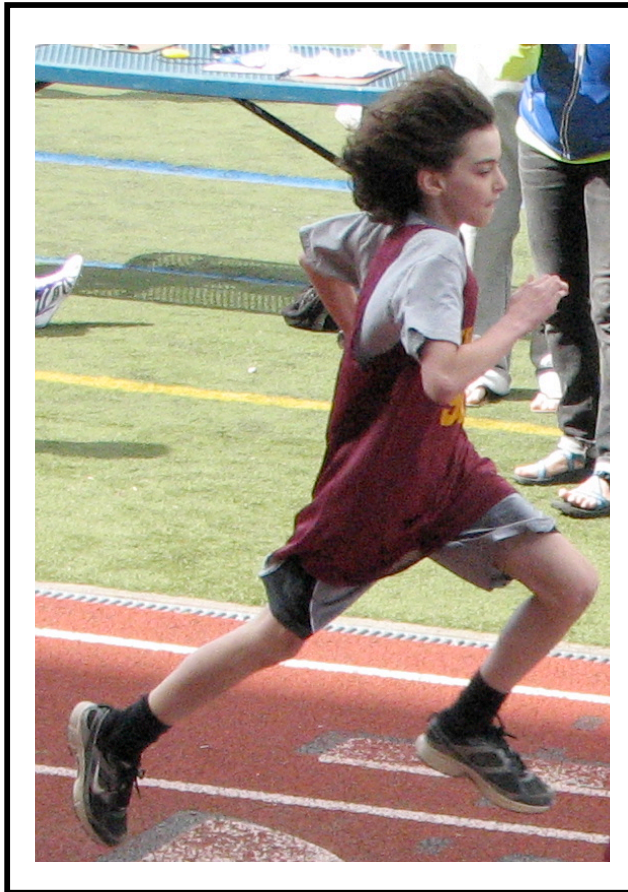


LIAM'S 11 MILES



Yes!

I start off fast

Breathing steady

First lap

Getting tired

Breathing hard

Second lap

Slowing down

Breath is dry

Third lap

I'm exhausted

My lungs are fiery

Fourth lap

I've run a mile

Now I feel good

Yes!

*By Liam Balton
2011*

LIAM'S 11 MILES

In August 2009, our family packed up the car hoping to leave Bellingham's gray skies for a sunny hike on Mt. Baker. But the gray overcast stayed with us as we began our trek that soggy day. There was potential for complaints. Still, we began the hike and kept moving forward.

At a drippy lunch stop with no dry seats, I remember Liam munching his sandwich, standing in typical Bellingham shorts and t-shirt. He finally put on a jacket to keep from getting soaked, though his dark curls collected water that trickled down his shoulders.

As we hiked, I worried Liam might be frustrated at the discomfort of the day. But he quietly put one foot in front of the other without showing any signs of inner soggiiness. If he had been frustrated, it was probably at me for often asking how he was doing!

Liam's dad, Chris, tried to lighten and sum up the day: "This is what builds character!" he said with a smile. His comment was open to rolling eyes and a disgruntled "hmmph". But that's not what happened.

At the end of the hike, we came to a misty, mountain-top meadow. We barely saw the view as the wind blew the mist away. After a short, cold celebration at the summit, we headed back down. The tone of the day lightened as Liam's sister, Elsa, and her friend, Julie, kept us laughing, *and* as we now knew where we were going and what to expect. Liam just headed down the trail, also lighter in heart and spirit.

Over a year later, at Fairhaven Middle School, Liam settled into sixth grade. In language arts, his teacher, Ms. Sachs, asked students to write in their composition books what mattered to them, and what did they hold dear to themselves. Liam wrote:

- ***My bunnies, 'Smoke' and 'Pearl'***
- ***Random stuff***
- ***Hiking 11 miles in the cold and rain***
- ***Shooting off fireworks from my driveway***

It impressed me that Liam accounted for the hike on Mt. Baker, tracked the mileage and took the experience to heart. I like to think that in his quiet, humble way, he was proud of his accomplishment. And so, I propose that we all try Liam's "11-Miles". I don't mean we have to head to Mt. Baker. **Let's just try it *our* way!**

👍 *Lisa (Liam's mom)*

Create Your Own "11-Mile" Challenge

- ✱ Try this for yourself, for a charity, or for someone you care about.
- ✱ Share it with a friend to help get motivated.
- ✱ Whatever you do, focus, push onward and give it a good try.
- ✱ If you find the challenge doesn't suit you, take time to discover a new one.
- ✱ Remember what you tried and what you did. Then be proud of your efforts and accomplishments.

Some ideas to think about

... even if you don't use the number 11:

- Exercise, run, shoot baskets, kick a soccer ball, dance, do yoga ...
- Compose 11 bars of music.
- Create art.
- Strategize in chess.
- Bake 11 cookies (or 11 dozen in 11 days!)
- Start with 11, then reach for more.
- Film an 11-minute movie.
- Just try something new.
- Learn to say "hello" in 11 languages.
- Raise \$11 or \$111 for a cause you believe in.
- Write a story, a poem, a song, a play, a computer program ...
- Draw an 11-panel cartoon.
- Relax for 11 minutes of peace and quiet.

Just imagine what you can do ...



**Think of 11 ways to send
a fire-breathing chicken to the moon!**

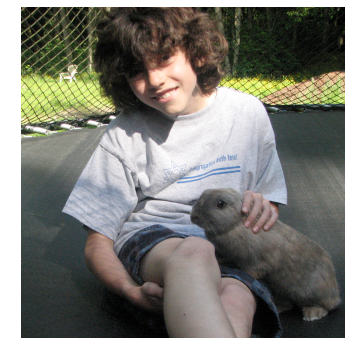
In Memory and in Honor of Liam

On July 29, 2011, Liam was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (A.L.L.), a form of blood cancer. The leukemia weakened Liam's immune system, leaving his body prone to many types of infection. Three weeks later, on August 19, 2011, Liam died because his body could not fight off one of those infections.



Liam tried very hard to work through his chemotherapy. He tried to eat well and do physical therapy exercises. He submitted to uncomfortable tests and tolerated numerous visits from medical staff who worked hard to help him. I admire Liam's strength and perseverance. He had a lot to bear and did his very best. He really tried.

In his life, Liam took on different challenges in Boy Scouts, Math Club and on the track team. He chose to memorize the whole Periodic Table of Elements and as much of the number Pi as he could. He read a poem he wrote in front of lots of people he didn't even know. He continued to play the violin since age six, and started learning electric guitar in June 2011. He was also getting ready to study for his Bar Mitzvah. At the same time, Liam appreciated doing nothing! That is to say, he spent time thinking, wondering and imagining. And that was important to him too!



I have also spent time thinking. And that is how "Liam's 11 Miles" came about. It seemed that taking steps toward challenge and accomplishment would be a good way to remember Liam.