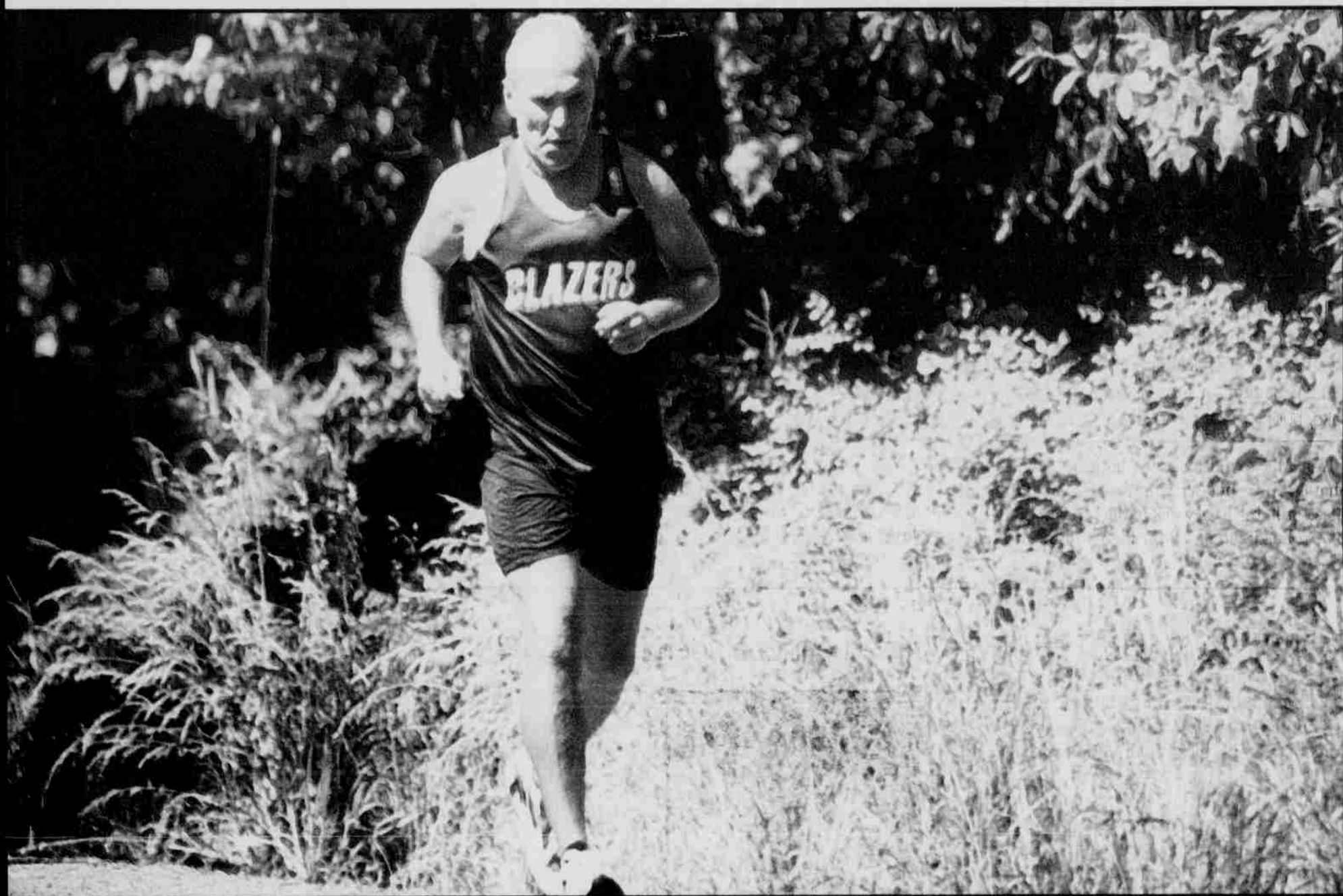


Older and Might Just Be In the Best Shape of His Life



Life Changes — Tribal Elder Don Simmons said running saved his life and that he hasn't gotten sick since he started running years ago. Simmons had to cut back on his running to save his knees, but he still pounds out two miles a day.

