

A FATHER'S PRIDE
November 16, 2010

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

Of course I was a proud father at the birth of each of my children, all four of them. What father is not? Pride is often made out to be a terrible thing, but a fathers pride is not arrogant or flippant. It is sincere and humbling. And as strong as that pride was, I want to tell you of another experience of pride that was literally overwhelming, beyond my imagination or even wish, and a total surprise in the middle of a life. It had to do with my second born daughter, Michael Anne. Today she likes and goes by "Michael Anne," but back then she was "Anne" or more familiarly just "Annie." This is the story of how Annie made me proud.

Michael Anne was born November 14, 1974 at home, attended by a woman doctor who also was willing to midwife if asked. After a night of labor, Anne was born in our house by the river just as the sun came up, and rays of light shot through the windows and onto the bed. Anne is a Scorpio, with Scorpio rising, and Moon in Aries, a very hot combination. From the first moment when that tiny baby's eyes met mine, I knew this being coming into the world was very strong. I found myself immediately having to make room for her in my mind.

Now Anne was always striking in appearance. Even as a toddler she had a look in her eyes that could stop an adult at ten paces and cause them to step aside, and woe to anyone that messed with her. The fire in her eyes and her quick intelligence would have them by the short hairs in an instant and she was absolutely fearless. Early on I was not sure what that intensity was all about, but some folks say that I can appear intense, so I told myself "Like father, like daughter" and let it go at that. I had no idea how it might manifest, and even less how that manifestation would affect me. I mean: not a clue.

And although Michael Anne was always very strong in her feelings and emotions, she didn't really make her move until well into high school, and even then I never saw it coming. Most of my kids played a little at sports, although none got too into any one sport. That is what most kids do. Anne tinkered a bit with soccer and actually I don't remember what else.

The first thing I do remember was that she wanted to get some running shoes for school sports. I think we made her use what she had to begin with, probably because we were tired of outfitting every new interest any of our kids had. I think she had to work through her old shoes. That didn't really catch my attention much, either. Now it did please me that she chose to run cross-country, if only because I love nature and running over hills and through dales seemed infinitely more interesting than any indoor track. Of course, in reality, she ran both indoors and outdoors.

Now I have to say something about my family's social life, and I will try to be delicate. We live in Big Rapids, a very small town in mid-Michigan. Since I was raised and grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a somewhat cosmopolitan center (and a very, very liberal environment), Big Rapids by comparison was so conservative. How we happened to live in Big Rapids is another whole story, but the long and the short of it is that I wanted my kids to have the experience of growing up in a town where they could walk downtown and back without our worrying that something might happen to them. Also, for a kid this kind of freedom can be important.

In other words, I wanted my kids to have the same kind of open freedom that I grew up in and, as wonderful as Ann Arbor as a city was, it was too large for me to let any of my babies just roam loose in it while they were in middle school. Then too, you have to keep in mind that for about 21 years we never had a babysitter. Why? Well, I guess it is because we never had any event that was so important that we would leave the kids for even a moment. It was not a sacrifice; we wanted it that way. Wherever we went, the kids went. It was that simple.

So we had moved to this small town to raise a family, and as liberal minded as I am, it bothered me not a bit that the town I lived in was way more conservative than I would have chosen, had I made a choice. It was not a big problem and we kind of kept to ourselves and had a life of our own that did not depend on mixing a lot in the local social scene. But then something interesting happened.

Our little girl started to win races! Cross country races typically are five kilometers long, which is 3.1 miles, so they are not a walk in the park. They are somewhat grueling, especially in competition, where you tend to want to run 'all out' at times. Anyway, Anne started to win races, and that surely caught my attention. Aside from winning a little as a swimmer, I had never been that good at any sport and didn't care either. In fact, aside from rooting for the Michigan Wolverines (U. of M. football in Ann Arbor), I didn't watch sports much, with the exception of the Olympics. I love the Olympics!

