

SPORTS

The Fastest Nice Christian Boy in the World

Then Bobby Morrow lost his speed, and he began to have certain doubts.



By William Martin

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In 1956 Bobby Morrow was the most celebrated athlete in the world. He broke the tape three times at the Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, and went on to become *Sports Illustrated's* Sportsman of the Year.

Richard Meek/*Sports Illustrated*

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The first time I saw him run, my eyes—quite to my surprise—filled with tears. As he rocketed through the curve and down the stretch, extending a string of victories that would mark him as the finest sprinter since Jesse Owens, perhaps the best the world had ever seen, Bobby Morrow was as beautiful as a high-speed human could be. A year later, in 1956, this shy farm boy from San Benito would become the star performer in the Melbourne Olympic Games and, for a time, the most celebrated athlete in the world. I had had other sports heroes—Ted Williams and Kyle Rote, to be specific—and places in the pantheon would eventually be granted to Bob Cousy and Carl Yastrzemski. But I *knew* Bobby Morrow. He'd speak to me and call me by name. He signed my yearbook "your buddy" and mentioned all the good times we'd had together as Frat brothers. I watched or read about every race he ran for six years, and I collected—and still have—a thick file of clippings and magazine articles about his career. I trust it is clear that we're talking about serious adulation.

Like most of us in sight of the half-century mark, however, I have learned that nobody wins every race. So when, now and then over the last 25 years, I would hear that Bobby Morrow had suffered some new setback or disillusionment, that life had not always given him a good handoff or a choice lane assignment, it held a special poignancy for me. Still, I felt a certain trepidation when I called to ask if I could come to Harlingen for a visit. Our phone conversation was uncomfortably similar to most others I had ever had with him—of few words and brief compass. He was never what you would call a compulsive conversationalist, and I felt no assurance that a visit would elicit much more than a few official memories and the diffident response I had seen him give others who seemed to think that because they had watched him run a footrace, they could claim the status of friend.

King of the Sprinters

When I arrived at Daddy's Money, Morrow's pool and video game center just across the street from Bobby Morrow Clothing, I learned that Bobby had gone to Brownsville on business and would not be back for several hours. His wife, Judy, an attractive and intelligent woman whom I thought of as his "new" wife despite the fact that they had been married thirteen years, was embarrassed that her husband had apparently forgotten our appointment, but she set me up in a back room of the clothing store with an ample supply of coffee and a stack of old scrapbooks.

The first scrapbook chronicled Bobby's high school career as a San Benito Greyhound. Most of the early clippings were about his gridiron exploits, but about midway through the book, track took an insurmountable lead. The 15 to 20 points he consistently scored in the dashes and the long jump led to his being named outstanding performer in meet after meet. In his junior year he took first in the 100 at the state meet and began to attract the attention of college coaches. Sportswriters said he was "the fastest and prettiest runner in the state," but his performance had not yet peaked. In 1954 he garnered 24 points in the state meet, with victories in the 100 and the 220 and a third-place finish in the long jump, and a headline declared, SAN BENITOAN SETS SCHOOLBOY 100 MARK OF 9.6. Even though no high schooler had ever run that fast before, Morrow sent his high school coach a laconic telegram: "1st place 9.6. Not pushed." Track experts began to realize what they were seeing, and major college track powers began to recruit him in earnest. Morrow loved to run but had given little thought to college. He had expected to finish high school, marry Jo Ann Strickland, and join his father on the family's successful cotton and carrot farm. When he did decide to give college a try, he had to attend summer school to obtain enough credits to enroll.

Bobby could have attended any college he wished. But because he was a member of the ultraconservative Church of Christ and sought a wholesome environment—San Benito track coach Jake Watson had said of him, "No dishonor has ever been connected with his name, and never will"—Bobby went to Abilene Christian, a small college affiliated with the Church of Christ. A minor league institution in most respects, ACC (now ACU) was not

the aberrant choice it might have seemed. Oliver Jackson was recognized as a national-class track coach whose teams had won the Texas Conference title five years in a row and, led by sterling sprint and mile-relay quartets, had taken the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national title in two of the previous three years.

