

# "Walkabout": searching for the right passage from childhood

by Celia Saxon  
Two grade nine students recently attempted to break the world's crawling record, as part of an English project called "Walkabout" at Acton High School.

Now what on earth has crawling to Georgetown on your hands and knees got to do with learning how to read and write?

Clare Henderson, the English teacher who pioneered the "Walkabout" program at Acton High, explains the rationality of this seemingly illogical venture.

"A Walkabout is a real life, personal experience, chosen by students, to be carried on outside the simulated environment of the classroom. The students must decide to do something they've never done before. The Walkabout is an experimental enrichment project which helps a student to grow intellectually and emotionally, to prepare them for the real world outside the confines of the school walls. The experience must add to their knowledge, increase their skills, and give them a feeling of independence and accomplishment."

Mr. Henderson said the Walkabout is a challenge designed to shock the unmotivated students to awareness, to relieve some of the peer pressures that prevent the followers from doing things that are "different" for fear of being laughed at.

"Walkabout is intended to shock corpses to life and to electrify the living to an exciting and challenging existence."

So how does all this apply to the exhausted lads, Glen Van Rijk and Mike Ashley, with their aching muscles and blistered hands and knees?

First of all the pair had to study the Guinness Book of World Records to find a challenge they felt they could take on. The boys then placed a long distance call to the United States to confirm the latest crawling record—10.1 miles.

Finding information by telephone, visiting local newspapers seeking publicity, soliciting sponsors to raise money for the school and organizing adults to accompany them on their journey, they learned valuable communication skills that will benefit them all their life. They must now further their communicating abilities by giving a written or verbal presentation to the class, relating their experience.

"And what an experience," Mr. Henderson exclaimed. "Something that seemed silly and frivolous became one of the most dramatic Walkabouts we've had so far. The boys became instant celebrities."

Everybody became a part of it. The Free Press, The Herald, The Toronto Star and other newspapers picked up the story. The adventure sparked school spirit, as many older students offered to accompany the youngsters on their 10 mile journey along Highway 7, while others gave pledges. Friends and strangers were on hand to cheer them on to victory. It bridged the generation gap as the boys' parents became involved.

It doesn't matter that the boys did not succeed. Their success lies in the fact that

they thought of the idea, and made the decision. They increased their store of knowledge about World Records and the difficulties of accomplishing them.

Walkabout is an Australian custom utilized by the Aborigines. In Australia a young native boy is given a six months long endurance test in which he must survive alone in the wilderness and return to his tribe an adult or die in the attempt. The young Aborigine faces a severe trial, in which he must demonstrate knowledge and skills necessary to make him a contributor to his community rather than a drain on its meager resources.

In his isolation, the youth is compelled to explore his inner and spiritual resources, confront his anxieties, and come to terms with himself and society. He develops a love and respect for the land he must take from.

Clare Henderson introduced the Walkabout idea to his grade 12 and 13 Canadian literature classes last year, after reading an article in an educational journal. In the article Maurice Gibbons, a university professor, compares the stark contrast between the actual Walkabout experiences of the Aborigine lad, to the theoretical learning situations of a Canadian adolescent preparing for the future.

Gibbons points out, "In contrast to the young native's Walkabout experience, the western youth is faced with written examinations that test skills very far removed from the actual experiences he will have in real life. He solves familiar theoretical problems, but cannot apply them to strange but real situations. He is always under direction in a protected environment. His education has little to do with reaching maturity or developing fully as a person. And yet, what will matter to him—and his community—is not his test-writing ability, or even what he knows about, but what he feels, what he stands for, what he can do, and what he is becoming as a person."

Mr. Henderson noted that our educational system has long ignored the emotional aspects of learning.

So, as an experiment, he asked his students to accept the personal challenge, and take on a real-life experience outside the usual bounds of the school. The students were allowed to choose from five categories: Community Service; Creative/Aesthetic; Adventure; Research or Vocational.

They were given specific objectives and criteria that it must increase their knowledge in some way. The students kept a journal to record their reactions. At the end of the semester each student was time-tabled to present the experience to the class. They outlined what they did, showed the results, and told how it was an important learning experience. They defined the personal challenge, and most important, described the personal growth that took place as a result.

"I was very reluctant to give specific examples, since students often leap on the teacher's ideas. I wanted each Walkabout to be totally student oriented," Henderson said. "I was afraid they might come in with stupid and insignificant things, but was amazed that they had some tremendously brilliant, original ideas. We could never have compiled a list from which they could choose, that would include the things they came up with."

Since there is a lot of emphasis on ecology these days, several students chose to take an extensive canoe trip in Northern Ontario's wilderness. Before the trip they had to do a lot of research and preparation—studying maps and organizing menus and gear, after which the participants gave a presentation to

the class using maps, personal photos and slides they took on the trip. One student conceded "I learned a lot about people, the way they react under pressure and how they react to different living conditions."

Jennifer Rowe went the other route, and took her adventure into the inner city of Toronto. Jennifer, an aspiring journalist, had planned to attend Ryerson after graduation. As a resident of a small town, she hoped the trip would alleviate some of her anxieties and familiarize her with the frightening big city.

Jennifer did a lot of research on Toronto before she went, and while touring Yonge St., Chinatown, Ryerson and other exciting places, she took colour slides for her presentation to the teacher and class. As a result of the overwhelming experience, Jennifer has decided to go to Sheridan College next year, instead, study Community Journalism and live at home.

"If you don't know Toronto, it's really something," Jennifer observed. "But the Walkabout changed my mind about working for a big city daily. I'm really glad I had the opportunity to assess it before I made the plunge. There's such a difference, even in the air. It's a nice place to visit, but..."

