

When I was nineteen, many years ago, a doctor told me that walking was the most effective way to maintain the health of the infant inside my body. So, in the interest of the child, I did as he told me. I started a habit of walking every day. Every day. Over the course of many, many years, the habit of walking dominated my free time. When I started teaching here at LCC, twenty years ago, I decided to walk to and from school every day, no matter what. Every day. This daily habit has evolved into an extended route, in order that I can average seven miles per day. (The average includes weekend ten-milers.)

Walking is the most natural of human physical actions. It's a self-perpetuating action and therefore often evolves into an ethereal state of mind—the legs and feet being ignored and the mind taking over. So most of my daily seven-milers happen without my knowing. The route is already established, so my mind has no decisions to make. Let the feet do their thing. Let the legs go free. I step onto my front porch, and before I know it, I'm in my office changing my shoes.

Eleven years ago, I walked the entire Columbia River, a total of 1,264 miles. This task took me sixty-six days at twenty miles per day. Here's a note from my journal: *It seems the human body was designed for walking, and mine is no exception. Walking will probably send me into my mature years as a tough old girl with good bones and feet so broad no shoes will fit.*

Now, I guess it's fair to say that I am now a tough old girl with good bones and broad feet.

Walking sends me into a meditative state, a tranquil place where fantasy and desire become plans and objectives. The longer the walk, the more serene is my state of mind. While walking the Columbia River, often I would enter this meditative state within twenty minutes of the day's allotment and remain there until after lunch. It was sort of like being in church, out there on the highway with nothing but pavement and, yes, the river, as companions. The Columbia River--my constant companion, my sister, my beloved river, flowing as I walked beside her. Yes, my imagination notwithstanding, the experience was very spiritual.

I have no plans to alter my daily seven.