

## **I WALK**

Stewart Hendrickson

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I walk because... for a lot of reasons. Before my life changed – living with my wife, free to sit at home or go out as I wished – I walked for exercise, for stress release, to think and contemplate, or simply to get from one place to another. Sometimes alone, sometimes with my wife or others. I have always enjoyed walking – over a thirteen-thousand foot pass on the eastern face of the High Sierras, to a neighborhood store or cafe, to get the mail, to a bus stop, or simply for the sake of waking. In my youth I walked fast, now I walk slow.

Now that I am living alone without my wife or anyone else, sheltering from a dreadful virus, walking is my daily exercise, my only chance to escape the walls of my small condo in Ballard. Every day for an hour or so I walk about two miles. My route encompasses the same rectangular area, away from the center of town and along residential streets – across seven streets in one direction and five or six in the other direction. The best part is along streets with single-family houses. Streets with condos are less interesting and visually boring except for the occasional old house, or sometimes historic church, surrounded by imposing, monolithic, new multi-housing structures.

I like best to walk in early morning on a sunny Spring day, with the air cool and crisp and the radiance of the sun warming me. I don't like walking in the rain, and will often wait until afternoon when the sun might come out, or early before the rain comes in. I am a fair-weather walker by choice. Although we are told to use a face mask outside in these coronavirus times, I usually don't if I am away from other people. If I encounter someone on the sidewalk, one of us will step out in the street or to the other side, keeping six feet or more apart. This is called the Seattle Shuffle. Other times if I meet someone at a street corner, one of us will wait for the other to pass at a safe distance. This is called the Seattle Wait. If I do, on a rare occasion, meet someone I know, I will put on my mask as we talk six feet apart and masked. All of this is Seattle Nice etiquette, although sometimes it is violated – rude people!

As I walk I often pause to admire flowers or a nice scene, which I will then photograph with my ever-ready iPhone (what did we do without them?). I have quite a collection of photos to document my walks: flowers and trees, beautiful vistas, interesting sculptures or other street art, quirky things like children's chalk art, little mosaics on sidewalks or walls, or anything else that might catch my eye. I try to walk all the streets in different directions, on different sides, under different lighting at different times of day, under clouds or sun, and I always find something different to photograph. Mine is not a fast walk, but more meandering and slow. I take time to admire things along the way.

People. We hear the term Seattle Freeze. People are reluctant to speak to others they don't know, strangers on the street, in shops or other places, and we find it hard to make new friends. This may or may not be true, but living in small-town Minnesota I often stopped to talk to people on the street, most of whom I already knew, and found it easy to

make new friends. As a new resident of Ballard, when I met someone on the street and offered a greeting – “hi” or “nice day” – most people would ignore me, look the other way, or walk away faster. That was mostly true of younger people (but not always), older people would sometimes respond. On my walks in these coronavirus times, however, I find people more willing to wave or say something; maybe it’s because “we’re all in the same boat,” and we are now kinder to each other. That’s good.

Here’s an encounter. I walked by a condo with little fenced courtyards along the street. The fences were too high to see anyone inside, but I heard a woman’s voice inside singing cheerful little snatches of song. I stopped to listen. Every once in a while I saw her hands above the fence; it looked as if she was hanging clothes – does anyone ever do that outside anymore? As I started to walk away I said, “thank you for the songs.” She laughed and said “you’re welcome.” What a pleasant encounter. All of this in these dismal times of pandemic. We can still find beauty and community as we live our lonely lives in these terrible times.

So I walk because I need to. It raises my spirits, and it’s good for my body.

**You can see all the photos** I have taken during those walks. They give you some idea of my Ballard neighborhood this Spring.

Click on this link

<https://1drv.ms/u/s!AgMyQPtWtab2vDKfcZf4mxfitIZf?e=Pd8ikA>

You don’t need to sign in. If you click on the first picture you should be able to do a slide show. If you have an iPhone, just click on the three dots ( ... ) on the upper left, and then “*play slide show*”.

Enjoy!