This semester Jennifer is doing her Walkabout with the Acton Free Press. She spends three afternoons a week

covering school and community news and says "I love it."

For a research project on truck driving, Ray Dunbar made an actual trip with a truck driver to the United States to help map out his career. The most important lesson Ray learned was that even a truck drive needs a minimum of grade 12 education. Ray is back in school this semester completing his grade 12.

While working at the Guelph Humane Society, every Sunday for three months, Diane Buckman confirmed a love of animals. She is now studying Animal Health at St. Clare College in Windsor preparing for a lifetime occupation.

Sandra Early, a young musician, organized a children's choir at her church and accompanied them on the organ. For her presentation she recorded some of the hymns the children sang. This year Sandra is at Sir Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, studying Music Education and Organ.

The young lady who spend her Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons tutoring a hyperactive child in Grade 1, was not necessarily performing a career-oriented Walkabout. Carol Grant just wanted to do something rewarding. Carol is also attending Wilfrid Laurier this year, working towards a business career.

Other students chose to write plays, novels, songs, poetry, or make animated



AS PART of her Walkabout program, Geraldine Schonnop helps out at Jeanette's Home for Senior Citizens.

film strips. Some of the creative endeavors included macrame, crochet and sewing. One girl spent time with a senior citizens group learning the old art of quilting, and also learning the fascinating history of Acton from her instructors.

"I was so gratified by the positive reactions of the students that this semester I have introduced the Walkabout program to all English teachers in the school," Mr. Henderson remarked. "We decided to make it compulsory, because if we left it optional, the unmotivated students, who stand to benefit the most from the program, are the ones who would choose not to do it."

So every student at all grade levels has to do a Walkabout. And do it to a high standard, as it is worth 20 per cent of the English mark on their report card. Since it is a personal experience, each student assists in the evaluation of his own project.

As Mr. Henderson put it, only the person himself knows how much he put into it, and how much he got out of it. Half the mark is assessed by the teacher, while the student marks himself on a scale of 1 to 10, on a prepared evaluation sheet.

This semester English students throughout the school have thrown themselves into the Walkabout with the same enthusiasm, adding to the long list of choices, including the Craw-

lathon.

Three grade 12 girls, Kathy McAfee, Bonnie Schaus, and Julie Townsley are spending a whole day every second week assisting teachers at the Child Development Centre in Milton. They help retarded children with physical disabilities. Two of the girls hope to make a career working with the handicapped, but the

third one went along with her friend because she couldn't think of anything else.

"But likely, the one who doesn't know what she wants may end up getting more out of the experience than the other two," Mr. Henderson speculated.

Geraldine Schonnop, a grade twelve student, is working all day every Thursday at Jeanette's Home for Seniors on Main Street. She is finding the venture a tremendous personal help as well as helping others. She sets their hair, makes the beds, and helps prepare and serve the meals. Geraldine feels this is valuable training for a future career in Community Services.

Among other Walkabout choices this semester are

skiing lessons, learning broomstick lace, and teaching disabled children to ride horses. A few students have formed a film club to bring good movies to town at an affordable price.

Students who are not particularly academically inclined, are finding the practical experience more to their liking. Some with imagination are increasing their self-confidence.

"But all will gain an awareness of themselves and the people around them that cannot be taught in a classroom setting," Clare Henderson contends.

"Schools are artificial environments. The Walkabout can go a long way in developing a real education."

## Firemen to school

Deputy Fire Chief Bob Hyde and Fire Prevention Officer Larry Brassard are going back to school.

Monday Halton Hills works committee approved attendance at the Ontario Fire College in Gravenhurst next year for both men.


Hyde will take part one of the Fire Protection Technology Course from May 8 to June 9. From November 6 to December 8 Brassard will be at the Fire College taking part one of the Fire Prevention Technology Course. There is no registration fee so all the town must do is continue paying the two men's wages while they are at school.

## Can FBDB help you?

**Tom McCurdy**  
will be in your area  
**Friday, December 9th**  
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Call 844-0911 Now For An Appointment**

If you require financing for a new or existing business, Mr. McCurdy will call at your place of business to discuss your needs.



**FEDERAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK**

**OAKVILLE BRANCH**  
345 Lakeshore Road East  
Opening New Doors To Small Business



EVALUATING THEIR own projects is an important part of the Walkabout program. English teacher Clare Henderson helps Jennifer Rowe evaluate her project.

**RECORD THE FAMILY VOICES FOR CHRISTMAS GIVING WITH A SONY CASSETTE-CORDER FM-AM RADIO AVAILABLE AT**

**WIGO T.V.**

and APPLIANCES SALES and SERVICE

**DOWNTOWN GEORGETOWN**

**877-3376**



**CF140**

**FEATURES**

- Sony-o-matic system maintains optimum recording level, eliminating need for manual volume adjustment during recording
- Automatic shut-off mechanism for record and play
- One touch recording
- AFC switch for drift-free FM
- Built-in electret condenser microphone
- LED record level/battery indicator
- Continuous tone control
- 3-position speaker recording monitor
- High power output
- 2-way power supply
- Attractive modern styling with large smoked glass dial

**WIGO PRICE Only \$88<sup>88</sup>**

**853-2010**

your hotline to bigger sales results




Your advertising message will get a long distance connection when you place an ad in the newspaper! You'll communicate to our entire readership... at a surprisingly low cost. Get bigger sales going for you... call!



**Acton Free Press**

**1978 RABBITS 1978**

MORE SMILES... MORE MILES



**Drive One To-Day!!**

**BAZ MOTORS LTD.**

VOLKSWAGEN - PORSCHE - AUDI - HONDA  
Sales and Service  
199 Guelph St., Georgetown - 877 5286 or 876 1813