

# Fear and Loathing in Spokane

by John Farrow

*There he is!* hissed my attorney. *Who?*

*Him. Right there!*

And so he was. Waldemar Cierpinski, our elusive quarry, was perched directly ahead of us talking ever so smugly to a reporter. No doubt he was reliving once again how he had vanquished our hero in the 1976 Olympics, depriving him of his rightful medal.

But now was not the time to act, however. Not during a fun run at the national convention of the Road Runners Club of America. No, we would bide our time and later, when his guard was down from overindulging on Gatorade, we would grab him. But not a moment too soon.

This assignment was shaping up vastly different from Vegas in 1971, when I had set off across the California desert to find the American Dream and cover the Mint 400 motorcycle race with my Samoan attorney and a trunk-full of controlled substances. Then, day and night had blurred into a cacophony of sensory experimentation and deprivation involving alcohol and recreational pharmaceuticals.

Now, thanks to my new attorney, Perry Pettifogger, I had come clean and found a new passion in running. My previous attorney had experienced running only as necessary to take cover from real or imagined demons, and of course, at the time I was little better.

But as I ran with my new attorney, I realized that I actually knew little about runners, let alone him. He was certainly more understanding than I about character flaws, but who were these people? What made them tick? Perhaps this convention would provide answers to a few of the questions that had been running around in my head.

*As your attorney, I advise you to be cool.*

He was right. A fun run was neither the time nor the place to apprehend our prey and convince him to come clean. But later, once we had him in our grasp, I had no doubt that he would admit to his illicit drug use prior to the Olympics and renounce his past deeds, thereby giving Don Kardong his medal at long last. No doubt this would earn us a handsome fee, as well.

Yes, we had our ways. We would deal with Cierpinski in due time, but now we began to realize that something else had happened. Oprah was there, surely not as an invited runner. So was Rosie Ruiz, again not an invited runner.

This group had met here in Spokane once before, during the running boom of the 1970s. Two weeks later, Mt. St. Helens blew up. What could possibly happen this time?

Back at the hotel, we were informed that Don Kardong himself had been kidnaped! Clearly it was the work of Stassi, the former East German secret police, creating a diversionary tactic while they spirited Cierpinski away to the Fatherland.

What was this? The RRCA Board had kidnaped one of its own? A ransom demanded? Just who were these people?

Friday we traveled eastward for a lakeside run with the setting sun. On our way to Coeur d'Alene, a sign announced that we were leaving the Apple Maggot Quarantine Area. Thank God we were finally free from their clutches. Those little buggers were normally quite docile, but they could turn on you. They could be especially vicious if they had gotten into fermented apple juice.

The Bloomsday Race Expo was the largest I had ever seen, almost as big as the spread set out at the old Flamingo when Sinatra would hold court. Even the Washington Dairy Farmers had gotten into the act with milk, cookies, doughnuts, ice cream and Dove Bars. With that many Dove Bars, though, Elvis had to be around somewhere.

*As your attorney, I advise you to try the Snickers Ice Cream.*

My attorney was in fine pre-race form: popsicle in one hand, ice cream in the other, doughnut glaze on his face, bagel in one pocket, Power Bar and cookies in the other. This was one running tradition I could come to appreciate.

Race day dawned grey, wet and cold. Warmth was the first order, with bun-to-bun coziness much appreciated prior to the start. We did, however, stay clear of the Farm Area Racing Team from Quincy, Washington, Team FART.

*As your attorney, I advise you to watch out for parking meters.*

He was deadly serious, of course. Those things were a menace to runners trying to make up time on the sidewalk.

At the gun, we shuffled much of the first mile, taking care to avoid flying elbows and knees. By the time the pack had thinned out and we could run unconstrained, we were alongside a cemetery. Not a good sign. Soon up ahead, one mother of a hill loomed.

In Vegas, we had fought for our lives as packs of attack bats descended upon us unmercifully. Now, struggling up Doomsday Hill, what should appear near the top but a black, ten-foot tall vulture. What was going on, here? I really must be more careful with that Power Gel until I learn how to use it.

We escaped the vulture's clutches and in the last mile were greeted by driving rock music from the Northwest to see us to the finish. Any state that could spark a move to name *Louie, Louie* by Rockin' Robin Roberts and the Wailers the official state song was all right by me.

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