

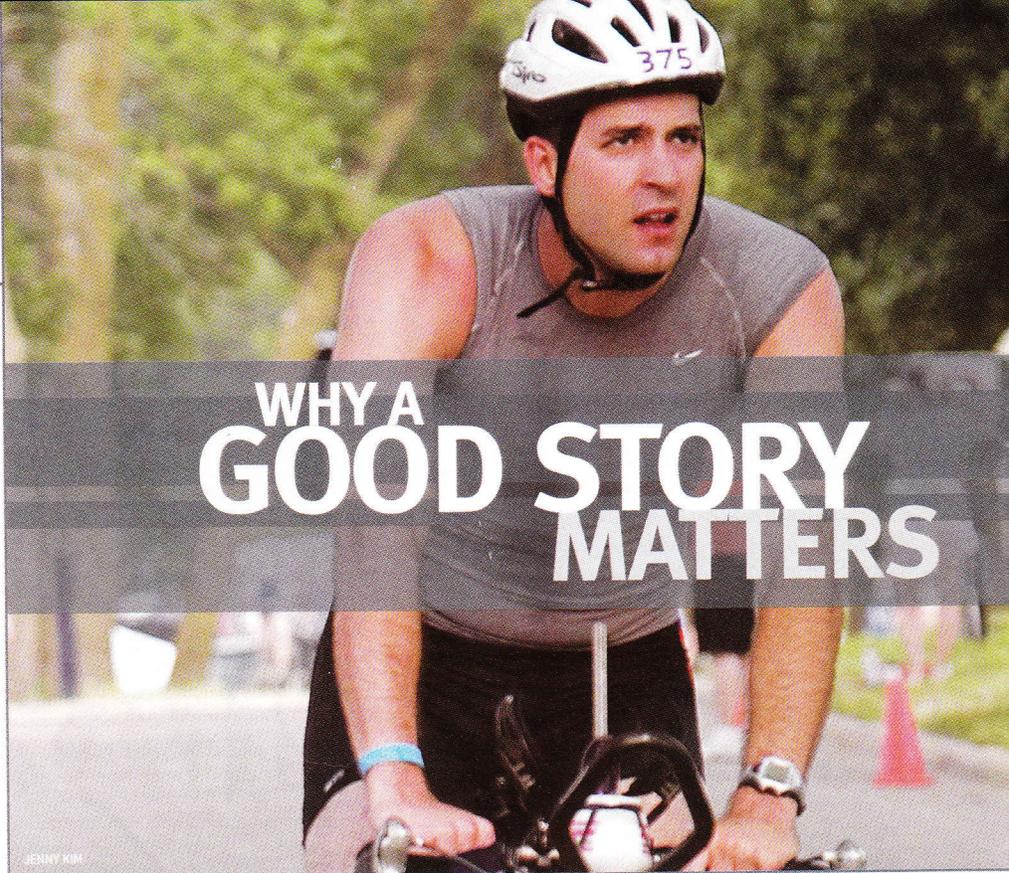
ordinary mortals™

talking triathlon
with steve jonas

One of the all-time great triathletes and pioneers of the sport, Scott Tinley, has had a regular column in *Triathlete* magazine for many years. His column in the July, 2007 issue began with the thought: "Sometimes sport matters. Sometimes not. Matters to what, you ask? To whom? . . . When it matters, sport makes a difference, it affects us, it resonates." And how does it resonate? It resonates in our memories, in our stories. This past summer issue of *USAT Life* celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Federation, our first national governing body. It happens that in this year I celebrated the 25th anniversary of my becoming a triathlete. And so, in this issue I thought to share with you a few of my stories, which reflect how our sport has resonated with me over these 25 years.

Do I remember every one of the 180-plus multi-sport races I have done? No, I don't. But let's start this reminisce with a story from my very first, the Mighty Hamptons held at Sag Harbor, NY on Sept. 17, 1983. That one I remember, and when I talk to first-timers I always tell them, "remember today. You will never do your first one again." And so, there I was, coming in from the bike, knowing that, even if it meant walking. I was going to finish! So I wasn't in any hurry. Back in those days there were no one-piece tri outfits and there were changing tents in some transition areas. Many of us changed outfits between the legs. (Some did not bother to use the changing tents, which led the then Triathlon Federation a couple of years later to ban disrobing in the transition area!) So into the tent I went. Slow I might be (and yes, I was slow then too). But color-coordinated on each leg I was going to be. Some minutes later, in matching singlet and running shorts (having shed my matching bike jersey and shorts), on my way out to the run I saw my two children and their mom standing near the run exit. I trotted over to say hello and give them all kisses. In a chorus, my daughter Lillian 7, and son Jacob 8, having seen me enter the tent some minutes before, yelled out "Dad! What took you so long? Get going!"

Then there is my very own Scott Tinley story. I was pedaling up Route 6 on Cape Cod, MA, outbound on the bike leg of my first ironman, the 1985 Cape Cod



WHY A GOOD STORY MATTERS

Endurance Triathlon. Being ahead of my planned pace and getting hungry (no gel packs in those days), I had just stopped for lunch: a hamburger and a coke. (Yes, I had previously tested out doing that, towards the end of a century ride in training. It had worked.) There, coming back down Route 6 on his way to setting the then-world's record for the distance, was Scott. I waved over to him, calling out something like "Way to go, Scott." He waved back. You don't forget experiences like that.

Then there is my favorite story from my last Ironman, the 1994 Great Floridian. I came into T2 after the official cut-off for the marathon. However, after a bit of negotiation with the race officials, because I had my own crew with a car, I was allowed to go out for the marathon. At about 1 AM a young lady came out from race management. I had about seven miles to go. "Are you going to finish?" she asked. "Yes, I am" I replied. And off she went. An hour later I had covered about three of those miles. "Are you going to finish?" "Yes, I am." "OK. Here's your Finisher's T-shirt. I'm going to bed." And finish I did, after 3 AM, with an elapsed time of 19:20. Believe me, I still have that finisher's T-shirt and still wear it every once in a while.

I don't do the ironman distance any more. Too much training for me now. But I get to go the Worlds from time to time as my age-group (now 70-74) shrinks in size. I went to my first at Madeira Island in 2004. Didn't

finish because I tend to get sea-sick doing freestyle in even mildly rough water. It was mildly rough that day, I had to do the slow old side-stroke to keep my head out of the water to avoid the sea-sickness, and I got somewhat hypothermic because I was in the water for so long. I stopped at halfway on the bike, after a lot of walking on the hills. I must have looked green. An aide came over, put her hand on my arm and said, in English, "you're cold." Indeed I was. And so, I got on the bus.

I was lucky enough to make Team USA again for Lausanne in 2006. Determined to finish, I did so on a course that even Hunter Kemper, then the reigning 2005 World Champion, described as "tough." Slow, real slow, at 5:02. But finish I did and what a thrill, because the secret of our sport for most of us is that it doesn't matter how fast or slowly you go; what counts is crossing that finish line, hopefully happily and healthily. And if on occasion you don't, as I did not at Madeira, there's always another race.

At the end of his column, Scott said: "We can create our own narratives . . . What matters is that we create our own history in the scrapbooks of our minds. When the bones are tired . . . the stories will still matter as they lie on the coffee table like old soldiers at the ready."

Whether you are fast, slow, or in between, collect your own stories. They will stay with you for a lifetime.



Dr. Steve Jonas is a 25-year multi-sport athlete, the author of *Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals™*, currently in its 21st year of publication (2nd ed. new in 2006), and a professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University (NY).