

Making Ripples

Why Walk

by Amanda Bancroft

One of my favorite fictional heroines is Jessica Fletcher, protagonist in the mystery series and TV show “Murder She Wrote.” Played by Angela Lansbury, Jessica does not have a driver’s license nor does she own a car. Instead, she has a pilot’s license and can fly herself and passengers to other locations, and she’s frequently seen walking or bicycling around town. I also admire Beatrix Potter, a real woman who walked all over the Lake District of England for most of her life.

I’ve heard from all kinds of local people that they have been discouraged from walking because of safety concerns or confused police, or because of their sex. Women and girls are particularly discouraged from walking, especially alone, because of fears of rape or kidnapping, even here in Northwest Arkansas. I have seen people pull over and insist I ride with them because it wasn’t safe for me to be walking!

Crime does happen, and these concerns are not necessarily invalid, but we should compare the risks from walking – a form of eco-friendly exercise – with the risks from driving or riding in a vehicle, or doing so while texting or intoxicated, which is seriously dangerous. Much more dangerous than a stroll across town.

Taking into account that a person is not walking (or rolling) in a dangerous area at night and alone without any protection (such as mace or skills from a self-defense class, which I have taken) walking is actually one of nature’s biggest blessings. It’s another step towards disease prevention, like many other forms of exercise, and it’s enjoyable not only because of time spent outdoors or in nature but also because of social interaction which boosts our mood. Walking is free, and you can do it in a variety of settings.

One of my good friends makes time for walking his dogs and walking around the mall, just for exercise, not for shopping. Many people I know go to the farmer’s markets, which are perfectly lovely at this time of year – pick up a pumpkin and that’s even more exercise points in your pocket!

According to one poster on “Why Take the Stairs?” hung in a local elevator, “it saves you time traveling to and from the gym, increases endorphins, lessens stress, helps you meet your fitness goals, reduces electricity usage from elevators, reduces your risk of stroke, cancers, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes, increases bone density and tones muscles, and increases cardiovascular health.”

The Mayo Clinic says that walking a dog for 20 minutes burns 100 calories for a 150 pound person, and taking the stairs burns about 50 calories in 200 steps. That gets us closer to the recommended 10,000 steps a day for optimum health benefits. I have not yet reached 10,000 steps a day, even while living without a car for three years, but I plan to keep trying. It's autumn, the leaves are turning colors and it just might be time to turn over a new leaf and start walking more.

Amanda Bancroft is a Master Naturalist and volunteers with her husband Ryan for their solar-powered online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.