**Carry my Son, Brother Joseph**

by Ruth White

“I will, mom!  I’ll be your trainer.”  My young son is the one lone voice that stands out among my unenthused family at my request for support in getting fit for the 5K, “Joseph’s Miracle Run”.    The run commemorates the boy, Joseph Smith’s, miraculous leg surgery performed by Dr. Nathan Smith of Dartmouth Medical School 200 years ago.  The surgery which saved Joseph’s leg and his life was before its time and not accepted as standard procedure for another 100 years.

So when my little Nathaniel, 10 years of age, offers his lone support a vision unfolds of our training.  What this means is, that I will run down the road behind Nathaniel as I push his wheel chair.  It is somehow very appropriate that Nathaniel and I join forces for the 5K to raise money for a scholarship as a gift of thanks for Dartmouth Medical School on behalf of Dr. Nathan Smith, who also founded the school.   When I consider all that I have now as a result of Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel, my faith, my ability to see the “big picture”, I am determined to overcome my own personal weakness and run.  But with Nathaniel on my team the significance is greater.   Dr. Nathan Smith also co-founded Yale Medical School, which saved Nathaniel’s life when he was born there nearly 200 years subsequent to its founding.

This is my little Nathaniel—so full of personality; a joker, a tease, a notorious flirt since birth.  Ten years of age and my gift.  Dr. Nathan Smith has affected my life in many ways and consequently, the “gift of gratitude” towards a scholarship has many layers of meaning for us.    Nathaniel, who has been through so much physical adversity since his birth, and I, who have been with him through surgeries, therapy, pain and tears, train as I envisioned:  me running and pushing, and Nathaniel waving to all he passes.    He shouts to the neighbors working in their gardens, “I’m training my mom!”  It is definitely more difficult to run behind the wheelchair and I wonder if I can really do this for the race.  But this has a lot of meaning for my little guy.   He so wants to run.    As we push forward together, I reflect on the greater journey of the miracle of Nathaniel’s life—the tenuous circumstances around his birth, a tracheostomy, ventilators, numerous surgeries—and in many ways I connect personally with Joseph Smith’s story.

My feet plod against the pavement rhythmically as I think back to a recent surgery on Nathaniel’s jaw which left screws in the bone.  As parents, it was our responsibility to turn the screws which separated the bone fragments, forcing new bone growth.   Nathaniel screams as I rotate the device which turns the screw in his jaw.  He clenches, writhes, then sobs.   But this is just one turn on the left side of his jaw.  I must repeat it for the other side.   “Are you ready for the next one?” I ask.  “Just a minute” he pants, “Give me a minute to calm down.”  The tears stream down his face and run over the screws emerging at his ears, trickling down to the scars under his jawline.  Finally, His breathing slows and willingly he submits to the ordeal again.  Every day, twice a day, the routine lasts a month.   My mind turns to young Joseph‘s surgery and while his agony was assuredly more intense, there is a certain similarity in the scenario.  Joseph who willingly submits to the physical ordeal of surgery without anesthesia, as long as his father held him and my son willingly submitting to the agony inflicted at the hands of his parents.  The shared experience of the pure and virtuous trust of the little child is heartbreaking to both parents.  Nathaniel’s screams are searing.  I can’t stop my ears because I must turn the screw, but in my mind I run to the same field beyond the cabin where Mother Smith has run to stop her ears from the same searing screams.  We meet here.  She knows the pain of my child’s piercing scream.

The road stretches on and Nathaniel points out that I have slowed down. I have to pick up my pace.  He loves to feel the swift movement and the air passing his face—sensations he seldom experiences.  Nathaniel has some mobility and can use a walker, but it’s not like the other boys.  “I want to run.  I want to jump!”, he says often and sometimes in frustration, sometimes in longing.  Again my mind turns to Joseph, recovering from the surgery that removed major portions of diseased bone from his leg.  It would be years before he regained the ability to walk, or run, or jump.  Nathaniel sees the other boys and tries to join in their basketball games.  They’re good kids and help him throw the ball.  He leans on his walker and swings his legs attempting to gain speed.  He struggles to keep up but, at best, he trails behind them.  I see the image of grown-up Brother Joseph running, as he so often did, with the boys for sport, fun, competition—all the things that Nathaniel has a desire for.  Joseph turns and kneels on one knee beckoning to the young straggler who clambers on his back.  Then they’re up and off again as Joseph runs with his little friend mounted behind.   But in this day, it’s my little guy who wants to be with the boys, who wants to run, to keep up, to be with the group.  If Joseph were here, it’d be Nathaniel he’d hoist on his back, to feel the thrill of the race, the camaraderie of the pack and the joy of the finish.

Nathaniel and I continue our run.  Cars pass, drivers wave.  Cyclists give thumbs up.  Pedestrians cheer.  At first I believe all this commendation is for Nathaniel, who represents faith, miracles, strength in adversity.  But suddenly, I realize it is for both of us, to keep it up, keep going, to keep on the journey.   Truly he has been training me in more ways than he realizes.  We may be slow but we press on together.   I still wonder if I can push him for the entire 5k.   But as I run along behind my son, we look with gratitude to those who came before.  Thank you, Dr. Nathan Smith, your works have followed you and live in my son.  Mother Smith, thank you for the times in the field. Thank you, Brother Joseph, for your enduring strength which shouldered the Restoration and gave me the faith to run my journey.  And one last favor.  When, we come to the race, carry my son.  He so wants to run.