

***literature for children***

**The Blue Runner**

*by Jennifer Red E. Sabela*

Lito sat on a bench facing the oval in their community park. He wiped away his tears as he recalled how Bulyo and the kids teased him, “Lito Lampa” which means “Unsteady Lito.” His playmates gave him this name because he was very unsteady on his feet. Earlier that day, Bulyo kicked him out of their team because he was always caught by their opponents in a chasing game. Yesterday his face hit the ground during a sack race and the other day he tripped several times while playing skipping rope with other kids.

Among the athletes who practiced their sports in the oval, the one who captured Lito’s attention was the guy in a blue running outfit. Nobody knew his real name and background. To the townspeople he was “Blue Runner” because he always wore blue jersey and blue shorts. All they knew about him was that he practiced daily in the oval and won consistently in Sunday fun runs.

“I bet he has never stumbled.” Lito told himself. “He is so lucky to be given strong legs. How I wish my legs were as strong as his so that Bulyo would not bully me.” Lito dusted his bruised knees which had earlier hit the ground. As he was about to leave, he heard someone yell.

“Hey Kid!”

Lito looked around and saw Blue Runner running towards him and signaling him to stop.

“You left these in the oval yesterday.” Blue Runner handed the rubber shoes to Lito who then shyly accepted them. “You shouldn’t leave your rubber shoes anywhere because they are expensive. There are athletes who badly need a pair of rubber shoes but couldn’t afford to buy one.”

He then smiled at Lito who was beginning to look nervous. “Do you mind if we chat for a while?”

Lito studied Blue Runner’s friendly face for seconds and then sat beside him.

“What’s your name, Kid?”

“They call me Lito Lampa, Sir.”

“Your name is Lito, not Lito Lampa, just Lito! Are those kids giving you a hard time?” Blue Runner pointed at Bulyo and the bullies who were still playing a chasing game.

Lito nodded.

“Are they the reason why you threw away your rubber shoes yesterday?”

Lito sensed Blue Runner’s genuine concern and so he opened up to him. “I was born with weak legs, Sir. Nobody wants to play with me because I often stumble while playing. Last week, Papa bought me these stability rubber shoes to keep me from tripping but I still did. I guess these shoes are useless.”

“Lito, it’s wrong to throw away something that was given to you especially when you do not know the sacrifices the giver had to make just to get it for you.”

Lito felt guilty as he realized that his father worked overtime for several days just to buy the shoes. “Sir, you don’t know how it feels like to be out of place just because you are born with weak legs.”

Blue Runner laughed as he softly patted Lito’s head. “Everybody is born with weak legs. It’s what one does with his legs that make all the difference. Trust me Lito, I know how it feels like to be in your shoes. I was just lucky to meet in my sixth grade, Coach Blue who taught me that everyone has the power to change his present circumstance.”

Blue Runner studied the reaction of Lito who was paying attention to every word he said. “Hey, do you want to strengthen your legs?”

“Yes!” Lito replied with excitement.

“Do you believe that you have the power to change your present circumstance, being bullied by Bulyo and always tripping?”

“Yes!”

“Do you want to learn how to run?”

“Yes!”

“Good. Meet me here in the oval everyday at five in the morning. Do not be late and do not forget to first ask permission from your parents. Oh by the way, wear your rubber shoes.”

The next morning, Lito excitedly showed up in the oval.

“You’re thirty minutes late!”

“Huh? S-sorry Sir. I had difficulty getting out of bed very early in the morning.”

Blue Runner lectured Lito, “If you want to change your present circumstance and to run fast, you have to learn the first lesson which is discipline. Discipline means self control. You practice discipline by sleeping early at night to be able to wake up early the next day. You see Lito, we can only practice from five to six thirty because you have a seven thirty class. That’s why you have to come on time for our training.”

Lito nodded in agreement.

“You also practice discipline by not eating junk food and by taking only nutritious food like fruits, vegetables, rice, fish and milk.”

Lito frowned. “Milk? But I’ve never liked its taste, Sir.”

“Yes. Runners have to drink milk upon waking up in the morning, right after training and before going to bed at night. Milk contains calcium which strengthens your bones. To improve its taste, you can mix it with chocolate powder.”

Lito smiled. “I like chocolate.”

“Discipline means doing something not because you like it but because it is good for you. This means that you also have to get eight hours of sleep to have a strong body.”

Blue Runner glanced at his watch. “We cannot train this morning because you will be late for your seven-thirty class. Do you see what happens when we fail to practice discipline? Go now but be here tomorrow by five in the morning. Do not be late!”

Lito rushed home after school to do his homework, took his supper early, skipped watching TV, set the alarm to four a.m., drank chocolate milk and went to bed at eight in the evening.