Oliver Jackson enhanced Bobby's raw speed and natural grace by polishing his form and teaching him how to relax as he ran, a development vividly reflected in pictures taken during his first year of collegiate competition. In early shots of Morrow breaking the tape, his fists and teeth are clenched, his face contorted with strain. In later shots, his slightly parted lips and loose hands make it appear that he is easing up from a mildly strenuous trot. As one writer put it, "He doesn't appear especially to pull, push, or drive as he runs. He's never struggling. . . . He just *runs*. . . . He's like a wheel rolling down the track." The new techniques not only enabled him to run amazingly free of the injuries that plague so many sprinters but also shaved precious tenths from his times. At the NAIA meet late that season, on a cinder track soaked by rain and chewed up by earlier runners, Bobby Morrow ran one hundred yards in 9.1 seconds. Had it not been for a wind slightly in excess of the allowable minimum, he would have broken the existing world record by two tenths of a second.

In the fall of 1955 Bobby Morrow and I were inducted into the Frater Sodalitas, a men's social club. We called ourselves Frats, but our club's activities bore little resemblance to what went on in fraternities at the godless institutions we referred to deprecatingly as state schools. A few years earlier a man had been refused admission to the club because he had drunk wine while on a trip to France. During my tenure, another man was rejected because he was said to have drunk beer in Waco. We met on Wednesday nights, after the midweek church services we all attended, in the same classroom where I took Bible, and the slightest off-color remark could be penalized by a monetary fine or a specified number of licks with a belt. When the meeting was over, we climbed the fire escape on the science building and sang our official club song and our mildly satirical drinking song ("Drink Milk"), then went to the Dixie Pig for pie and ice cream.

It sounds tame—of course, it *was* tame—but we were certain that we were the sophisticated elite of the college, and we were almost as certain that everyone else knew it. And Bobby Morrow was one of us. He didn't say much at meetings, but when invited to lay stripes on the tensed-up butts of errant brothers, his licks manifested coordination and power that made them fearful to behold, awesome to receive, ennobling to bear. He seldom went with us to the Pig, but we did not hold that against him. In those days and in that setting, going home to his new wife, Jo Ann, elicited considerably more envy than pity; marriage seemed to us not a burdensome matter but an institution of unimaginable licentiousness.

It was a heady time to be Bobby Morrow's friend. Besides Morrow, Jackson's new crop of recruits included Waymond Griggs, a quick-starting flash from Camden, Arkansas, and James Segrest, a versatile sprinter and hurdler who, with 28 points, had brought the Class B title home to Bangs, though he was his team's only representative. In 1956 they were joined by Bill Woodhouse, as unlikely-looking a world-class sprinter as ever churned down a straightaway, and Abilene Christian College found itself with the best sprint relay team in the world. Over the next three years, in individual and team events, Wildcat sprinters would set or tie world records eleven times. But 1956 belonged to Bobby Morrow.

His only defeat that spring came during a 38-degree downpour at the Drake Relays, when Duke's Dave Sime got a rolling start and beat him out of the blocks by four yards. Morrow never complained about the race, but in the months that followed he spent hours perfecting his already good start, working to make every element—the angle of his back on the blocks, the first motion of his left arm, the tripping into action at the sound of the pistol—automatic and flawless. He insisted that because of his Christian convictions he would never try to outguess the starter, and not once in his career did he ever jump the gun. Dave Sime had a fantastic spring, including a run of twenty seconds flat for the 220, the fastest ever for that distance on a straightaway, and many considered him the premier sprinter in the country. But when they met in the 100 meters at the NCAA meet at Berkeley, they came out of the blocks even and Bobby outran him by two yards. Morrow did

not gloat, but he told *Sports Illustrated*, “I never ran a better race—or ever enjoyed winning one quite so much.” With subsequent victories in dashes at the American Athletic Union meet and the Olympic trials, Bobby Morrow was finally the unchallenged king of American sprinters.

