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West Texas *living*

Father-daughter duo bond while running for charity

By Sara Higgins

Staff Writer

When Bill Berry ran his first marathon with his daughter, Emma, he had one goal: to run the entire 27.2 miles. Emma, who was 15 at the time, fell behind at the 16-mile mark and encouraged her father to keep going. He ran all the way to the finish line, but as he waited alone for his daughter to join him in his accomplishment, he came to a harsh realization.

"It struck me that I was missing the whole reason why I was going through all that torment in the first place," he said.

After that first race, Bill's one goal became three: to try and run the whole race, have fun and not get hurt and, above all, to stay together. For the four marathons the two have run together since, they've never left each other's side.

Bill never thought he'd actually be running that first marathon in spring 2009 at the Big

D in Dallas. When Emma started expressing interest in running a marathon, he offered to tag along for support, not knowing what he was really getting into.

"I wanted to inspire her so I told her, 'I'll run with you,'" Bill recalled, "but I also thought it was a pretty safe bet. Lo and behold, she started training her little heart out, and I had to stay true to my word."

Bill was a little scared after his first

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BIG D
Emma and Bill Berry celebrate after completing their first marathon together in Dallas in 2009.

Courtesy photo



happy
FATHER'S DAY

In celebration of Father's Day, The Reporter-Telegram asked readers to submit photos of fathers with their children. Micah Duncan, right, holds his 5-month-old daughter, Brinley. FAR RIGHT: Dylan Daylong, 3, watches as his father, Dustin Daylong, shaves. BELOW: James Smith sits with daughter, Dylan, 4, and brother, 7, at a centered



MARATHON

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marathon experience due to wearing shoes that didn't fit quite right, so Emma ran one marathon without her dad at Crossroads in Odessa that fall. When the two geared up to run their second marathon as a pair, Emma had an idea. She wanted to run with a purpose. She decided to use her newfound passion for running to benefit the Midland Life Center, a non-profit, faith-based organization that promotes abstinence and provides education for mothers- and fathers-to-be. She volunteered throughout high school at the organization, where both of her parents are on the advisory board.

"I've always just felt really strongly for the Life Center and what they do and their mission," she said. "When I realized you can raise money through running, it seemed like a no-brainer. That gave me a purpose, which can be hard when you're in high school."

Emma and her mother, Lisa, sent out letters to friends, family and potential sponsors to raise money for the organization. For the two marathons Emma and her dad have run as fundraisers, they were able to help the Life Center raise more than \$4,600. The duo also ran to benefit the Scottish Rite Hospital in Dallas, where the children of one of Bill's co-workers have received treatment.

The two train together whenever possible leading up to marathons, though it's hard to match up their schedules in the off-season.

"The good thing about training is we get to do it together," she said.

