

A Story of One
By Dennis Atkins

This weekend, I received my sixth visit from the St. Charles Police Department. A neighbor has continued to report me for running in the middle of the street in our subdivision. The complaint is that I am a public nuisance and impeding traffic. All 6 visits from the Police have been very professional. All officers have been very supportive, encouraging, and concerned for my safety. I am a marathon runner and have been running since April 1978. I run for hours every week to keep in running shape.

So why am I running down the middle of the street?

Because it provides me with the only obstacle free guide I have to run with. I have an eye disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa. This disease has progressed to the point where I can only see shadows and light and dark. The good Lord has strengthened me to continue to run even though I have very limited sight. My running has helped me cope with the fact that I am going blind.

Many of us are facing or have faced major life challenges. My life challenge continues every day. What is your life's challenge?

I am presently training for my 15th marathon. I have a goal to run 75,000 miles with a lifetime goal of 100,000 miles. To date, I have ran over 68,000 miles. So you see, continuing to run is a major focus for me.

Every day I take 35 steps to my starting point. For the first 15 minutes or so, I run by using the feel of my legs. Every day the good Lord has helped my eyes focus to see the black expansion joint in the middle of the street. So my neighbor is right in that I run in the middle of the street. I do this for a purpose, to avoid the parked cars, mail boxes, storm drains and the weekly trash cans, along the side of the road and the sidewalks. My hearing is excellent so when hearing a car coming, I move to the side of the road. There is very little traffic in Hollow Brook. This was a major factor for me when I built a home here.

I am familiar with my subdivision where I run safely every day. Every neighbor is supportive and encourages me except one. I have no ill feelings for my neighbor who has reported me to the Police six times. The police are required to respond to each call. This requires me to explain my reasons for running in the middle of the street. Do you ever get tired of having to explain your actions?

I wish this neighbor could understand my world. The St. Charles Mayor Sally Faith and the St. Charles Police have said that I can continue to run without any repercussions. I am thankful for this decision.

In most ways, I am not different than anyone else. We all have challenges to face in our life. You may have lost a love one, a job, have an illness, or some other hurdle to face. Like you, individuals with disabilities must find a way to continue. This is exactly what I am doing when I run. I must face my fears every day. I am asking that everyone stop and take the time to get to know someone like me.

I have used my running determination to encourage others to never give up. Individuals with disabilities want to have the same rights to live independently in their communities. Is this not your same wish?

If you have interest in my story check out my website DennisAtkins.com . My website will let you see how I want to make a difference with my life. My limited sight has never slowed me down to doing the

things I want to do. I continue to pursue my career with American Family, have attained my Doctorate in Business Administration, and volunteer my service to our community and state.

One person can make a huge difference. Someone has to be the person to start and increase the understanding. Individuals with disabilities face this daily. My role is helping to make this happen. What is your role? Don't be afraid to get to know someone that may be a little different than you. Also individuals with disabilities are great role models and perfect employees. We never give up.

I invite my neighbor to get to know me. Do you want to go for a run? I am just trying to find my way in a seeing world.

Will you join me in helping to bring about a greater understanding? If you will join me then this no longer is a story of one.

Dennis W. Atkins