Back in Abilene, college administrators began to realize that God so loved the world, he had given them Bobby Morrow. Robert D. Hunter, then director of special events, now vice president of the university, was assigned to oversee the mythmaking machinery. Hunter’s first extravaganza was an airport send-off to the Olympic Games that attracted thousands to “Watch Bobby Fly Bye.”

Televised coverage of the games was rudimentary in 1956, and I have never seen films of Bobby’s races at Melbourne, but I do not really need them. They could not, in any case, match the perfection of the contests I have watched again and again in the interior stadium of constructed memory. In the preliminary heats for the 100 meters, Morrow twice equaled the Olympic record of 10.3 seconds. Then, in the finals he flashed across the finish line in 10.5, just ahead of fellow American Thane Baker, now a purchasing agent for Mobil in Dallas, and Australian Hec Hogan. Oliver Jackson told *Sports Illustrated*, “He was a wonderful sight in the final. Bobby just seems to rise a little, out about 40 yards, and sort of float.” In the 200, Morrow feared he might have trouble with Andy Stanfield, who had taken the gold medal in the 1952 games at Helsinki, and he felt clammy and queasy as he pushed his way through a crowd to get onto the track. Still, he was confident of his ability to run the course, and the lane assignments were perfect. “I had Stanfield just ahead of me,” he said, “and I watched him and gave it everything I had, and when we got into the stretch I knew I could do it.” In doing it, he set a new Olympic mark of 20.6. Then, in the 400-meter relay, he anchored Baker, Ira Murchison, and Leamon King to a world-record 39.5. He became the first man to win three gold medals in track and field in a single Olympics since Jesse Owens won four in 1936.

Calls began coming into Abilene from all over the world; people wanted to learn more about this little college in West Texas. Bob Hunter first went into mild shock, then into action. “It was the first major event we’d ever had,” Hunter recalled recently, “and we went all out.” After a grand parade through Abilene, there was a messianic banquet at which Morrow’s entire table service was made of gold. “It was the first visit ever by the major networks,” Hunter said. “He put the name of the college on the map around the globe.”

In the months that followed, Bobby Morrow ascended from Olympus to the Mount of Transfiguration. He adorned the covers of *Sport*, *Life*, and *Sports Illustrated* magazines, posed for newspapers alongside politicians and movie stars, appeared on the Ed Sullivan and Arthur Godfrey shows. He received the Sullivan Award honoring the outstanding amateur athlete of the year and was named Athlete of the Year by Sport Magazine and Sportsman of the Year by *Sports Illustrated*—his competition for the latter included triple-crown winner Mickey Mantle, Heisman Trophy winner Paul Hornung, and the NFL’s MVP Frank Gifford.

The Texas Legislature asked him to address it in joint session on the topic “The Challenge of Opportunity.” The Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, elected him to its board of directors and summoned him to the White House for a conference with President Eisenhower. And the United States Chamber of Commerce honored him as one of nine Great Living Americans.

Athletic excellence is itself a worthy ideal, but seldom do we allow our heroes to embody only one mode of excellence. Rather—and this was more the case in 1956 than today—we expect them to epitomize a wide range of cultural values, and we thrust upon them exaggerated conceptions of prowess and personality. We hold them up as models for ourselves and our children, and we expect of them more than they have ever volunteered to deliver. So those who thrilled at Bobby Morrow’s exploits on the track were not content simply to let him be “the human bullet from Abilene Christian,” “the beau ideal of the U.S. Olympic team,” “the fastest of all ‘Fastest Humans,’” or “the best runner in history.” As Bob Hunter observed, “He was a young American

who epitomized what athletes can do and be, and there was enormous social pressure on him to live up both to what he was and to what he might be.”