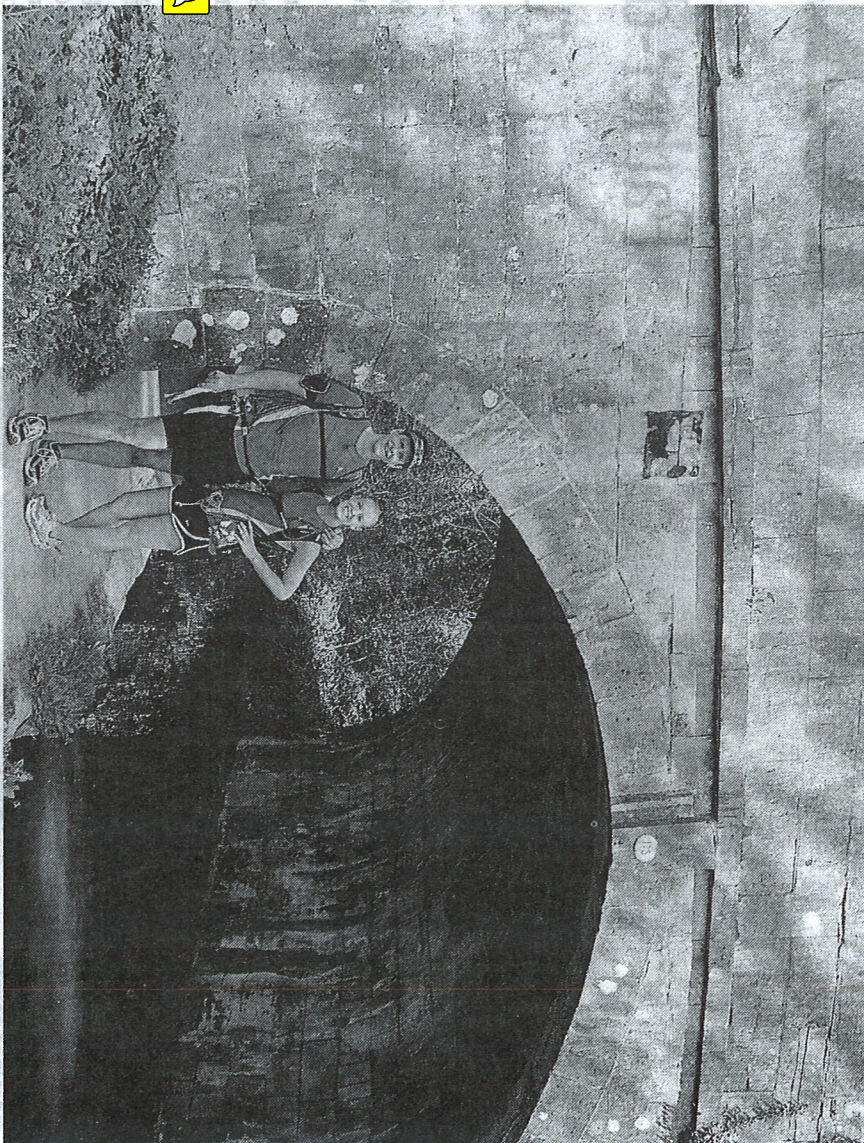
The duo usually begins a race in silence, using iPods to distract themselves. They buckle down and gear themselves up to finish strong when they reach the halfway, 13-mile marker. When they hit the infamous "wall" at 18 miles, they carry each other through encouragement.

"Usually it's me saying, 'Dad, this is really hard,' and he says, 'Just keep going,'" Emma said.

The pair's future in marathon running is up in the air. Emma graduated from Midland Classical Academy this year, and will follow in her attorney father's footsteps as a pre-law student at the University of Dallas in the fall. She's always had her dad around as a partner to safely run longer distances during training, and she's not even sure she'll have the time on her hands to do so during college. Knowing the pair may only have time for one last marathon, Emma's parents wanted to do something special in appreciation of their daughter's commitment to running. Bill signed the two up for the Bath Beat marathon in Bath, England.

"I was really, really surprised," Emma said.

The experience was a memory they'll never forget. The marathon took place on an unmarked course spanning the English countryside. The two were given four pages of single-spaced instructions with directions like, "Run to the oak tree and turn left," and, "Run two miles to the limestone rock outcrop and veer right." At check-



ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE Bill Berry and daughter, Emma Berry, run the Bath Beat marathon in Bath, England. The marathon was a surprise Emma's parents planned before the Midland Classical Academy graduate moved to Dallas to attend college.

points, they were offered hot tea. The course took them seven hours to complete.

"It was grueling," Bill recalled, "but it was a wonderful experience. We wanted to give Emma something special for her discipline in doing these marathons."

Running marathons not only has given Emma physical endurance, it has helped her strive to be a better student. Her grades and test scores in high

school earned her the University of Dallas Trustee Scholarship.

"What I take away from it is the overall application that if you set your mind to something you can accomplish it," she said. "There's nothing you can't do if you try your hardest and put the hard work in. I think that'll be useful going into college."

As Bill sends his first child off to college, he's grateful to have had spent the time with his daughter, even if it's caused him

a few blisters along the way. "I really have no business running marathons," he said, laughing. "The only reason is it's something we can do together. Just seeing her when I know she's tired and worn out and hit that wall — she digs deep and she pushes on. That inspires me."

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