But here my little girl is suddenly winning races, and of course she wants me to come and see this. And this was actually something I really wanted to see, for it had never occurred to me that any child of mine would be into sports. We are more like artists, musicians, poets, etc. So I began to attend sports events, and not just the cross-country races (that I naturally liked), but also the track & field events, which could easily last most of a day. We took food, chairs, and even small tents to last out the very long time that these events went on. And Anne kept winning. In fact, she still holds track records at the local high school, so I am told, like the mile or half-mile; I am not sure which.

But the funny part is that this also affected our social life, or lack thereof. As basically 1960s children (hippies is not a word I respond to), we were into home birth, home schooling, vegetarianism, organic foods, not to mention Buddhism and astrology. As an astrologer, I did not exactly fit into the Big Rapids Republican Bible-belt conservative scene. Don't get me wrong, I am sure these were all fine people. We just didn't manage to mix, and as someone who didn't babysit, this didn't help our sociality either. Partying adults don't really want kids around making noise.

But when my daughter started winning all the races, we were thrust together with the more established folk of Big Rapids. I always felt that it would have been much more convenient for them had some other person from their own group won the races. As it was, it was awkward to say the least. But this was what was happening. Still there was always a little disconnect, and probably on both sides. We did the best we could. But that would be a story in itself. Back to Michael Anne.

Well, the winning of races became more frequent, not less, until she was winning all the major races, and not just locally, but regionally. All of this took me totally by surprise and thrust me into an arena I had never even imagined was possible, one for which I was totally unprepared for. This is one of the great surprises and experiences of my life. And here is where the pride comes in.

It is one thing to win a few races against neighboring towns, but quite another to start taking down runners from other parts of the state, whole regions. Now there no longer was a question of attending these events. We had to be there. Anne depended on that, not that this was a sacrifice. I couldn't wait to be at the next race, just to see what would happen. Was I proud?

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It was a gift from the universe that I never thought to even imagine or ask for, a total gift. To me Anne could walk on water, and she gave to me something that was missing in my life, but that I never knew was missing. Of course I was proud. It was WAY over the top.

And when at the far end of the season, when Anne had won every important race there was, and it was time for the state championships, I was spellbound when finally that great race day dawned. And it was a very cold day in November, with snowing, and slush was on the ground or at least in patches. Everyone was bundled up in their full winter gear, everyone of course, except the runners. It was snowing hard enough that you couldn't even see that far into the distance, and trying to run to different places along the race course to see the runners was out of the question. We pretty much just waited at the end to see who would emerge out of that snowy scene. And these were the very finest runners in the state.

Out of that blowing snow, I could barely see one runner, and could only hope it was my Anne, and it was. It was Annie! Totally exhausted, she crossed the finish line and fell into her mother's arms, the state champion cross-country runner of Michigan for 1991, the fastest woman in the state. She was 16 years old. By this time I was so blown out that it hardly registered. We had been out in the snow for (I would guess) hours, and now this. It was an experience I will never forget and a kind of being proud of someone (other than myself) that changed my life in a very real way that overflowed beyond any limits in my embracing my child.

To make this somewhat long story shorter, Michael Anne not only went on to take the state championship, but she led her entire team to the state championship the next year, in 1992. After that she was offered (and accepted) a scholarship on the track team of the University of Michigan, at that time one of (or "the") top track team in the nation, the Big Ten Conference Champions.

So there you have my story of how a child of mine made me proud beyond any expectation. And while it may seem by writing this I am boasting, it is my here intention to tell you of an overwhelming experience that I could never have given myself, and that the universe just sent my way for I have no idea why. It took me by surprise and satisfied something deep inside that I never even knew existed. Thanks for reading and thank you Anne for making this possible!

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Anne falling into her mother's arms to become the 1991 state champion of Michigan cross country.



Anne was very intense, from the very beginning, and had a look that would stop most adults cold, if she was not pleased.