To the delight and satisfaction of the college and the Churches of Christ, whose self-imposed exclusivity left them with less than a proportional share of admired world figures, virtually every media reference to him gave prominent attention to his sterling character and Christian commitment. *Sports Illustrated* spoke of his leading prayer in chapel, his serious studies of the Bible, and his perfect attendance at Sunday and Wednesday evening services. Other stories mentioned the Bible class he taught for teenagers at the College Church of Christ and asserted soberly that “his every act on and off the track is an inspiration to the youth of our nation.” When, at the close of the hundreds of speeches he made over the next four years at service clubs and athletic banquets and alumni meetings and church camps and youth rallies, Bobby would say, “I sincerely believe that my greatest race, the Christian race, is the most important of them all and is yet to be won,” no one doubted that he meant every word.

Slowing Down

Nothing could match the glitter of Olympic gold, but Bobby’s last two years of competition were fine ones. At the NCAA meet in Austin in 1957, he finally tied the world record in the 100-yard dash. And at the Texas Relays that year, which were dedicated to him, he anchored the Wildcats to a world record in the 440 relay. At a meet in Fresno, Morrow and the 440-relay team lowered the world mark of 40 seconds to 39.9. A few days later, at Modesto, they shaved it an additional two tenths of a second and, for good measure, set a new world mark in the 880 relay as well.

Despite those feats, 1958 was not a great year for Morrow. Bill Woodhouse, by then tying world marks himself, kept nipping Bobby at the tape. Then, in a blustery wind at a meet in Big Spring, both Woodhouse and Sime outran him. Despite those losses, we were confident that when the starter raised his gun for the 1960 Olympics in Rome, Bobby would be there and he would win again, just as he had in Melbourne.

In the meantime, he had to finish school—the Olympics had thrown him behind a semester—and support his family. By this time, he and Jo Ann had had twins, Ron Floyd and Vicki Jo, and the family was beginning to feel pressured by Bobby's fame and his extensive traveling. To maintain his amateur status, Morrow turned down an offer to do commercials for Newport cigarettes and another to costar in a Fess Parker film. Instead, he accepted a vice-presidential post with the Abilene Bank of Commerce, which counted on him more for public relations value than for economic expertise and allowed him time off to practice and run in invitational events.

Nineteen fifty-nine contained few notable high or low spots. Bobby worked at the bank, ran in a few meets, and continued to travel on behalf of Abilene Christian College. On one of those tours, I had my first chance to reflect on his celebrity. An alumnus flew us to College Station, where both of us spoke at a youth meeting sponsored by the Churches of Christ in the area. My speech was well received, and I entertained afterward with some juggling, comedy, and a memory stunt, but I had no illusions about who had drawn the overflow crowd. I had heard Bobby speak several times soon after he returned from the Olympics, and though he performed quite adequately, he had been obviously nervous and anything but smooth. Bob Hunter was now writing Bobby's speeches, and I was not surprised at the slicker phrasing and more natural transitions of this effort. I was, however, astonished at his inflections and gestures, not only because they evinced far more expressive power than I had ever seen him display either in public or in private but also because they bore strikingly little relationship to the words he was speaking. The contrast between his fluid grace on the track and his robotic artificiality in the pulpit was striking.

The next day, while waiting for the finals of the Border Olympics, we lunched at the Corpus Christi Bar and Restaurant in Nuevo Laredo. I loved having people notice our group, but I got tired of being unable to carry on a conversation because of requests for autographs and pictures alongside Morrow. Later, as we poked around in curio stores, people came up to Bobby to ask him whether he was running in the meet or how he thought he would do in the next Olympics. He answered them as he answered everyone, with a

“no” or “we’ll see” that spoke precisely to the question but revealed little about the speaker. I knew it was just his way, perhaps altered a bit by his frustration at the loss of privacy, but I saw several people turn away feeling that they had been given the cold shoulder by a guy who thought he was too important to talk to them. Don’t misunderstand me; I would have traded places with him in a moment, but I began to realize that celebrity had a down side.

