

CREATIVITY MOVEMENT

The Zen of walking

— Susan Dawson-Cook, M.S.

If you tend to exercise while watching the news, listening to music or reading a magazine, you're not alone.

Most people feel compelled to transport their minds elsewhere in order to reduce boredom and provide distraction from potential discomfort. Imagine how different your life could be if you began embracing those hours to resolve troubling issues or to culture the flow of innovative ideas on anything from a new business strategy to a plot for a novel.

For centuries, artists, writers and philosophers have spoken out about the myriad of benefits of walking. Henry David Thoreau once said "...the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow." The rhythmic nature of walking cultivates self-understanding and allows you to enjoy the beauty of the outdoors. If undertaken at a brisk pace for at least 30 minutes, walking also improves cardiovascular fitness and facilitates the maintenance of bone density.

Children's author and Tucson resident Jennifer J. Stewart finds her daily walks to be enjoyable and rejuvenating and much easier on her joints than running or jogging. She often walks alone, but also enjoys sharing the road with close friends as a kind of "therapy."

"I notice a difference in my mood on days I walk versus days that I don't get any vigorous exercise. If I can get a good 45 minutes to an hour in, preferably in the morning, I find that I am more productive, I can tackle more things and I don't feel tired and sluggish," she says. Perhaps walking is one of the ingredients to her success, along with her knack for making her readers laugh—her middle-grade novel, *Close Encounters of a Third-World Kind*, inspired by her family's experiences living in Nepal, has been nominated for the 2007 Arizona Young Reader Award. Stewart is hard at work on her fourth book, a novel for intermediate readers.

Walking often leads to the resolution of puzzling questions which Stewart is unable to solve in front of the computer screen. As she walks, she allows her mind to play and for her characters to step off the page and converse with her. "I've had characters talk to me as I'm walking, but more often it [walking] will help me to iron out a plot problem or to figure out where the story is going. Often when I'm done, I have an answer,"

she says.

Stewart's favorite walking sites are Sabino Canyon and Agua Caliente Park. She finds Agua Caliente to be a particularly enjoyable place to take a meditative walk because of the diversity of what she sees along the way,—ponds teeming with fish and turtles and water-loving birds such as herons and ospreys. "I see something different there every time. It's this little oasis."

Phoenix-based children's and young adult author and regional advisor for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) in Arizona, Michelle Parker-Rock finds walking to be pivotal to her success. With a long history of publishing credits and her new 12-book series of author biographies entitled *Authors Kids Love* soon to be released, Parker-Rock is no stranger to success.

Parker-Rock describes her walks as "deliberate, long and hard." She thrives on the euphoria she experiences each time her brain releases endorphins, the body's natural opiates. "I walk to get that feeling," she says. At the beginning of her typical walk, thoughts and concerns about work dominate. Once Parker-Rock establishes a rhythm, she reaches her "zone," where random thoughts flow in and out of her conscious-

ness without attaching themselves, and often an epiphany occurs where she is able to resolve whatever is puzzling her. "I have had very creative moments when I am walking and even when I am two or more miles away from home," Parker-Rock says. For that reason, she now carries a writer's notebook with her so she can jot down notes when that perfect sentence or phrase pops into her head along the way.

As far as locations go, "One's neighborhood is always a great place to start," says Parker-Rock. She has established several different walking routes throughout her neighborhood to keep her interest level high and wears a pedometer to keep track of distances. When time permits, she also enjoys exploring the trails at the Cave Creek Recreation Area and the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area in Phoenix.

Clearly, much can be learned from authors, philosophers and artists ancient and modern that have freely shared with others the benefits of walking. Raymond Inmon once said "If you are seeking creative



The author and her dog, Sammy, on the Canyon Loop Trail

Christopher Ferko

ideas, go out walking. Angels whisper to a man when he goes for a walk." So step outside your doorstep or head for your favorite park and let your footsteps lead the way to a new world of discovery and self-understanding. **F**

Walking Areas in Tucson

Rillito River Park

What: Multiple-use paved walkway with facilities.
Where: Campbell Avenue to La Cholla Boulevard along Rillito River.

Santa Cruz River Park

What: Multiple-use paved walkway with facilities.
Where: Along Santa Cruz River from Grant Road to Irvington Road.

Canyon Del Oro River Park

What: Three miles of separated multi-use paths in Oro Valley, with a 2.3 mile stretch along the south side of Lambert Lane.
Where: Access from either Lambert/First Avenue intersection or the Lambert/La Cañada intersection.

Reid Park

What: Three-mile loop with water and facilities.
Where: Southwest corner of Alvernon and Broadway.

Sabino Canyon Park *

What: Four-mile paved path.
Where: On east side of Sabino Canyon road, north of Sunrise.

Agua Caliente Park *

What: Preserved 1920's ranch with walking trails, a natural spring flows into three separate ponds, attracting ducks, herons and ospreys.
Where: 12325 East Roger Road (take Soldiers Trail north from Tanque Verde to Roger and then head east.).

* Jennifer Stewart's favorites

Walking Areas in Phoenix

Cave Creek Recreation Area *

What: More than 11 miles of hiking and walking trails.
Where: Exit I-17 at Carefree Highway, drive east 7 miles to 32nd street, then turn north about 1.5 miles to entrance. Entrance fee is \$3.

City of Glendale Xeriscape Botanical Garden

What: Four acres where there are more than 400 species of plants, garden is open to the public every day of the year at no cost.
Where: 5959 W. Brown St. at the Glendale Main Library.

Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area *

What: Walking trails along the foothills of Elephant Mountain, can walk on main paved road or along gentle walking trails, archaeological sites and lush riparian areas along Cave Creek.
Where: From central Phoenix, take I-17, 35 miles north to Carefree Highway. Travel east on Carefree Hwy. to Cave Creek Road, then north to Spur Cross Road. Turn north on the Spur Cross Road and continue 4.5 miles to entrance.

Tempe Town Lake Linear Park System

What: Five miles of paved paths around Tempe Town Lake.
Where: Mill Avenue, Rural Road and Priest Drive provide crossing points that connect the North and South Bank Linear Parks. Paved path for the North Bank Linear Park begins at Priest Drive going east. South Bank Linear Park begins at McClintock Drive.

* Michelle Parker-Rock's favorites