

# Russians Just Happy to be Here

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As he logged the long miles through Russia with new friends from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and points east, he thought how nice it would be to return the Russians' hospitality. "I wanted them to see what the United States was like," Opsahl recalled, "and I wanted Americans to meet Soviets on a personal basis. Running is a great way to do that. It breaks down a lot of barriers."

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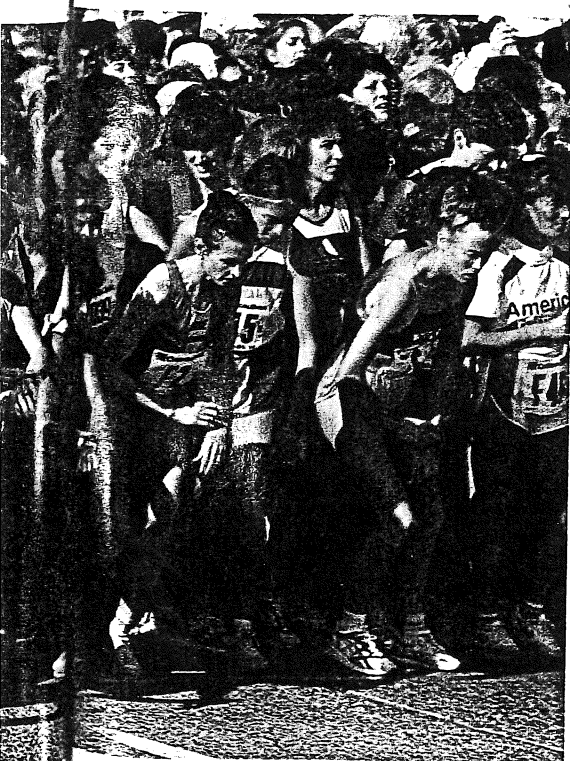
But this wasn't like booking a tour group from London. There were some anxious moments on August 19–21, when

the attempted coup in Moscow threatened to knock the idea cold—as in cold war. Opsahl was especially concerned because his son Hans, a student, was in the U.S.S.R. at the time. But finally, on August 30, a fax arrived from Denisov. "All is well in Moscow," it began.

And all was well in New York two months later—or as well as could be expected when running a marathon after being jetted, feted, and flattered from Fire Island to Wall Street. Opsahl and friends had a busy agenda for the Soviets in the days leading up to the race. And the 10 Russians who came weren't elite runners, after all, just folks who like to run. In addition to Denisov, the Russian contingent included a teacher, a journalist, two professors, a manager, and—as Opsahl dryly noted—"a couple of communist officials looking for work."

No matter. The marathon's manifesto is one of the indomitable spirit of humankind, and Denisov and his comrades—running with Opsahl and some of his Long Island running buddies—reveled in it. "I was thrilled at the bravery of these runners," said the 47-year-old Denisov after the race. "I started in the back and saw so many remarkable people—elderly, disabled. I felt quite privileged to be running with these

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