Nineteen sixty was a year Morrow hoped would bring him a second ride on the glory coaster and a shot at lucrative commercial endorsements. Instead it left him with a taste of gall and wormwood. He looked good through most of the season and seemed to be in peak form for the summer meets that would determine who went to Rome. Then, at the Meet of Champions in Houston, he suffered a muscle spasm and had to be carried off the track, his face twisted with pain and disappointment. A few weeks later he seemed to have recovered, but he strained a muscle warming up for the 100 at the AAU meet. With his thigh black and blue, he failed to qualify in the 100 and did not get past the semifinals in the 200. His injury healed before the final Olympic trials, but the break in his training routine had hurt him. The faded brown clippings near the end of the crumbling scrapbook were painful for me to read: “Morrow defeated,” “Last of 10 in preliminary heat,” “A disappointing swan song,” and “In all certainty the curtain has already dropped on the career of the most brilliant sprinter of the last decade.” In the finals of the 200 he ran fourth, one place short of a ticket to Rome. The Morrow era was over.

The Price of Fame

At noon, Judy Morrow and I had lunch at a nearby restaurant and traded stories about her husband. They had met in Ohio, where Bobby, divorced from Jo Ann, had moved. They dated for a while, then were married.

She told me that Bobby had some bottled-up feelings and might possibly talk about them, but since he never had before, she wasn’t sure he would open up. He did not, she said, like to talk about track or the past in general. I told her how wonderful he had been to watch, and she told me of an occasion four

years ago when Bobby, Thane Baker, Earl Young (another ACU Olympic-medal winner), and former UT Olympian Eddie Southern had run an exhibition relay in Dallas. “Bobby ran last,” she said. “He was a little heavy, of course, but when he got the baton, everybody in the stadium started yelling, and I just couldn’t believe how beautiful he was. The tears just started running down my face.”

Back at the clothing store, I noticed the display cases that contained the Sullivan and *Sports Illustrated* trophies, Bobby’s Olympic cap, and one of the three gold medals—the others are in the Smithsonian Institution and the Texas Sports Hall of Fame. As I was finishing the last of the scrapbooks, Bobby walked in. He was a bit heftier than when I had last seen him, and I had no trouble believing he was 48, but he still had that wonderful smile.

We got some iced tea at a deli next door and I told him I wanted to talk to him about what had happened to him since the Olympics and how he felt about celebrity. He said, “All right,” paid for the tea, ambled around to a photocopying shop in the center, and got a key from the owner. We drove to his friend’s apartment a block or two away, where he obviously felt at home. He lit a cigarette, poured himself something to drink, and started talking. Judy was right. He had some bottled-up feelings.

Bobby admitted that the Olympics had been significant to him. “That was one time where I was lucky,” he said. “To be able to represent your country in the Olympic Games is an experience an athlete will never forget. The people you get to go and meet over there. It’s something to see. I would never have got to see it otherwise.”

But he disliked the deluge of attention that followed his triumphs. “I have shunned publicity rather than sought it out. I like for people to know me for what I am, not what I’ve done. It was unbelievable. I was invited to address a joint session of the Texas Legislature in Austin, just because I was able to run. I hadn’t done anything else. That’s what I don’t like. I want people to like me for what I am. But it’s not that way. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce named me one of the nine Great Living Americans. Listen to the guys that were in there: Clare Boothe Luce, Cecil B. DeMille, Norman Rockwell. Just

because I went to the Olympic Games and had the natural ability that my mother probably gave me through birth, why should I be named one of the nine Great Living Americans? Just because of my legs.”

He felt the same way about the newspaper and magazine articles written about him. “I have never read an article that’s been written about me. I’d look at the cover or the pictures, but I never read the articles.” Why not? “Because I knew what I had said, and I didn’t really care what they said.” Was he ever worried that he might be misquoted?” “It never worried me, no. I’ve had people misquote me, especially in New York. One time, at Madison Square Garden, at an indoor track meet, a guy came over and wanted to interview me and said, ‘This is off the record.’ I forgot what he asked me, but I told him, and dadgum if it wasn’t in the newspaper the next morning. It was something about one of the Olympic officials or something. That was when I didn’t make the Olympic team in 1960.

