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, and Santa Claus, and happiness was an around-the-clock proposition. But we call people who remain in that wistful time-zone, the ‘retarded ones.’ That is to say, they live in a world without malice. They’ve stopped well short of the urge to kill or to covet. They’ve never come upon the low cunning which besets the ‘unretarded’ majority. They’ve never learned to lie, to cheat, to steal. They have to be institutionalized, not because they’re a threat to society, but because society is a threat to them. Dale Evans once called them ‘angels unaware.’

“Some 300 of these special people were in our midst this week for the Special Olympics. These are children who have learning impediments, thus they’ve not learned words like hate, victory, revenge, kill or cheat which, of course, makes them culturally deprived. You very quickly learn what’s so very special about these Special Olympics – nobody’s trying to win. There were no false starts. Every athlete performed as if he were alone on the track. It was an achievement for some just to know the direction.

“There were no tears from the losers. In fact, there were no losers. You take Alice, who ran in one of the lower divisions of the 300 yard run. I use the word ‘ran’ loosely. You can tell right away that Alice is no runner. Alice is one of those multiply-handicapped. An obvious glandular case, her torso is heavy with fat, and it took her several seconds just to get out of the starting blocks. She peered down the track in dismay from behind her myopic spectacles. The field was in the home-stretch before Alice even got started. She lost the race by 200

alone on the track, holding up the race that was next to start.

“But from the stands her fellow competitors, who had already finished, her friends, came shouts of encouragement and hand-clapping unlike any I’d ever heard, and Alice would start up again. About 20 yards from the finish, she got this expression of pure joy on her face as she strained and concentrated and actually sprinted across the finish line where she collapsed happily into the arms of her friends.

“That’s what the Special Olympics was all about. There are stories of the time the winning runner knew a companion had tripped and fallen, and he circled back to help his pal to his feet, costing himself one of the gold medals. You hear that, and your mind flashes back to an auto race where a driver sped past a burning car that had his own brother inside. And you ask yourself, ‘who is retarded?’

“There was a boy from Chicago who ran on crutches, a girl who long-jumped on an artificial leg. There was a blind boy who followed the voice of his coach around the track. There was a basketball game without a single intentional foul. There was the boy who finished the race and then kept running around and around the track just because it made him feel so good ...

“The athletes we remember are not the flawless, but the great human beings who have reached beyond themselves to achieve some glorious goal. It’s no trick to win the long-jump when you’ve got two legs, and neither one of them is made of metal. It’s no achievement to win the mile when you can see which way to go. It’s no honor to win the 440 when a fellow athlete stumbles and falls and you don’t stop to help them up again.

“There were no losers – everybody was a winner!”

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Dr. Biggs adds: “What is the church but a group of people who come with braces on their legs and bandages on their hearts, to hear a God speak to them a word for winning. ‘Bring your problems to Me. Bring your broken heart, your broken dreams, bring everything you’ve got. I’m here to make losers into winners!’ (See Mat. 11:28-30) They said, ‘Is this the son of Joseph?’ He is the Son of God!” ■