



## Strongest Dad in the World

### Description



Dick Hoyt and his son Rick

Many of you may have already heard of Dick Hoyt. My friend Anne shared his story in a facebook post last week. The following article was written by Rick Reilly and published in Sports Illustrated Magazine several years ago. Iâ€™m not a Sports Illustrated reader, but this story is totally worth the few minutes it takes to read it. It made me smile and cry.

I try to be a good father. Give my kids mulligans. Work nights to pay for their text messaging. Take them to swimsuit shoots.

But compared with Dick Hoyt, I suck.

Eighty-five times heâ€™s pushed his disabled son, Rick, 26.2 miles in marathons. Eight times heâ€™s not only pushed him 26.2 miles in a wheelchair but also towed him 2.4 miles in a dinghy while swimming and pedaled him 112 miles in a seat on the handlebarsâ€”all in the same day.

Dickâ€™s also pulled him cross-country skiing, taken him on his back mountain climbing and once hauled him across the [U.S.](#) on a bike. Makes taking your son bowling look a little lame, right?

And what has Rick done for his father? Not muchâ€”except save his life.

This love story began in [Winchester, Mass.](#), 43 years ago, when Rick was strangled by the umbilical cord during birth, leaving him brain-damaged and unable to control his limbs.

â€œHeâ€™ll be a vegetable the rest of his life,â€ Dick says doctors told him and his wife, Judy, when Rick was nine months old. â€œPut him in an institution.â€

But the Hoyts werenâ€™t buying it. They noticed the way Rickâ€™s eyes followed them around the room. When Rick was 11 they took him to the engineering department at [Tufts University](#) and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate. â€œNo way,â€ Dick says he was told. â€œThereâ€™s nothing going on in his brain.â€

â€œTell him a joke,â€ Dick countered. They did. Rick laughed. Turns out a lot was going on in his brain.

Rigged up with a computer that allowed him to control the cursor by touching a switch with the side of his head, Rick was finally able to communicate. First words? â€œGo Bruins!â€ And after a high school classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him, Rick pecked out, â€œDad, I want to do that.â€

Yeah, right. How was Dick, a self-described â€œporkerâ€ who never ran more than a mile at a time, going to push his son five miles? Still, he tried. â€œThen it was me who was handicapped,â€ Dick says. â€œI was sore for two weeks.â€

That day changed Rickâ€™s life. â€œDad,â€ he typed, â€œwhen we were running, it felt like I wasnâ€™t disabled anymore!â€

And that sentence changed Dickâ€™s life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. He got into such hard-belly shape that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 [Boston Marathon](#).

â€œNo way,â€ Dick was told by a race official. The Hoyts werenâ€™t quite a single runner, and they werenâ€™t quite a wheelchair competitor. For a few years Dick and Rick just joined the massive field and ran anyway, then they found a way to get into the race officially: In 1983 they ran another marathon so fast they made the qualifying time for [Boston](#) the following year.

Then somebody said, "Hey, Dick, why not a triathlon?"

How's a guy who never learned to swim and hadn't ridden a bike since he was six going to haul his 110-pound kid through a triathlon? Still, Dick tried.

Now they've done 212 triathlons, including four grueling 15-hour Ironmans in [Hawaii](#). It must be a buzzkill to be a 25-year-old stud getting passed by an old guy towing a grown man in a dinghy, don't you think?

Hey, Dick, why not see how you'd do on your own? "No way," he says. Dick does it purely for the awesome feeling he gets seeing Rick with a cantaloupe smile as they run, swim and ride together.

This year, at ages 65 and 43, Dick and Rick finished their 24th [Boston Marathon](#), in 5,083rd place out of more than 20,000 starters. Their best time? Two hours, 40 minutes in 1992—only 35 minutes off the world record, which, in case you don't keep track of these things, happens to be held by a guy who was not pushing another man in a wheelchair at the time.

"No question about it," Rick types. "My dad is the Father of the Century."

And Dick got something else out of all this too. Two years ago he had a mild heart attack during a race. Doctors found that one of his arteries was 95% clogged. "If you hadn't been in such great shape," one doctor told him, "you probably would've died 15 years ago."

So, in a way, Dick and Rick saved each other's life.

Rick, who has his own apartment (he gets home care) and works in [Boston](#), and Dick, retired from the military and living in [Holland](#), Mass., always find ways to be together. They give speeches around the country and compete in some backbreaking race every weekend, including this Father's Day.

That night, Rick will buy his dad dinner, but the thing he really wants to give him is a gift he can never buy.

"The thing I'd most like," Rick types, "is that my dad sit in the chair and I push him once."

? To see a photo gallery of Dick and Rick Hoyt, go to [Sl.com/teamhoyt](#). If you have a comment for [Rick Reilly](#), send it to [reilly@sletters.com](mailto:reilly@sletters.com).

I wanted to share this remarkable example of what the human spirit is capable of despite what may seem impossible. This time of year many of you may have started a new physical fitness regime. It may seem impossible to run that extra mile, lift a few more pounds or even walk up two flights of stairs. I'm not recommending that you don't listen to your body, but I do know first hand that we are capable of much more than we think we are. I know the next time I am struggling and want to give up on something I will think of Dick Hoyt and his determination and perseverance.



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