“I really got screwed on that deal. After the trials, when I came in fourth in the two hundred, they talked me into going out and training with the Olympic team. They said if I’d train with them and show improvement, they’d take me to the games. So I left my job in Abilene and stayed in California for about six weeks. My leg was healing, and I was beating the ones who had made the team, so the coaches and officials had a meeting; they were supposed to leave for the Olympics the next morning. I called and they said, ‘We haven’t made a decision yet. Come to the plane in the morning and we’ll tell you then.’ So I got out to the airport, and they said, ‘Nope, you’re not going.’ Later, I found out it was the eastern coaches who didn’t want me to go, because of the athletes from the eastern schools. As it wound up, they really screwed up the Olympics. Ray Norton came in last in the hundred. Same way in the two hundred, and they were disqualified in the four-hundred-meter relay.”

Getting Burned

Failure to make the team diminished his value to major advertisers, but Morrow had retained enough popularity, particularly in Abilene and in

Church of Christ circles, to make his name and image a valuable asset. Because he had come to stand in public consciousness not just for speed and grace but also for integrity and honor, he was ripe for exploitation by those deficient in the latter qualities. After giving up his bank job to train for the 1960 Olympics, he fell in with a master salesman and con man, Max Nunn. After rubbing snake oil on Morrow's wounded ego, Nunn helped him set up a company to market Stim-O-Stam, a mineral potion that, taken before exercise, was supposed to prevent sore muscles. Morrow estimates that he and Nunn sold tens of thousands of dollars in stock to dozens of investors, many of them members of the Church of Christ in Abilene and Dallas. As Bobby tells it, he and other directors in the company were beginning to notice irregularities in the way money was being handled when Nunn's wife called to tip them off to her husband's activities. Morrow called lawyers, and after they discovered an indictable offense, he signed a warrant and had Nunn arrested at the Abilene hotel where he was staying. "All the friends I sold stock to lost their money," Bobby lamented, "people that didn't really have the money, that had to go out and borrow money to put in it. I think maybe they understood, but perhaps it was my fault. God, I was only twenty years old. [He was actually closer to 25.] They were using me. I know that now. Nunn had me wrapped around his finger."

In 1963, not long after the Nunn episode, Bobby got burned by the Church of Christ's most famous criminal, Billie Sol Estes. "I'd made several speeches for Billie in Pecos," he recalled, "at the church and at sports banquets, and I'd always stay over in a guest house he'd built for President Truman, but Truman never did come use it. Well, after he'd got into all the trouble with the fertilizer tanks and was out on appeal or something, he was visiting his brother in Abilene and he called me one night at home and asked me to come have dinner with him and some friends. I told him I'd already had dinner, but he talked me into coming down to the hotel where they were for a cup of coffee. I walked in, and he was sitting in a booth with a colored boy he was sending through college and the boy's daddy. So I scooted in by Billie Sol. We chatted about different things, and pretty soon old Billie said he had to go to the rest room, and he left. In about ten minutes he came back and started talking again. And lo and behold, here comes newspaper reporters flashing

pictures and television guys with cameras rolling. I put my hand up to my face, and they're asking questions, and I was saying, 'No comment. No comment.' We got up to leave, and they followed us out to the car, still taking pictures. And there it is on the front page of the *Abilene Reporter-News* the next morning."

Billie Sol may have benefited from his association with a paragon of virtue, but Bobby was barraged. "Man, the phone calls at the house were so bad, I had to have an unlisted number put in. They talked to my wife mostly, because I was gone, but they said they were going to paint me black and dip me in tar and feathers and I could 'go live with the niggers' if I wanted to. And those that weren't mad over the race thing were mad that I was sitting with Billie Sol. It was unreal."

