

Medalist and Acalanes Track and Field Coach Shares Joy of the Sport

By Michael Sakoda



Joy Upshaw, far right, runs hurdles for Acalanes High School in 1979.

Photo provided

In 2013, Acalanes track and field coach, Joy Upshaw, won three gold medals – 100, 200, and 80-meter hurdles – and a silver in the long jump at the World Masters Athletics Championships in Brazil, the latest accomplishments in a decorated career.

In 2011, just a week after her 50th birthday, Upshaw set world records for W50 in the long jump – 17 feet, 11 inches – and the indoor 200-meter – 26.24 – at a Masters Championship in Albuquerque, N.M.

But breaking records is nothing new for the Upshaw family, as Joy put it, “We’re a track family.”

Her father, Monte, broke Jesse Owens’ high school long jump record in 1954 (24 feet, 4.25 inches). “We never heard the stories from him,” Upshaw recalled. “But other people would tell us about how good he was.”

That’s where Upshaw says her love of the sport began, and it wasn’t long before she was competing for herself. “They used to have the Merriewood Relays out here near Fairview,” she said. “I went to Springhill, and we competed against Merriewood, and Happy Valley ... a fun little relay meet in Burton Valley.”

In 1968, Upshaw and her family moved from Berkeley to Lafayette where she and her three siblings competed for Acalanes. “The experience at Acalanes was great,” she said. “We had great coaches like Kris Brown and Scott Brady-Smith ... we had a really good team ... broke a lot of records.”

Her siblings, Chip, who was on Acalanes’ last championship football team in 1981, Merry and Grace all ran track for the Dons.

“I remember after Grace’s grad

night at Acalanes she got home at four in the morning,” said Upshaw. “I woke her up the next day and said, ‘Let’s go to a track meet,’ and we did ... and she jumped a 19 feet, 3 inches and set a school record.”

Upshaw said the memory gives her a ‘no excuse’ policy with her kids. “When they say, ‘I was up all night studying,’ I tell them, ‘So? You can still go break a school record,’” she said. Though, her sister did go on to long jump for team USA at the 2004 and 2008 Olympics.

After high school, Upshaw ran track for Cal State Hayward where she trained with Olympic coaches and received a degree in kinesiology with a dance minor. “My mom was really musically inclined,” she said. “So she always kept us in music, dance and art.”

While Upshaw isn’t dancing anymore, she did teach aerobics for a number of years after graduating from college. “I was teaching at the Walnut Creek Racquet Club in 1983, and the football coach at Acalanes had me come in and teach aerobics to the team during their summer workouts,” she said with a smile.

But sharing her love of track is her real passion, and she’s been doing it at every level – from coaching the Dons, to helping her sister, Grace, train for the Olympics, from coaching on several U.S. National teams, to founding the Jack Rabbits Track Club in 1998.

“The purpose of Jack Rabbits is to teach kids the joy of track and field ... to learn the sport and understand

it,” she said. “We work on posture and running mechanics and drills and introduce them to the long jump and hurdles, relays, shotput and discus.”

Upshaw is a mother of two, and unsurprisingly her daughters are runners. Her oldest, Sunny, was a standout at Gunn High School and is now a senior at Cal on a track scholarship; while her youngest, Windy, is a freshman on the track team at Acalanes.

So why has a world class athlete and coach returned to Lamorinda? The answer lies in her fondest memory.

“The best feeling was having the baton on the relay leg in the FAL Championship and winning as a team for Acalanes,” she said. “(Lamorinda) is a just a great setting ... a nice community ... I want to give back and see Acalanes do well again.”



100m (13.24 1st)



Upshaw winning her medal for the 100-meter hurdle in Brazil.

Family Focus

Are Your Children Helping Enough at Home?

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

Our children are busier than ever these days. There seems to be more homework, longer and more frequent sports practices and games or meets, more pressure to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities, and of course more pressure to succeed. Many parents tell me that they want their kids to do regular chores at home, but they don’t see how it’s possible given their hectic schedules. The choice might be between chores and sleep.

I hear from many parents (and know from my own experience too), that it is actually harder to set up and enforce chore implementation than it is just to do it yourself. As a result, there are many grumbling parents around who know their kids are getting off the hook, but who are too busy to do something about the situation.

As parents, you don’t want to be the ones to place additional burdens on your children when they are already busy and stressed. After all, their job is to do well in school and in their other activities. Why have them fold laundry when it’s so easy to do it yourself? They’re only young once, so do they really need to spend their limited time vacuuming or changing their sheets?

