

*With a Single Step:
The Story of a Non-Motorized
Circumnavigation of the Earth*

BY JOE OAKES

Many families are graced with a crazy uncle whom the parents want to protect the kids from during family gatherings but whom the kids love to hang around with because he is entertaining and very much un-adult. In the radio stories of the late/great humorist Jean Shepherd, it was his Uncle Carl, who was a confirmed drunk but who could entertain folks by downing a car of beer without pausing to breathe and then produce a melodious series of belches.

For many years the San Francisco Bay Area had such an uncle. His name is Joe Oakes. He eventually moved to Portland, Oregon, the Bay Area's loss.

While he lived in the Bay Area he did things like create the Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon and the Recover From the Holidays Fat Ass 50-Milers, which he franchised (for free) to anyone in the world who wanted to put on a 50-mile race as penance for over-indulging over the Holidays; dozens of folks did just that: no frills, no entry fee, no prizes.

Joe was also quite the cerebral long-distance swimmer. He swam in the unfriendly San Francisco Bay, where currents were treacherous, the waters cold, and the sport dangerous: just the kind of sideline Joe Oakes loved. As part of the sport of long-distance swimming, Joe began to study the tides in the Bay and began to go after records. By swimming *with* the tides, he was able to put his name in the record books, but in typical Joe Oakes fashion, he had an explanation. "Hell," he said, "if you play the tides right, you could drop a turd in the water and it'd set a record."

Joe was always a restless guy, always looking for new challenges, always with a bag packed just in case something interesting cropped up in some remote part of the Earth that demanded his attention. His long-suffering wife Sylvia put up with all of it—and still does. She's been with Joe now for more than 50 years. God bless her.

Joe's most outrageous escapade was put together over a decade and came in

roughly a dozen installments, all tied together, like knotted shoe-laces, in an attempt to travel around this big ole world of ours without using an internal-combustion engine..or an engine of any kind.

The fact that he accomplished that feat only goes to prove how much of a nut-bag Joe Oakes really is.

By running, bicycling, swimming, kayaking, dog-sledding, etc., Joe circum-navigated the Earth.

And for the edification of the rest of us, he wrote it all down and a little publisher in Portland packaged it nicely in a handy 270-page book that is one of the most entertaining adventure travelogues you're likely to read. Entertaining because besides being crazy, Joe is one of the better humor writers plying the endurance path. He wrote numerous pieces for *Marathon & Beyond* in its early years, and people still cite them as memorable.

Joe's writing style is easily accessible, fast-moving, always entertaining, and his observations on the people he meets and the places he goes classic. His escapades in Siberia are especially noteworthy, and the shenanigans of pulling off the open-water swim between the islands in the Arctic Ocean where the USSR and the USA nearly meet are classic.

This would be a good book to read while warming yourself in front of a roaring fire while sucking down cheap wine from a gallon jug. Or while lounging under a warming sun while chugging cold beers. Either of those locales would put you in spiritual touch with your favorite new crazy uncle.