

# Olympic spirit not just Snickers, 7-Up

While visiting a friend in Portland this weekend, I was fortunate enough to personally witness the Olympic torch relay.

I was fortunate, however, not because I had an individual privilege in seeing it. There was no expensive ticket to buy or seat to reserve, and anyone who cared to could simply step out of the office or walk down the street to watch both runner and flame pass by.

And I was fortunate not in the sense of being in the right place at the right time, as the local radio and television reports kept everyone informed of the torch's progress hours in advance.

The real reason I feel lucky to have seen it is because being there on the side

of the road while the caravan went by changed my attitude about the relay and about the Olympics as a whole.

To be honest, I originally thought the whole thing was about as ridiculous and commercialized as some of the plastic garbage people fill their lawns with around Christmas.

Think of it, people paying up to \$3,000 a shot just to lug an oversized cigarette lighter around through hot deserts or over mountains in the dark. It definitely wasn't my idea of a cheap thrill.

And when it comes to the Olympics, competition aside, I've seen more than I can stomach of official pop, cars, clothes, candy bars, pain relievers or jock straps — you just name it and, sure enough, some company is getting its capitalistic hands into the athletic arena.

Go ahead and call me a communist or a socialist, but I've also had it with big business, and American Telephone & Telegraph is no exception. After my last phone bill, I didn't like the thought of corporate profits promoting what I believed was more self advertisement than sincere sponsorship.

From the comfort of a car, I'd questioned the sanity of the onlookers who lined the long boulevard waiting there



Junction City Jaycee Women unfurled their banner along Ivy Street and waited patiently for the torch to pass.



American flags of all sizes lined the route of the Olympic torch, making the occasion seem like an encore of the Fourth of July.

for what must have been hours. The kids seemed brainwashed, too. Many of them standing in a sort of expectant awe or dancing around and waving miniature flags in their excitement. I would have been content to merely catch a picture of it on the late news or in the morning paper.

But later on the curb, with hundreds of people around, I realized I was wrong.

Here he came, this average-looking man, jogging up the street while surrounded by flashing lights and cheers. In appearance, he was no picture of the ideal Olympian athlete, and I doubt he even wore anything with an Adidas or Nike label on it.

But in all his exhaustion, sweat and pain, this anonymous man always held the torch high above his head. And as we all clapped and made our hoorahs, it

suddenly struck me that the man out there represented us — just average people who would probably never run, jump or swim in the Olympics.

There we were, people who usually support this ominous event only from our family rooms, now participating in a tradition that's spanned centuries.

The man finally passed, not seeming to notice the people, lights and noise that surrounded him. Even the fellow runners and motorcycle police officers who pulled up beside him to chat failed to turn his seriously-expressed face from its forward look.

But we didn't care, for not only had we just come within feet of the Olympic tradition, we had realized the Olympian within ourselves.

Commentary by Julie Shippen  
Photos by Michael Clapp

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