

# He came through

He's a shy sort of kid, well mannered and eager to please, but just a little undermotivated. That's why he was sent off to endure the rigors and rigid routine of St. John's School in Claremont.

He took to the school's academic program like a duck to water. Small classes, lots of personal treatment, and no where to hide.

He didn't know what hit him when he got his first taste of the institution's outdoor program that pits boys from soft urban environments up against elements, as well as their own lack of toughness. The two week canoe expedition in Northern Ontario proved to be an experience in both endurance and basic survival.

But he grew a little, and gradually learned how to hold his own, despite his being the youngest in a school of 55 boys, some of whom are being sent there as a last ditch effort to straighten out lives heading in all the wrong directions.

His quiet steadiness led to his being chosen as one of the team captains for the annual St. John's snowshoe race, a grueling ordeal that sees the kids up at 4:30 a.m. on race day so they can beat out their 23 miles before sundown.

He had never been asked to lead anything in his life, and there was some doubt he'd be up to it. After all, he was just not a take charge kind of 12-year-old.

The training runs that led up to the big day proved inconclusive. One week, his outfit would be up near the top, the next week, they would slip towards the back of the pack.

Was he taking control, was he tuning into the requirements of leadership, the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle prodding needed to keep his charges from succumbing to the aches and pains that can sour a youngster's attitude, especially late in the race when simply finishing can become the only concern?

Race day saw his team holding its own — until, inexplicably, the collective chemistry went sour. His dad, so hopeful this could be a positive experience to help the boy come into his own, watched with disappointment as his son's unit pulled into the mid-point juice break dead last in a four-team race, and seemingly without inspiration.

He took his son aside during the three minute breather, and reminded him this was what all the hard work had been leading up to, that leadership required one seize the moment and bring out hidden qualities in both the leader himself, and those he was assigned to lead. Give yourself something to remember 20 years from now, he told him.

The team trundled off and soon disappeared in the nearby hills. The boy's father watched the white sweater with the faded pink stripes that made it so easy to identify his son among the others, trying to make sense of what was apparently happening as they faded into the bush.

Now the whole point of the marathon on snowshoes is for the boys to fight their own personal battles. And for some, those a little more frail than others, those who have experienced handicaps like asthma or whatever, it's truly a victory just to complete the course. Winning the race is, in many ways, of secondary importance.

But for this boy, strong of body and high on potential, this was more a test of his ability to prove his worth to himself and others in terms of taking on the responsibility of leadership. To place last would represent failure for him.

The parents lined up at day's end, straining their eyes as the lead teams made the turn that led to the finish line in front of the school.



**FROM WHERE I LIVE**  
**Bruce Stapley**

The winning team, the one that had taken control early and never looked back, came clomping down the road. About 10 minutes later, the second place team came into distant view. And as they trudged wearily into sight, it was the white sweater with the faded pink stripes one parent noticed above all the rest.

Somehow, the captain had managed to inspire his troops. The comeback had been accomplished.

I was very proud of my son Shane in this year's snowshoe race, that Saturday in February.



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