

Stride Over Struggle - The Joe Drake Odyssey

“Joe Drake’s ‘Run With It’ is a stirring triumph, masterfully capturing the essence of resilience and the transformative power of an unyielding spirit against life’s adversities.”

Reader’s House magazine lies a commitment to sharing stories that inspire, challenge, and transform. It is with immense pleasure that we present an intimate conversation with Joe Drake, an individual who embodies the tenacity of the human spirit in the face of life’s unforeseeable turns.

Joe Drake’s journey is not just a tale of personal triumph over Parkinson’s disease; it is a testament to the indomitable will to redefine one’s life narrative. Diagnosed at 57, Joe saw not a setback but a call to action—a clarion call that led him from the tech corridors of Silicon Valley to the marathon tracks of the world’s greatest cities. His story is one of courage, of finding therapy in the rhythm of running shoes against pavement, and of a relentless pursuit of vitality against the ticking clock of life.

Our dialogue with Joe delves into the pages of his debut book, “Run With It,” a narrative that captures the essence of his audacious six-week marathon challenge. It is a chronicle that has captivated readers, earning accolades and affirming Joe’s literary prowess. Beyond the awards, it is the authenticity of his voice that resonates—a voice that speaks of perseverance, family, and a ceaseless quest for adventure.

As Joe prepares to conquer his 23rd marathon, we invite you to join us in exploring the depths of his insights—from his engineering days to his literary escapades, from his childhood readings to his current literary favorites. This editorial serves as your gateway into the world of a man who runs not just with his feet, but with his heart and soul.

Welcome to an editorial introduction that heralds not just an interview, but an encounter with inspiration itself. Join us, as we unravel the story of Joe Drake—a narrative that champions the human spirit in every stride.

Your first book, “Run With It”, was published in 2022 when you were 61 years old. What took you so long?

Well, I am a slow-starter [laughs].

Seriously, I have always had a flair for writing and storytelling and I took several writing courses in college. But I am good at engineering, too, and that skill provided for my family. Though I made several forays over the years, I could never convince myself that I had something worthy to write about.

But then after I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s and took up running marathons, I hit upon this nutty idea of running all the World Marathon Majors over a six-week stretch in 2021. I found that the tale held my audiences spell-bound. They were enthralled and inspired by this nobody marathoner taking on such an audacious challenge and succeeding. I thought, “Maybe this could be it.” That and encouragement from friends convinced me to write it all down.

What challenges did you face in publishing it?

Same as all authors just starting out, I suppose. Rejections and ghosting by publishing houses are the norm. I figured out quickly that I would have to self-publish. Also, I understood my manuscript needed the critical eye of an experienced editor and I couldn’t convince myself that the hybrid publishing houses had that skill available for their clients. Hence, I hired an editor and we worked on the manuscript for a few months. After that I learned how to create a website and how to publish on Amazon, Ingram Spark, etc. Fortunately, there is a lot of information on the internet to guide would-be authors.

I had doubts all along about the book’s quality. The fact that it won a few awards is immensely gratifying and validating.

There’s a lot going on in the cover art for “Run With It”. Is there a backstory to it?

Yes. I had ideas of what I wanted to express with the cover – the scene at a marathon, Parkinson’s and dopamine, spectator love – and I ran them by my sister, Tricia Snyder, who also has Parkinson’s and is an artist. We had a great discussion but she declined the opportunity because she was too busy.

She writes grant proposals for public sector art programs. But then the day following our discussion she sent me some sketches and we were off and running. (See what I did there?) Turned out, she would much rather do art than write grant proposals.

What kind of reader were you as a child?

I was unenthusiastic. I read just what was needed to do well in school. Then after graduating from high school, on a whim, I read “Catch 22” and I was floored. Who knew that literature could be so off-the-wall crazy, funny, and thoroughly enjoyable? I’ve been an avid reader ever since.

What’s the last great book you read?

“The Golem and the Jinni” by Helene Wecker. It’s a marvelous mashup of Hebrew and Arab legends of the supernatural told against a backdrop of early 1900’s historical events. I’ve also read the sequel, “The Hidden Palace” and I hope Ms. Wecker will have more for us in this series.

Which writers – working today – do you admire most?

As an engineer, I am drawn to writers who can make complex topics broadly accessible. Bill Bryson and Michael Lewis come to mind. I also love the historical fiction of Ken Follet, especially when he uses characters who are early wizards at applying science and engineering principles. And then there are some writers – I am thinking of David Mitchell now – who thrill me with their other-worldly creativity.

Who is your favorite fictional hero or heroine?

Don Tillman, introduced to us in “The Rosie Project” by Graeme Simsion. Don is a brilliant scientist who is wonderfully clueless about people in general and about his own shortcomings. Don at times made me laugh out loud and, in the end, cheer for him when he finally gets the girl despite his developmental disorder.



PHOTO: Embarking on a journey of resilience and revelation with Joe Drake, whose marathon triumphs against Parkinson's inspire and uplift.