“You’re on time! Good. You finally know the meaning of discipline.” Blue Runner smiled as he wiped off Lito’s chocolate milk mustache.

“The second lesson which I want you to master is prayer. We should pray upon waking up in the morning and just before going to bed at night. We should also pray before and after our training. Our body is God’s gift to us so we have to use it to glorify Him. If we train for a race to please God, He will surely bless our efforts.”

Blue Runner pulled out from his wallet an old picture of a man wearing blue running clothes and showed it to Lito. “This coach once said that the secret to winning in races is to train hard as if

everything depends on oneself and to pray hard as if everything depends on God. He taught me that if I win, I should offer my medal to God but if I lose, I should still thank Him for a good run.”

Blue Runner began their training with a prayer followed by some warm up exercises. “Now Lito, we will slowly jog around the oval. Our goal this morning is to complete one loop. Are you ready?”

Lito nodded.

After jogging with Blue Runner for thirty seconds, he stopped. “I cannot do it anymore, Sir. I’m running out of breath. I think I have weak lungs.”

“Lesson number three is perseverance. It’s normal to run out of breath because your lungs are not yet used to jogging. Just persevere, meaning, just continue to jog for as long as you can. If you experience shortness of breath, walk then jog again. If you will just train everyday in spite of difficulties, soon you will be able to jog nonstop for more than an hour. But today, our goal is just to finish one loop. Can we try again?”

Lito persevered in alternating jogging and walking until he completed one loop. Afterwards the two did cool down exercises and thanked God for a successful training. At six thirty, Lito rushed home to prepare for school.

In the succeeding days, Lito came to the oval on time, prayed before doing warm up exercises, jogged-walked-jogged around the oval, did cool down exercises, and then thanked God for a successful training. At the end of his first week of training, he could already finish one loop without walk-breaks and at the end of the second week, he could already do two loops.

On the third Monday of Lito’s training, Bulyo and his playmates passed by the oval and saw Lito practice with Blue Runner. The bullies decided to watch the duo. When Lito became conscious that the bullies were watching him jog, he doubled his speed to impress them. As he was about to finish two loops, he tripped on a rock and fell to the ground.

The kids laughed so hard. Bulyo shouted, “You will never change, Lito Lampa. You’re just wasting your time as well as ours. Let’s go guys.”

“Lito Lampa,” the kids chanted as they walked away.

Lito remained on the ground, sprawling on his stomach and sobbing.

Blue Runner ordered him to get up and when he refused, Blue Runner raised his voice at him. “I said get up! Lesson number four in running is immediately rising after a fall. In life, sometimes we

stumble. Losers stay flat on the ground after a fall but winners rise immediately and continue running because they are determined to reach the finish line.”

Blue Runner helped Lito get up and then continued his sermon. “Lesson number five is not minding others’ opinions because they will draw your attention away from your goal. In life, there will always be people who will criticize you. Do not pay attention to them. Focus on your goal instead. Remember that you run to impress God rather than people so it does not matter what other people say about you.”

Lito continued to train every morning. Sometimes Bulyo and the kids watched him train but their presence and remarks no longer mattered to him. He finally understood that he came to the oval to train hard and to please no one else except God with his performance.

One Friday morning, Blue Runner handed Lito a gift and said, “Lito, you’ve successfully changed your undesirable circumstance by practicing self discipline, praying, persevering, rising immediately after a fall and not minding the opinions of others. You’ve mastered all the five lessons I taught you and for that I got you something.”

Lito hurriedly opened his gift and was shocked to find a blue jersey, a pair of blue shorts and a 5k race bib.

“I believe that you are ready for your first race.”

Lito smiled and hugged Blue Runner as he whispered his genuine thanks to him.

On the following Sunday, as Lito nervously waited for the race to begin, he said a prayer. “God, thank You for giving me a coach who helped me strengthen my legs. I trained hard and now I leave the result of the race to You. This race is for You.”

Lito looked stunning in his blue outfit as he walked the streets of their barangay. But what made him even more stunning was the gold medal with inscription “First Place, 5K” hanging on his neck. He walked side by side with Blue Runner who was also wearing a gold medal with inscription “First Place, 42 K.” Kids including Bulyo gathered around Lito to ask about his first experience in racing. Some kids started to call him “Blue Lito” but nobody dared to call him “Lito Lampa” that day.

While Lito was chatting with Bulyo and the rest of the kids about his first race, Blue Runner pulled him aside. Blue Runner then pointed him in the direction of a kid sobbing and sitting alone on what used to be his favorite bench. Blue Runner then said, “There’s one more lesson you have to learn, Kid. Lesson number six is imparting your knowledge to someone who needs it most.”

Blue Lito smiled widely in agreement and ran speedily towards the lonesome kid.