



Run For Your Life

*Steve Palmquist
English, Jr.*

THE EARLY morning sun spread its lazy rays across the room and an occasional beam broke ranks to leap at my sleeping eyes. My mind fought to retain the comfortable cobwebs it had accumulated during the night and I jerked the covers up over my head.

I just lay there awhile and let the muffled conversation from downstairs sift its way into my fortress. By now I was fully awake. I folded the sheet back neatly over my chest and rolled over onto my belly. I pressed my nose into the pillow and filled my lungs with the fresh odor that comes from drying bed-clothes in the wind. I was going to miss Mom's clean sheets. I was going to miss Mom. I was going to miss a lot of things.

I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and let them feast on my tidy little room. I focused on the window frame and saw that the shade had been raised during the night. Somehow Mom always discovered and foiled my plans to sleep-in. She knew that the sun through my east window was a better alarm clock than anything on the market.

I looked around the room and let the lustre from the mellow blue and red ribbons sink into my consciousness. I remembered the hundreds of hours of concentration, sweat,

and effort that had gone into winning those satin tokens.

Being captain of the track team had meant so much then; it had been an impressive title, but I knew now I hadn't been captain because I was a leader, but because I was the best runner.

Running had been easy, second nature. And it had taken guts. The last two-hundred yards of the half-mile were really rough, but I'd always finished because it was expected of me. The coach always wanted a faster time. But when I'd hung up my track shoes after the big conference meet, I'd thought my running days were over.

I looked into my closet. Oh, yes, they were still there, hanging over a peg.

I swung my feet over the side of the bed. My toes were met by the familiar, clammy surface of the linoleum. My feet squeaked like new shoes as the sole pulled reluctantly away from the floor with each step.

I reached the closet and picked the shoes from their peg on the wall. They were lighter than I remembered. My fingers left prints in the thin envelope of dust that dulled the royal-blue leather. But the three narrow racing stripes still stood out boldly. I traced the delicate curve of the arch with my fingers and let the shoes drop to the floor. This time I wouldn't need them. And this time, running wasn't second nature.

I rammed my fist into the closet wall; it made a loud clunk. Damn it, why had I done *that*? Now the folks would know I was up. I cast a hasty glance at the clock. Nine a.m., only thirteen hours until the plane left. Thirteen struck me as being appropriate.

"Are you awake, Allen?"

"Yeah, Mom, I'll be right down." Why did she always ask questions that she already knew the answer to?

I pulled the wrinkled T-shirt over my head and stooped to look under the bed for my levis. I found them, jerked them on, and walked over to my dresser. I stood a long time looking at the reflection. Was there *really* a coward hiding behind that bush of long black hair? This bearded person surely couldn't be the clean-cut track captain that had always lived up to other people's expectations.

My eyes dropped, half in shame, but also because the

blue and white envelope on top of the dresser demanded recognition. I reached out and picked it up.

I pulled it open and drew out the ticket for the tenth time since I had bought it. Omaha to Montreal, one way. Nothing strange about that except that my destination was supposed to be Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. As far as everyone knew, I was leaving for basic training.

I slipped the ticket gently back into the envelope and started toward the stairway. I paused for a moment to look at the framed collection that had always haunted the hallway.

The walnut frame surrounded the field of midnight-blue velvet. The Purple Heart clashed with the velvet and the Distinguished Service Medal kept its vigil over its brood of three oak-leaf clusters.

Dad was so damned proud to have served. And for what, so his son could run off to Canada when his number was called? I guess so, because that's the way it is. But how does a guy break his dad's heart gently? How does he break a Purple Heart?

"Well, Al, you have thirteen hours to find out," I whispered as I started down the stairs.

Haiku

Barb Spitz

English, Sr.

Yellow, green and blue —
 on every bush and roadside,
 Springtime writes Haiku.