

CALIFORNIA INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

Kenny King Youth Fitness

By Kenny King, Jr.
For the 1988 CIM Program

Dad had always felt that he stayed in good shape by watching his diet, maintaining a positive attitude about life, and exercising. Even as a young person working in San Francisco, he preferred running home from work, rather than taking the streetcar both ways. He continued on, throughout his life and working career, to take every advantage of an opportunity to exercise when possible. This included such things as his habit of parking his car some distance from a store and then running to and from his destination, as well as taking other short runs whenever he could. He would use stairs (always taking two steps at a time) instead of an elevator, or do other things for exercise that he could fit within his daily activities.

Dad's earliest running hero was Larry Lewis (a San Francisco runner who ran until he was over 100 years old). Dad was inspired by this older man's determination and spirit, and he had kept a yellowed, late 1960's, newspaper clipping containing a picture and story of Lewis.

When the company that Dad worked for here in Sacramento moved its plant to another state, his "retirement" at 66 years old was not satisfactory. He said, "I don't want to let that old rocking chair get me", and so he took up long distance running. He started off at a beginner's pace for short distances, and began to improve his times and distances on a regular basis. He read everything that he could about running and kept careful track of his improvement.

Dad's favorite race was the Bay to Breakers, which we started running in 1980. We ran nine Bay to Breakers races, and each year he would look forward to the following year of fun and excitement, which he always had at that run. Sacramento favorites were the Sacramento Half-Marathon, the old Out and About Run in 1980, 1981 and 1982, the Weinstocks Run, and the Dusty Morgan monthly run, which he faithfully ran from about 1982 on. He ran the California International Marathon in 1983, and 1984, and finished both races. (He always joked about himself "holding the course record" for his age in the CIM since he was the oldest person in the race, and 1983 was the first year for the CIM.) He also ran the Celebrity Run last year. Other San Francisco races that he looked forward to each year included the Presidio 10, and the Bay Bridge Run. There were few runs that he didn't like, because each time he would not only enjoy the running, but would always have the opportunity to meet old friends, as well as make new friends.

In the 1980s, Dad was inspired by runners such as Ivor Welch (who was from the San Francisco Bay Area and ran regularly at 90+ years old), Ruth Rothfarb (who was running marathons at 80+ years old), and others who were Masters runners. While these people, and other division front-runners who were not as well known, but who were out there running, trying just as hard, whether young or old, to do the best that they could. In most of the races that he ran, he would often come across someone who was struggling, and he would offer them encouragement, even to the point of slowing his pace to help that person. He liked doing this and people responded with appreciation for his cheerful, positive attitude and for taking the time to help.

Dad's love of running never decreased, but later on, he varied his exercise program by lifting weights, and working out on stationary bicycle and rowing machine, while maintaining his running mileage (which would vary from four to seven or more miles a day). He had said many times that he believed that "running may not make me live any longer, but it's sure going to make me live better while I'm here." Anyone who knew Dad, or watched him run, could see that that was true.

Earlier this year, at the Bay to Breakers in San Francisco, Sacramento's oldest runner at age 77 never reached the finish line of his favorite run. Kenny King passed away just one hundred yards from the finish line, doing what he loved best to do, running and trying. In Kenny's honor, and as a dedication to his never ending spirit, the Sacramento Long Distance Running Association renamed the 5K Celebrity Run held the day before the marathon to the Kenny King Fun Run. In addition, SLDRA has undertaken a project to increase the fitness and self-esteem of our youth. This too has been named in Kenny's honor.

The Kenny King Youth Fitness Program began this fall in the San Juan Unified School District. Next spring the program will expand to the parochial school district, and in the fall of 1989 will be countywide. The intent of the program is to have kids of elementary school age run one or two days a week. The runs are designed to be fun, with participation and completion as the main goals. When a child accumulates a particular number of miles (5K, 10K, Half-Marathon and Marathon), they receive a certificate of completion. Along the way to these levels, running events like cross-country races, fun runs and track meets are built into the program.

The program as it is now designed, relies on physical education specialists at the schools, or individual teachers. We need their help to get kids motivated. We wish to build parent support into the program as well. We have tried to encourage one run a week at home with a parent. Running with mom or dad, sister or brother is one way to help strengthen the family bond. It may also be a way to get some coach potatoes out the door!

This fall close to one thousand kids from the San Juan district took part in our program. We feel that we are on the right road to providing a constructive program for the kids, and a new generation of runners. But we need your help to keep this program moving. We need you to get the program going in the school that your child attends. Parents are powerful tools when it comes to teaching, both in motivating teachers and supporting your kids at home. If you want to help, please call or write SLDRA for more information. And by the way, over two hundred teachers run the marathon each year, so let's hear from you too!