

When I got to the bottom of the hill, I looked around for what had caught my attention. Then, I saw a woman pushing a shopping cart. The snow-covered sidewalk made it hard for her to walk. As she got closer, I noticed that she had on several thin coats and a couple of hats, and her fingers were showing through her gloves. I knew in an instant that she was a homeless person. She looked very tired, cold and helpless. My heart sank. How could I be enjoying this weather that someone else was dreading?

I watched her struggle to push the cart. I wanted to help her, but what could I do? Then I remembered the church at the top of the hill.

I ran up the hill, dragging the sled through the parking lot and into the church. I saw a man cleaning the floor, and I told him about the woman. He followed me outside. The woman was still struggling up the sidewalk with the cart. The man walked up to her and told her not to be afraid, that he worked at the church and he could help her. He said that the church was taking in homeless people for the weekend, and she was welcome to come inside, have something to eat and get warm.

The homeless woman looked so grateful! I felt so good that I couldn't stop smiling.

When I went outside, snow was falling softly, and it made me feel peaceful. Once again, I lay on my stomach and started down the hill. Only this time, the wind seemed gentle, my eyes didn't water from the cold, and I felt warm inside. What a great day!

Alese Bagdol, 11

The Race

It is our choices . . . that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

J. K. Rowling

Todd and Brett maneuvered their milk-carton boat to the starting line.

"This is it, Todd," Brett said, dipping his oar into the water. "This year we have to win. We've built the best boat out here."

Todd nodded. "We'd better win," he said. "Since we're twelve now, it's our last year to be in the kids' division. Next year the competition will be a lot tougher."

"Yeah," Brett agreed. "No second place for us this year. Right, Todd?"

Todd nodded again and slapped the side of the boat. He and Brett had worked for months in Brett's garage, waterproofing each milk carton before assembling

the hundreds of cartons into this streamlined racing boat—as streamlined as boxy milk cartons would allow. The boat construction had to follow all the rules that the Dairy Association, the group that sponsored the race on the lake, made for the annual event.

“The competition this year doesn’t look tough at all,” Brett said. “But when the race starts, Todd, we need to pour it on and not let up until we cross that finish line.”

“Sure,” Todd agreed, glancing up and down the line of boats positioned at the starting line. Part of the fun of the race was just to see all the crazy boats other kids had constructed out of milk cartons. Todd looked at the boat next to his and Brett’s. The owner was a little kid, probably not more than eight—the minimum age for the race—and he was struggling to keep his boat from drifting away from the starting line.

“Look, Brett,” Todd said, poking Brett with the end of his oar. “That little kid is here all by himself.”

“Looks like he built the boat all by himself, too,” Brett replied. “How does he expect to get anywhere in that wreck?”

That boat does look pretty bad, Todd thought. He shook his head, thinking of all the hours and effort the boy must have put into making his boat.

Suddenly, the whistle blew. The race had begun. Todd dipped his oar into the water and stroked, watching Brett, sitting in front of him, do the same. Their boat glided quickly out in front of the others.

“Keep going. We’re ahead!” Brett shouted, as he and

Todd paddled through the water.

We’re winning! Todd thought, as he glanced quickly to both sides. *No one else is even near us.* In the distance, Todd could see the finish line. They had quite a way to go in the long race, but at least they were ahead. Todd took a quick break from stroking and looked back over his shoulder, curious to see how the little boy who had been next to them was doing.

“Brett,” Todd yelled, “that little kid has barely moved from the starting line. And he’s drifting off to the side. He can hardly control his boat.”

“So what?” Brett threw the words over his shoulder. “We’re winning!”

Yeah, we’re winning, Todd silently agreed with Brett, but all he could think of was the year when he and Brett were nine, and they had entered the milk-carton race for the first time. They didn’t have any idea about what they were doing, their boat was a disaster, and they never even reached the finish line before sinking. Todd remembered how he and Brett had fought back tears as they watched their dreams sink beneath the water.

“We have to help him!” Todd yelled.

“Are you crazy?!?” Brett took a break from rowing to turn around and scowl at Todd. “We have this race won. That is, if you keep rowing. We’re not stopping for anything, Todd. Especially not some little kid who doesn’t even know how to do anything right.”

“I just remember when we were like that little kid,” Todd said. “And I’m going to help him—even if you’re

not." Todd set down his oar and swung his legs over the side of the boat, ready to jump into the water.

"Wait!" Brett yelled. "If you leave me alone on this boat, we can't win the race!"

"But if you help me with that kid's boat, we can all cross the finish line," Todd said evenly.

Brett stared at his friend, then watched as another boat began to gain on them. "This is lame," Brett replied, "but I guess I have no choice. Let's turn around and get him."

Together, Todd and Brett turned the boat around and quickly cut through the water to reach the little boy. The boy had barely made it past the starting line, his boat drifting toward the center of the lake, with no hope of ever reaching the finish line.

"Throw us your tow rope," Todd called as they reached the boy's boat. The boy looked at Todd through eyes that were close to tears and tossed him the rope. Todd grabbed the rope and wrapped it through the tow hook on their boat.

"Okay, go!" Todd called to Brett.

As Todd dipped his oar into the water, he called back to the boy, "We'll get you to that finish line."

"I still think this is lame," Brett said. "We would've won, Todd. Now we've lost for sure." Brett pointed out the dozen or so boats ahead of them in the water, certain to cross the finish line before they did. Todd glanced back at the little boy, who now stroked the water with his oar, finally heading in the right direction.

"Thanks," the boy said to Todd. "I never would have

made it without your help. But I'm sorry you're not going to win now."

"That's okay," Todd said. "Winning isn't everything."

And as the little boy looked at Todd and smiled, Todd knew that he meant it.

Heather Klassen