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# BABY, BONDING and BRINGING BACK A DREAM

By David Allison  
Photo by Blake Tilker



**W**e all have favorites: favorite cities, favorite movies, favorite foods, favorite races and many other “favorites”. I have a favorite invention. No, it’s not the new iPhone. It’s not Edison’s light bulb, the proverbial “sliced-bread”, or even the ubiquitous air conditioning in Arizona.

My favorite invention is the simple baby-jogger. This contraption has been around for more than 25 years, and although I had always known about this infant-wheeling device, I never understood its true dimension until my son Charlie was born a little more than three years ago.

My wife, Zoraida, was delighted when she found out she was pregnant. At the same instant, I realized that if this baby would possess half the energy I had as a kid,

I would need to get back into better shape to keep up. I had been a life long runner, ran Division I college track and cross-country and had done a 2:27 marathon at the age of 27.

But due to a few injuries and changing careers a couple of times, running in my early 30s was sporadic, at best. Basically, this newfound nervous energy—or, if I were to be honest with myself, more likely my sub-conscious fear of being a good role model for my progeny—caused me to reevaluate who I was, what I wanted to be and

how I wanted my future son/daughter to view me. So, on our list of items for our baby registry, baby-jogger made the cut.

Months later my older brother, Noel and his now wife, Tara, gave us a baby-jogger as a gift at my wife’s baby-shower. Immediately I was excited. I fast forward in my mind myself running through my neighborhood with my little bundle of joy giggling in delight as daddy, sweat dripping from his nose and deep breathing, raced up some hill or strode past the eclectic shops on Ventura Boulevard in Studio City, Calif., where we lived then.

Not knowing a thing about babies, I figured the moment we were home with Charlie I would pop the little guy in the baby-jogger and off we’d roll and begin our Easy Rider adventures through the San Fernando Valley. This, naturally, was not the case.

One learns with babies that they need to have good head and neck control before they can be harnessed into forward-facing car seats or, in this case, baby-jogger strollers. My ego and enthusiasm took a hit, as my master planned magical mystery tour didn’t materialize on my schedule. I held fast and waited.

After a few months I finally got the green light from my wife to take Charlie on his first run with daddy. It was terrific. I carefully strapped him into his hammock-like holding area, made sure he had on his booties, hat, and jacket zipped tight, and away we went. Charlie loved it. As I ran he cooed and pointing at objects in the sky, then he would magically drift off to sleep to the motion. That allowed daddy to get in a few more miles without fear of pushing the little tyke beyond his allocated harnessed-in time frame.

Just after Charlie’s first birthday, we moved to Ahwatukee. I went through what every athlete/parent goes through: I was logging in more than 25 miles per week, all the while trying to balance parenting, work and keeping in shape. One fateful morning all of this was about to change—for the better.

Not long after our move to Ahwatukee, I was picking up the newspaper on the driveway and saw about a dozen people run past me. I called out to one of the last runners in the group, “Are you a running group?”

She answered, “Yes, we meet every Wednesday at 6 a.m.”

Like a little child who sees his first snowfall, I ran inside the house giddy with excitement. I told Zoraida there was a running group that just flashed by our house and I was taking Charlie and would try to catch up with them.

Out I went, sprinting down my street with my baby-jogger hoping to find them. Luckily, they were doing some sort of interval workout back and forth on my street. I would find out after the run that they were members of the “Gage Total Training Team” and that they did, in fact, meet every Wednesday at The Pointe. Here’s the best part: Charlie and I were more than welcome to run with them whenever.

Mostly due to daycare issues, I worked at night in the restaurant industry and watched Charlie most of the day. My son is an early riser; the usual time this vibrant ball of boyish energy wakes up is 5 a.m. Luckily, I am a morning person, because I need to be fully awake when the young’un gets rolling and my wife leaves the house at 6 a.m.

So although I would have preferred another hour or so of sleep, I wasn’t totally put off about getting five to six hours of shut-eye in per night; plus, it was morning and it was cool. If I was up, Charlie and I might as well get in a good run, right? So, most mornings (especially Wednesdays) we were out and about, exploring most of Ahwatukee on foot and baby jogger wheels.

Charlie and I were Ahwatukee’s dynamic duo. Where once we were putting in 30-plus miles per

week, after a few months we were getting in 40 to 50 miles regularly. I was getting stronger by pushing this 25-pound kid all around town. My average mile pace per run was back down to my youthful 20-something 6:15 pace. We did 10- and 15-mile runs, track workouts, between mile repeats, up hills and down hills. If the baby-jogger could have handled the trails of South Mountain we would have run there, too. Throughout Ahwatukee I became known as “that fast guy with the baby jogger”.

Charlie was so used to going at such a good clip, that if I would go slower than usual—like taking a jog rest between repeat miles—he would demand, “Mas daddy! Mas!” in his Spanglish tongue. “Okay, okay, Charlie, give me a sec, buddy,” I would say breathlessly after a five-minute mile repeat.

But without my knowledge a number of things were happening: Charlie and I were outside almost two hours a day in our neighborhood; I was getting fitter than ever before because I was doing workouts while pushing this now 30-pound kid around; and this running together had become a routine we both enjoyed. I was spending quality time with my son and was staying fit; Charlie felt the wind in his face, was seeing new things everyday, and he was getting in some quality nap time, too.

Nearly a year into our “routine” I decided to attempt to make the Olympic qualifying marathon time of 2:22. This had been a dream of mine for decades. I can honestly say that if my son were never born, I don’t know if I would have had the desire to even start running again at the level I have achieved thus far.

For just over a year now Charlie has been in daycare as I work during the day. I did not make the Olympic qualifying time, but did run a 2:30 both at Boson in 2006 and P.F. Chang’s in 2007. Charlie and I don’t run as much together, although he has a blast running around chasing mommy and daddy and playing with his friends.

And what of the jogger?

Well, it acts more like a sports basket today. It gathers dust in the corner of the garage. Charlie’s baseball bat, soccer ball, cleats and basketball fill the space where he once directed my mileage movements. The jogger has been replaced by Charlie’s two feet, which will eventually be replaced by a car. I realize that together we have many more adventures and miles ahead of us.

Although those 20 months or so of daddy and Charlie riding around like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid will most likely never be again, I will always feel like the baby jogger is the greatest invention known to man. For that tricycled-cradle allowed me to simultaneously laugh, love, sweat, dream, believe, inspire, and explore all in a matter of an hour run with my son.

Now that’s an invention—and memory—worth holding on to. ■

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