

**the loneliness of
the long distance racewalker ...
“there is no finish line”**

Part 2

**Hamilton, Ontario
1976, May 16
Canadian 20 Km
Racewalking Olympic Trial**

fourth place and
only sixteen seconds ...

yet, I might as well
be on the
dark side of the moon
when it comes to Olympic
team selection for
20 kilometre racewalking,
'cause only three
make the cut
for Montreal's July event —
sure, others seem impressed
by a young upstart
with little more than
two years competing
in what's really not
supposed to be
a “young man's sport”,
but still very nearly
snatched one of
the coveted places
from these wily vets —

coaches, seasoned athletes,
reassure me there's
Moscow Olympics in four years —
time enough to commit, to going
the long distance in racewalking,
have my chance at an Olympic prize ...

It's about Journeys and Destinations
"there is no finish line"

"A journey of a thousand li
begins with a single step."
(Laozi, ancient Chinese philosopher, founder of Taoism)

April, 1976:
my first national team ...
we're off to Mexico,
six athletes plus coach,
a week of training
followed by competition
on the weekend —
us, the visiting Canadians
versus our hosts, the Mexican
powerhouse national team
with numerous record holders
in Xalapa near Vera Cruz
on the Caribbean ...
my first international race,
a 20 km event, including
Daniel Bautista who's
ranked number 1 in the
world this year —
a bleak irony begins
its slow purr ...
by weekend it may be
into a full throttled growl with
"Glenn in the lions den"

* * *

... quest driven journeys have figured prominently throughout history, including among other stories, the legendary Arthurian tales of quests for a Holy Grail ...

"Olympian", it's an adjective that carries its own rather monumental weight ... so, now begins my own quest, remarkable in value only because of its challenges for me — the personal mountains that I'll be required to climb during my Olympic Quest ...

Xalapa, Mexico
1976, April 11
5:00 pm (23 C, 93% H)

today's 20 kilometre race is
my first international test,
the Mexicans include
the number one and three
ranked athletes in
the world this year
with Daniel Bautista
and Domingo Colin,
at least I'll see them
at the starting line ...

even in pre-race
warm up, I can feel
the thick, wet air —
sweat's dripping off me
and the race is
still a quarter
hour from
starting,
I got'ta find a
Johnny-on-the —
deal with these
last minute nerves ...

* * *

... the main character in Alan Sillitoe's short story, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner" realizes during his morning cross country runs that life itself is a mix of misery and happiness ... under the exertion of his long distance runs, Smith feels he's experiencing a life that's fully lived because of the mix of these emotions ...

the “Hurly Burly”
in Xalapa, Mexico
1976, April 11

okay, these laps are 2500 metres each ...
my gawd, it's damn humid,
concentrate now, just got'ta pick it up
if I can, or hold on to the pace ...
ahhh, there goes Oakley, off on a tear
how can he do it, I mean at his age ...
now, Farrelly, too — I mean,
that makes it two Canadians
ahead of me ... at least
LeBlanc's still a few seconds back of me,
I'm not last Canadian, at least ...
yeah, I'm sufferin' like
a wounded wildebeest,
but I'm not ready
for any kill just yet —
in fact, I'm ready
to give this last five K's
my usual hot safari rush ...
besides my split times
have been sounding really good ...

* * *

// Mexico Training Camp and Xalapa Post Race Script:

... the pre-Olympic one week training camp, followed by competition, was arranged in early April of 1976 for a Canadian racewalking team of six athletes and a coach in Mexico ... the Canadians trained and learned from the Mexican athletes and their coaches; however, when it came to the competition, it was really an intra-Canadian affair first and foremost ... your author finished with a PB performance for the 20 k distance (1:39.25.8); it was another promising step in preparation for the Olympic Trial race coming in one month's time ...