

# Walk Hard

by Wlady Pleszczynski

**W**ITHIN A YEAR OF BIRTH we learn to walk, much to the delight of our parents. But then we disregard our new ability. Speaking for myself, I only recall never wanting to walk anywhere. For movement I wanted wheels, a real bike, not a tricycle good only for going around in circles and tipping over. And no training wheels either, which were like a ball and chain and sissy besides. The best thing about going to school was going to it and back on my bicycle. It was as faithful a companion as my later dog. Leaving it behind for summer camp five years in a row was traumatic, particularly because of Wednesdays, set aside each session for all-day hikes. What a drag-out nightmare in the hot San Bernardino mountain sun. From one of those endless treks I returned feverish with measles. That put an end to my career in forced marches. Soon enough I turned 16 and traded bicycle for car. Now I wouldn't have to walk for even greater distances.

Sports, a.k.a. exercise, at the time comprised running and jumping and darting about, and not much baseball, actually, perhaps because of all the "walks" it involved where hardly anyone knew how to throw a strike or to hit one. Calling them "free passes" hardly erased the stigma.

Next thing I knew I was married and suburban, commuting to downtown offices, with lots of driving back and forth and everywhere else. It seemed walking came into play only on those few occasions I traveled to New York City, where walking is a necessity and a one-of-a-kind pleasure. But who can walk in beautiful downtown Indianapolis, say, after they've seen Manhattan?

The decades flew by. Then came the day my doctor suggested I lose some weight, improve my diet, and exercise regularly. Luckily his diagnosis coincided with a visit I made to my boyhood California hometown. Before I knew it I was walking along the streets I used to bicycle, checking up on some of my old neighborhood's key properties—its mom-and-pop purveyors of penny candy are long gone, alas—and then expanding

my horizons. It's amazing how far one can walk if one devotes an hour or two to the deed. And to keep things interesting one can keep coming up with new paths.

After 10 days of this I returned to Northern Virginia. I rediscovered my neighborhood, walking along streets I hadn't seen since our boys were in a pram. A similar broadening occurred, and suddenly I was going places I'd never been, not to mention seeing for myself what a rich collection of jogging-biking-walking paths my county has to offer its non-sedentary residents.

Better still has been my experience in Arlington, our magazine's home since 1985—at three different locations no more than 30 minutes away, as I've now figured out. From our current offices in Rosslyn it's 12 minutes to the Iwo Jima Memorial, 17 to Arlington Cemetery's north gate, 30 to the Memorial Bridge. Cross it in less than 10, turn left and follow the embankment along the Potomac past the Kennedy Center to Georgetown for another half hour, and then cross the Key Bridge back to our offices in 20 minutes or so.

But nothing beats the Mount Vernon Trail, which once past Roosevelt Island (13 minutes away) offers lovely views of Washington from Virginia's Potomac shore. There's not a tourist in sight, though many a jogger and occasionally crazed biker compete for space along this path, which doesn't end until you reach George Washington's home 18 miles away. Not enough hours in the day to walk that far, but a mile or two suffice for a long, sustained look at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, and Capitol dome across the majestically wide river. At first the three appear to be lined up one behind the other—but 20 minutes later they seem to be standing one next to the other. Throw a few ducks into the picture, geese, egrets, and even an occasional otter, next to parkland grass and weeping willows and thick-leaved trees, and what could be nicer?

Maybe to have another crack at an all-day summer camp hike? ❄

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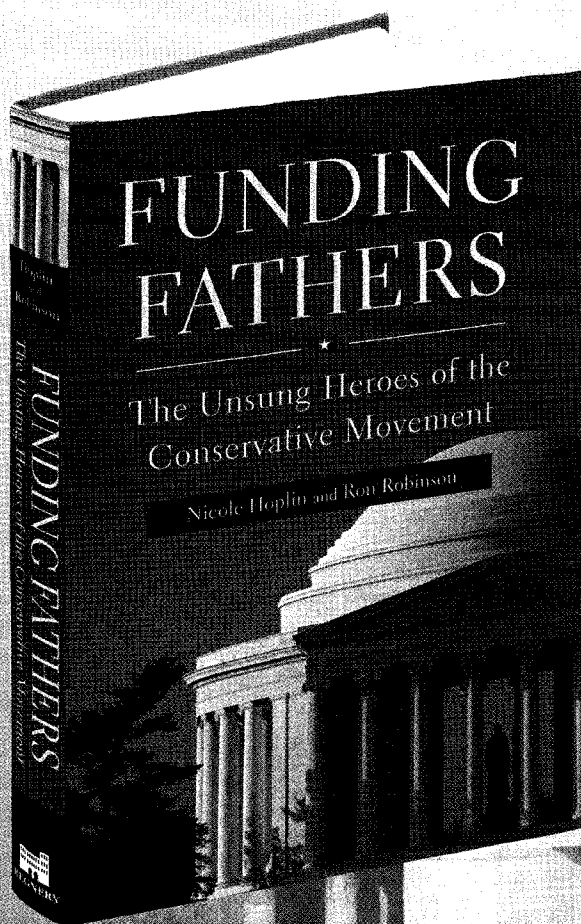
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