Some parents think their children are helping enough by putting away their toys, or later on, putting their own dishes in the dishwasher or doing their own laundry. To be sure, these tasks are helpful and important. But what I am suggesting is that they learn to do more than just take care of their own possessions. They need to pitch in with chores that help out others in the family and the family as a whole.

Through the years, I have seen many families in my practice who regret not having these kinds of expectations for their children. If parents allow their children to avoid pitching in with family chores, they run the risk of becoming subservient to their children’s needs. Children will see that their needs trump any family or parent needs, and consequently they may develop characteristics of entitlement and self-absorption. As these children get older, they may very well become insensitive to the needs of parents and others. Training them to help and think of others at an early age helps instill responsibility, thoughtfulness and consideration.

You can begin with simple tasks when your children are 3 or 4 years old. Young children can put the napkins on the table for meals or put a cup of dog or cat food in a bowl. Some parents have their children pick certain chores from a list so that they have some choice. Other families trade off chores among their children on a weekly or monthly basis so that no one is stuck for very long with tasks they dislike. The important thing is to develop a plan and stick to it until it becomes a natural part of your family functioning. You may need to think long-term, since training your children to do a good job and comply consistently can actually take months to incorporate.

Parents who elicit this type of cooperation from their children at an early age have an advantage. They can avoid, or at least reduce, what parents of older children may well incur at first: negativity and passive or active resistance. Training older children often requires a very positive approach. Parents need to demonstrate appreciation, flexibility, and collaboration with their children. It is important to obtain children’s buy-in to the general concept of helping others in the family before negotiating the specific tasks that will be involved. You need to expect that it may not be a perfect implementation with older children. If your children contribute to the family’s well-being on a regular basis, if not perfectly, it is still cause to celebrate your parenting skills. You will have enhanced your family’s cohesiveness and your children’s emotional health.



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New Year’s Resolutions for Your Pet

By Mona Miller, DVM



Photo Mona Miller

It is the season of appreciation and reflection, a time to consider what changes to make for the next year that will enrich our lives. Perhaps we should take a few minutes to extend the same resolutions to our pets – what can we do in the new year to enhance their health and enrich their lives? This might be the year to update health/veterinary care, enrich your cat’s home environment, or explore new activities with your dog. Some of these resolutions might affect your budget and some might affect your time schedule, much as our own personal resolutions tend to do.

During the down economy over the past few years, most Lamorinda veterinarians noticed a decrease in preventive health care measures taken for pets. Some vaccines were delayed, blood test screenings put off, small lumps left alone. Now that the economy is swinging back up, this might be the year to reconsider some of these expenditures. Just as with any elective item (new TV, couch, etc.), it is wise to get the information ahead of time and incorporate it into your budget. Your next veterinary visit might be a good opportunity to ask for cost estimates for dentistry or geriatric blood and urine tests. Other preventive health measures include committing to brushing your dog or cat’s teeth four times weekly, adjusting food calories for the overweight pet, or maintaining a daily walk

schedule.

Environmental enrichment can be achieved with any pet, whether it’s a dog, cat, rabbit, bird or turtle. You can rotate toys – pick up the ones laying around for the past year or so, and introduce new toys every few months. Cats that enjoy catnip might need a refill or a refresher to the stuffed mouse from past holidays. Caged birds enjoy bells, colored ropes and food treat toys. It might be time to re-decorate the cage with new items, and you can save the old ones to bring back in four to six months. My son’s idea for this article is to make turtle and tortoise terrariums look as much like their natural environment as possible.

We are fortunate to live in the Bay Area, which is consistently rated by various groups as a dog-friendly place. This might be the year to explore some of the areas around that earn these ratings. A September 2013 Huffington Post article listed San Francisco as “a dog friendly city” – one of the reasons why people who live there are “so happy and healthy.” Likewise, Estate ranked San Francisco fifth in their list of “17 Best U.S. Cities for Dogs.” While these highlight San Francisco, the truth is that the East Bay has many places that are dog-friendly: downtown Lafayette, 4th Street Berkeley, and Point Isabel dog park, for example. You can find East Bay “Splash Spots” (such as in

Benicia), Oakland brew pubs that welcome your well-behaved pooch, and of course the numerous regional parks that allow you to hike with your dog. Field trips with your dog help strengthen your bond with him, allow for different socialization experiences than the home setting and provide some interesting new sights for both of you. An excellent resource is “The Dog Lover’s Companion to the San Francisco Bay Area.” My own 2014 new year’s resolution for my dog is to take him on more hikes, and for my cats is to brush their teeth more consistently.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and Luka, a yellow Labrador. She has worked in the Lamorinda area since moving here in 2001. She attended U.C. Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached via email at MonaSDVM@aol.com.