His first wife, Jo Ann, regards the period from the 1960 Olympics to the Billie Sol fiasco as pivotal. "Nobody can stay on a pedestal," she observed, "and he fell pretty fast. It was really hard on him and on our marriage too. Neither one of us was very communicative. He came through the Stim-O-Stam deal pretty well, but he was disappointed in people because they were disappointed in him. But the blow he couldn't take was when he tried to go to the '60 Olympics. They strung him along and used him to help the other sprinters train. When they didn't take him after that, it was a hard blow. That was kind of a turning point. He felt used and got down on himself, and then he got down on everyone else. He got more cynical and chose some friends that he would never have chosen before. The friends you pick influence you a great, great deal, and they led him into a completely different lifestyle. Money meant a lot to them, and it started meaning a lot to him. He turned against ACU, the church, his goals, everything he had ever stood for and appreciated."

Bobby insists that puts the matter too strongly, but he acknowledges that he eventually came to regard the college in a less than flattering light. "I didn't resent making the speeches," he said. "I was all involved in the college, and I thought I was helping. But I resented it later, because I know now what they were doing. Maybe they were really sincere about it. Maybe Bob Hunter was

just using a good public relations tool, which is what any good PR man would do. Whether [ACC president] Don Morris thought about it, I don't know, but I suppose he did, because I helped him raise a lot of money. I traveled with him a lot to see people. I went to all the alumni meetings. I was gone all the time. And I was getting nothing in return, really. I felt good about the college when I was going to school there, but my attitude changed after I got out, especially when I went through my divorce."

The fairy-tale marriage, already running into trouble in Abilene, grew more rocky after the Morrrows moved first to Odessa, then to Houston, where Bobby resumed his banking career. To his dismay, several key officers of the Houston bank were involved in shady financial manipulations, and when the authorities began to close in, the ringleader blew his head off with a shotgun. Unfortunately for Morrow's confidence in his fellow religionists, the man was also a member of the Church of Christ.

About 1968 the marriage collapsed and ended in divorce. Jo Ann seems to feel the divorce was late in coming rather than too hasty and blames the effects of Bobby's celebrity. "When he first started giving speeches, he modeled himself after Bob Richards [an Olympic champion and motivational speaker]. He got a lot of his style and content from Richards. He had a tape or something from him, and he and I worked on it. Bobby was so proud he could give speeches. He was entirely genuine in those days. Then, later, when we were having trouble, he asked me to go with him to a speech he was giving to some junior high kids at a church. It was the same speech he had given at ACU, when I felt like he meant all those things. I realized then that he had become a good actor. He could give the speech and not mean any of it. It got to be an ego trip."

When Bobby's family and many Church of Christ people, reflecting their strong opposition to divorce, took Jo Ann's side and couched their disapproval of him in the language and emotions of strict fundamentalism, he was hurt and disappointed.

"The attitude people had toward me after that, and the gossip," he volunteered, "that's the main reason I changed my mind about some of the

people [whom he had regarded as friends]. They act like they can do no wrong, but I know they do.” Though he still holds Oliver Jackson and other people associated with ACU in high regard and retains membership in the Church of Christ, his only visit to the campus in more than a decade was to attend his son’s graduation in 1981, and he mused about gathering up some people whom he felt had abandoned him in a time of need and preaching them a sermon on hypocrisy. “I’d make some of them squirm,” he said. Without revealing the key points of his sermon or suggesting that our mutual acquaintances have any corner on hypocrisy or other conventional shortcomings, I suspect he is right about the squirming.

Bobby also reflected on the distance he feels from his children. According to Jo Ann, the twins visit him once a year in the Valley, but Bobby neither writes nor calls, even when business takes him near their homes. The tie with Ron, who works for one of Bobby’s former associates in Abilene, is apparently in somewhat better shape than that with Vicki. Morrow declined to walk down the aisle with her at her wedding.

“My daughter and I are not on speaking terms,” he said. “We had a long talk, and she said, ‘I don’t want to be around you.’ I said, ‘Fine, but why?’ She said, ‘Well, I don’t like the way you do things. I don’t like the way you take God’s name in vain.’ I said, ‘Because I say “Oh, my God”?’ She said, ‘Yes.’ That’s her attitude toward me. It’s hard to say this about your daughter. She writes me letters, and I just don’t answer them. I don’t even read them.”