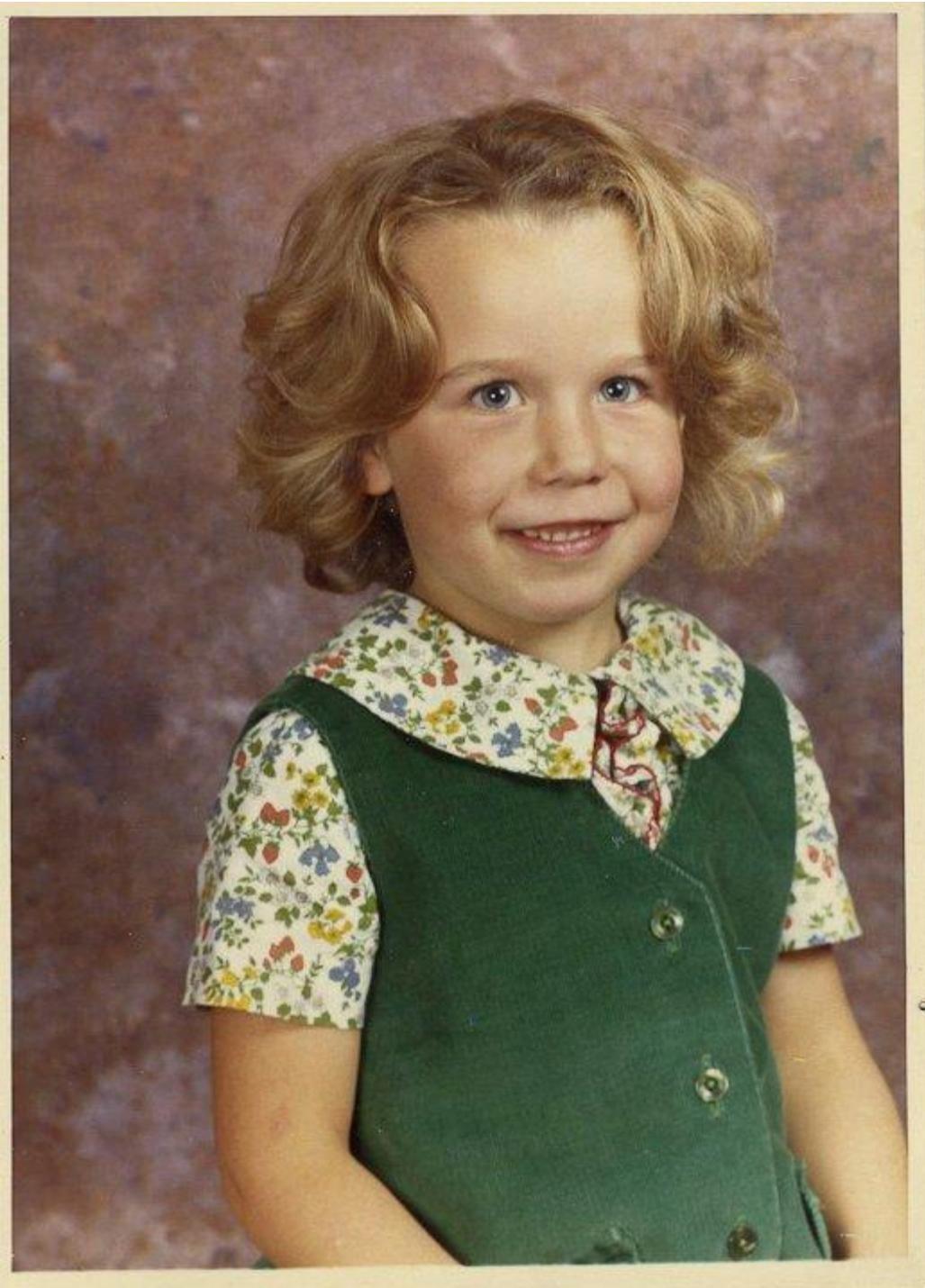
Michael Anne was also a very dear child.



Anne with that "look."



