

# MY JOURNEY TO THE WORLDS

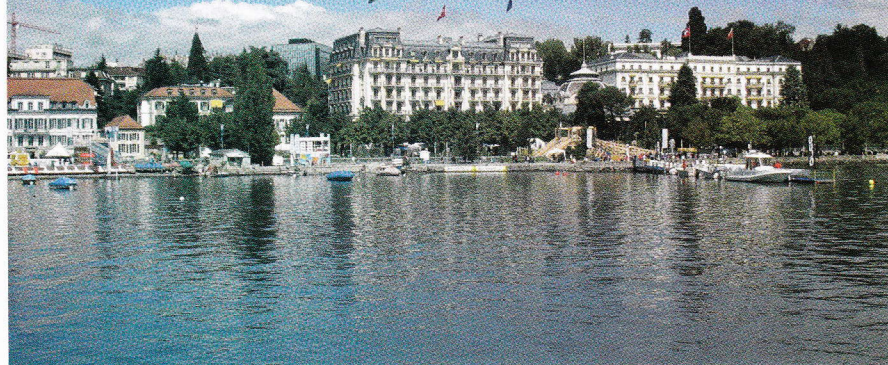


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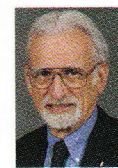
● By Dr. Steve Jonas

Worlds were to be held late in the year in New Zealand. The 2004 Worlds were scheduled for early in the year at Madeira Island. I figured that because of scheduling, the numbers game might work for me at the 2003 Shreveport, La., Nationals, the Madeira qualifier. I was right. There were only 15 of us for the 16 spaces that are available for each five-year age group. I finished, and went to my first Worlds at Madeira, 2004.

I get seasick in rough water, and to avoid that happening I have to swim side-stroke, keeping my head out of the water. Thus I was in rather cold water for a rather long time. Mild hypothermia and a very hilly bike course lead me to a DNF there. Next shot? When I would age-up to 70-74 in 2006. [By USAT/ITU rules you are the age you reach in the given calendar year.] Once you have made Team USA, you are forever qualified for Nationals. And so I went to Kansas City, Mo and with four other gents, made the team for the 2006 Worlds at Lausanne.

There, in my 112th triathlon and 175th multisport race overall, I experienced the thrill of crossing the finish line at a Worlds for the first time. And what a thrill it was, with my wife, Chezna, and various friends on the team there to greet me at the finish. I am already hoping to get to the next Worlds, at Hamburg, Germany, in 2007.

What does all of this mean for you? In our sport, anyone has a chance to get there. You can go fast and get there younger, or you can go long, like me, and get there as your age group cohorts shrink, with you still in it. The whole experience is such an expanding one: the travel, your friends on the team and making new ones, meeting triathletes from other countries, racing on the same course as the very best in the world, even if you aren't one of them. Representing your country at an international competition. So even if you are not fast now, think about it. If I can make it, so can you.



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On September 2, 2006 I crossed the finish line at the International Triathlon Union Age-Group World Championships at Lausanne, Switzerland. Did it take me a long time, both on that day and over time? It surely did. I was the last finisher in my age group (male 70-74). And it was a long journey from the days of my youth when I was invariably the last to go in "choose-ups" for any sport. But I made it, 24 years after finishing my very first triathlon. I thought to share with you in this space a few details of that journey.

On a day in October, 1980 after walking up a flight ramp at Cobo Hall in Detroit, on my way to a professional meeting session, I found myself out-of-breath. That was nothing new for me. But for reasons still unclear, at that moment I decided to do something about the fact that I had never been "in shape" in my life. I had heard about the then 20-minutes-three-times-per-week-aerobic-exercise recommendation of the American College of Sports Medicine for health improvement. I thought that I would hate doing even that little, but I was determined to do it, for my future health.

Within a month I was running 3-4 times a week for 30-45 minutes and enjoying myself. By the time spring, 1981, rolled around, I was a regular exerciser. The next year, before anyone had heard of cross training, I thought that balancing my exercise program would be a good idea. I bought my first 10-speed bike, ever. [And yes, it did have just ten speeds.] In the spring of '82, a friend invited me to do a five-mile race. "Race? What me, race?"

Little did I know. It was fun, and for the rest of that season, I was into road racing, up to 10ks.

Stimulated by another friend, I started having "marathon thoughts" early in the winter of 1983. I started to train for a full marathon. And then, having been made aware of the sport by having seen the famous "Julie Moss crawling-across-the-finish-line" February, 1982 Hawaii Ironman on TV, I heard about a race called the Mighty Hamptons Triathlon (MHT), to be held not too far away from my home in Port Jefferson, NY, at Sag Harbor. "That sounds like fun," I said to myself, "more fun than marathoning." [Speaking from the perspective of having done ten of the latter, boy, was I right.]

I finished the 1983 MHT, an Olympic-distance-plus race, slowly, happily, and healthily. There I was in the transition area at the end, a newly minted triathlete. I was just thrilled. "When is the next race?" I said to myself. I found one, three weeks later. I finished it too, happily and healthily. I was hooked. I have been racing regularly ever since. But as I said, I was slow and always have been. How, then, did I get to the Worlds?

At an MHT in 1998, I happened to finish third (out of three) in my age group. I realized that I had qualified for the USAT Nationals to be held the next season at St. Joseph, Mo. It was not something that I had thought about, but given the opportunity, I went. I didn't come close to qualifying for Worlds, but I caught the "Worlds bug." Several years later I noticed that the 2003