Casting about for a fresh start after his divorce, Morrow spent a year in Ohio with an organization called Higher Education Crusade. “Oh, God,” he recalled, with a painful grimace. “That was such a big farce. It was an educational program for kids. You put money in a trust fund, and over a period of years you were supposed to have so much money to send your kids to school.” Morrow lent his image to the project and gave motivational speeches to salesmen, until he ran projections on what the trusts would actually earn and discovered “there was no way it would be what they said it would. Again, somebody was using my name to do their dirty work. I didn’t have any control over it, but, of course, my name was connected with the

company as representing them. I felt lousy, really. I seemed to be always getting involved with crooks.”

The one positive aspect of the Ohio sojourn was finding Judy. Shortly after they married, they returned to Houston for a brief period where he trained to be a stockbroker before deciding he wanted no more of asking people to invest in his recommendations. He also helped coach and raise money for the Houston Striders, an independent track club, and participated in an unsuccessful school furniture venture. In the early seventies, when his father invited him to come back to San Benito to run the farm, he accepted readily and has been in the area ever since.

Bobby’s life seems to have stabilized somewhat since he returned to the Valley, where the memory of his accomplishments is still alive. The day before my visit, he had attended Bobby Morrow Day at a grade school in San Benito and was scheduled to be the commencement speaker at another school the next evening. “It’s like that a lot,” he said. “I don’t like to do it, but I do it. Everybody wants me to do it for free, especially for football and track banquets and all the spring banquets. I’ve just quit that stuff and started charging. That cut out a lot of it. People think it’s nothing to come make a speech, but it takes a lot. You’ve got to prepare, you’ve got to work around it on your schedule, then you’ve got to actually go through with it. It takes a lot out of you.”

He says he doesn’t attend parties or go out much at all, because he feels he is still on display, at least to some extent. Neither does he stay in touch with his former running mates. “I went up to a Night of Gold program ACU put on for its former track stars at the Texas Relays this year. They did a real good job, but I felt uneasy all the time I was there. Some of those guys loved it. They crave the attention they used to have. That’s all they talk about: ‘Back then . . . then, then, then.’ It’s always past tense. I just want to forget all that stuff. At that program Earl Young asked me if I would be interested in competing again in Masters’ track meets. I said, ‘For what?’ and he said, ‘For ten thousand dollars.’ I said no. After that exhibition in Dallas four years ago,

I couldn't get out of bed the next morning, and I said, 'Never again.' And I haven't. I've got no interest."

I had always assumed that I could have parlayed the ability to run like a gazelle into a lifetime of pleasure drawn from golden memories richly burnished by fond and frequent recollection. After spending the day with a man who had personified excellence to me at a key and exhilarating period of my life, I was not so sure.

Was it possible that Bobby Morrow, one of the great athletes in history, a man who still receives mail from all over the world asking him to autograph pictures clipped from newspapers and magazines, honestly thought that the games had not been worth the gold? If he had a son with comparable extraordinary gifts, would he not encourage him to develop them to the fullest, in the hope of achieving the same glory that had been his? Does he truly believe his life has been less happy than if it had been more ordinary—a life, perhaps, in which a bumper crop, a successful clothing sale, or a big night at the video parlor might be counted a highlight?

"You bet it has. I'd never had gotten involved with all those crooks. They wanted the name, and the name was for running, not for anything else. I'd have been just another person on the street. Yeah, I'd have been a lot happier."

"Are you sorry it happened to you?"

Now, think about this one, Bobby. You could have called your clothing store the Smart Shop, and nobody but your friends would have known who owned it. You could have left the trophies at home instead of showing them off in those display cases. And remember how it felt to stand up there on that top box while they played "The Star-Spangled Banner"? Don't answer too quickly. Don't say something you don't want me to tell people.

He paused, then said, with no observable flicker of second thought, "Yeah, I am. I really am."