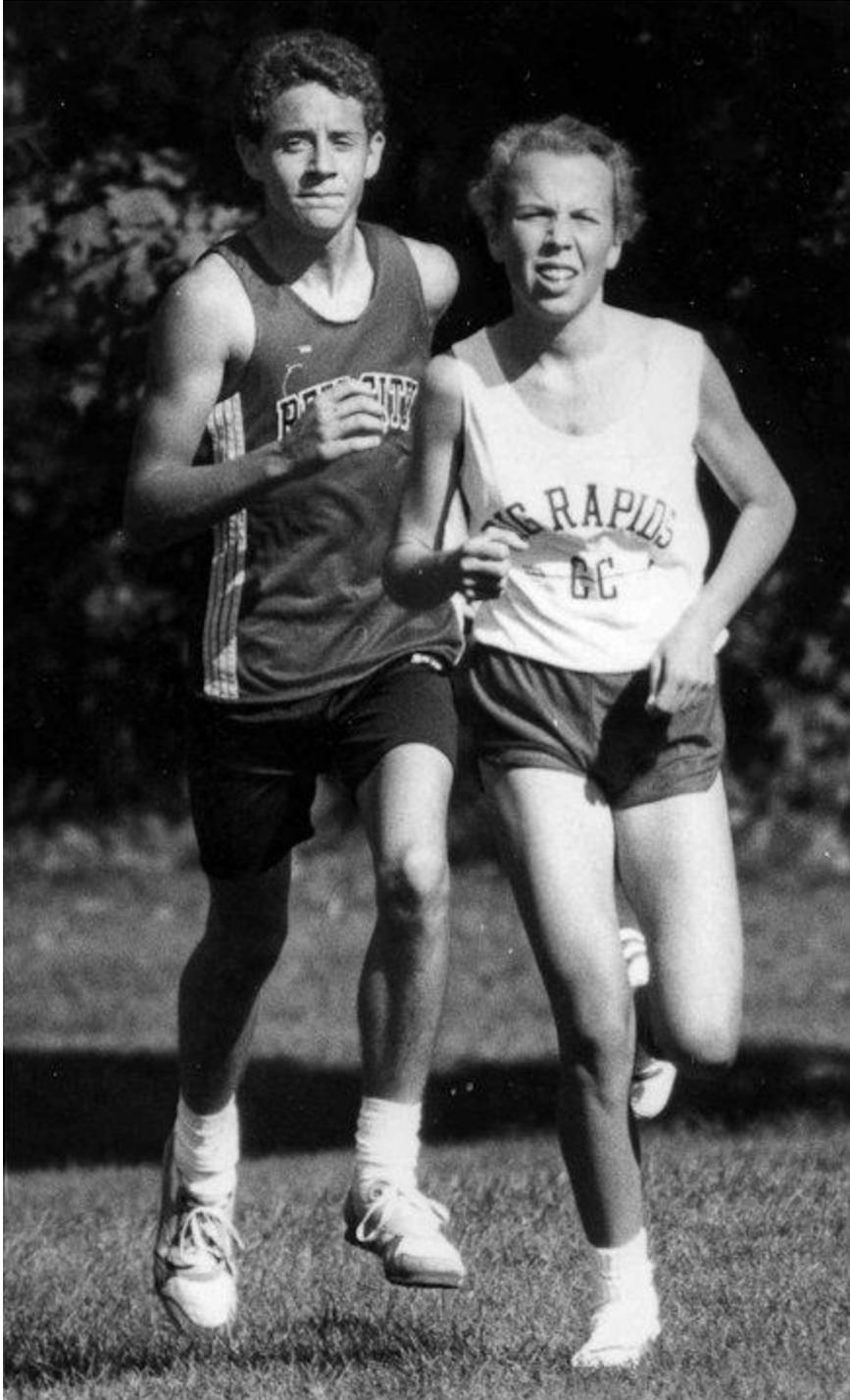
When Michael Anne blew out the candles, they got blown out.



Annie.



Michael Anne (on the left), and her good friend Sara Stanton. — with Sara Stanton Berg.



When Anne began beating the boys, that raised some eyebrows.