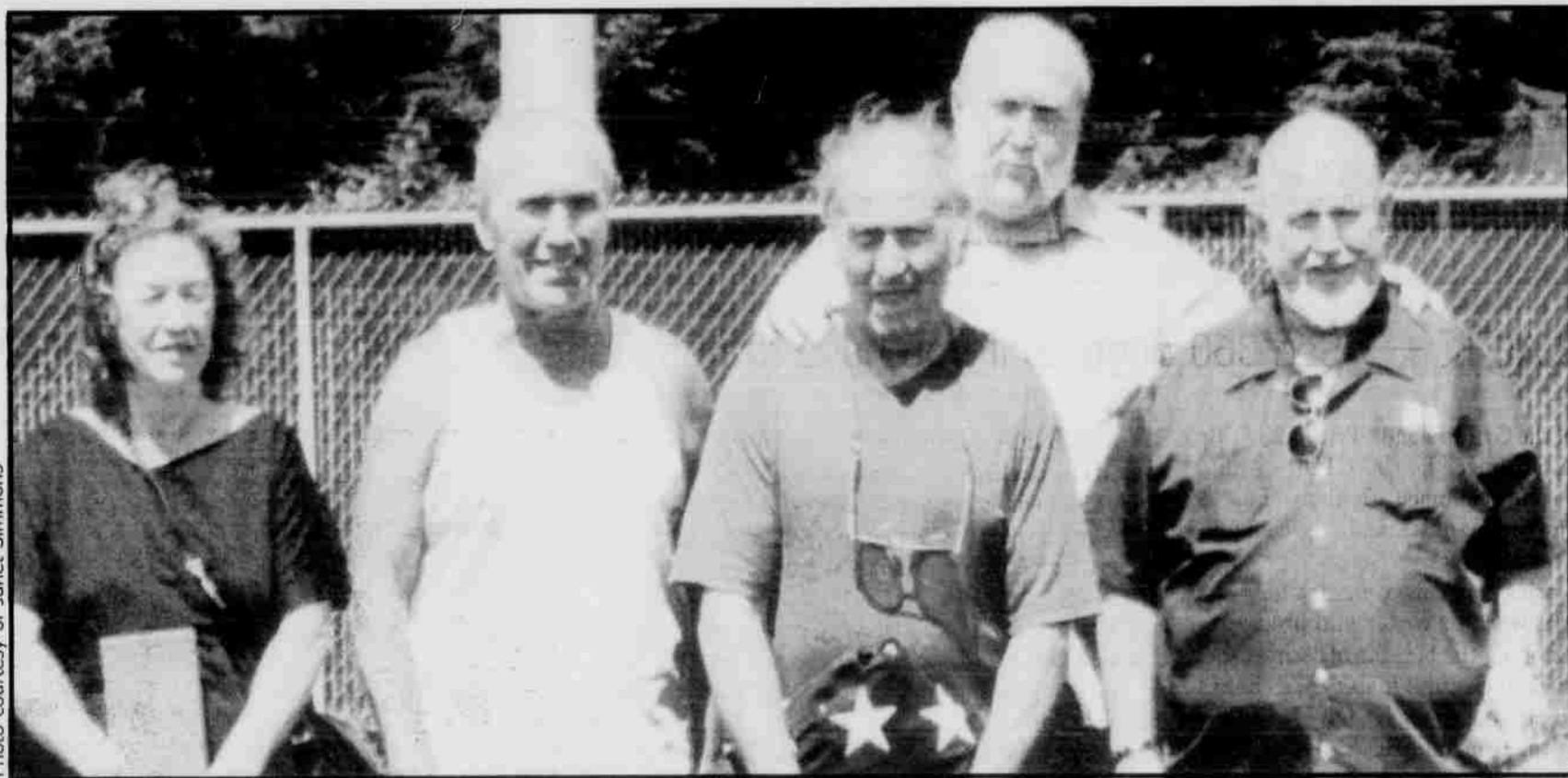


Photo courtesy of Janet Simmons

Family — The family in Grand Ronde for Sam Jr.'s funeral, July 2002. Left to right are: Claudia, Donald, William, Leroy, (in back) and Walter.

life. Stress is a killer, but I don't have it," he said.

A second turning point in Don's life came when he was walking down the street one day. A couple of people jogged by him. He looked at them jog away and decided that he wanted to take up running.

He walked down to the bus station, rented a locker to put his backpack in and took off running. And he hasn't stopped since.

"Running saved my life," Simmons said. "My whole life changed again. I ran every day. I still do. And I went all out, too. I hit the wall the first day. But it was such a high. I'd find the steepest hill in Seattle, Queen Anne Hill, and run up it. I ran everywhere. I even ran to pay my cable bill," he said. Don began to change.

He felt better. He looked better. He even slept better.

He started doing things he never did before, like reading, going to museums, or going to the coast.

"And now I feel better than I have in my entire life. I've never been sick since I started running. And I don't keep a pill in the house," he said.

Don has toned down the running to save his knees, now only running two miles a day. Nonetheless, he can frequently be seen around the Grand Ronde area, either jogging or riding his bicycle. He likes to go down to the casino to socialize. He recently studied for and passed his G.E.D. test.

He lifts weights regularly, watches his diet and doesn't drink coffee.

Now that he's living in the Elder's housing, Simmons said, he has time to take care of himself and appreciate the simple things in life.

"I'm grateful," he said. "These places here are nice. You know what I like about living here? No fences. That's nice. The other nice thing is that lot of my childhood friends are here with me right now — Jesse Robertson, Wayne Sells, Lee Graim, Candy George, a lot of folks. I have really good neighbors," he said.

We walked outside and looked at the mountain.

"But the best part is being able to look out and see Spirit Mountain.

I look at it every day. There were times I thought I'd never see it again," he said.

"I'm grateful every day I see it." ■