

Introduction



All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

The premise of this book is very simple — I like to walk. Whether it's for a night out on the town, getting to work, running errands or even going to the grocery store, I prefer to get where I'm going using my own two feet.

For years, friends and family have regarded this choice of mine with, well, curiosity. For them and the majority of Americans, the idea of walking to a destination as opposed to driving seems rather strange.

My preference for walking has led to some interesting responses over the years:

Woman on date: *"We're walking, not driving? But what shoes will I wear?"*

Mother: *"You walk to that restaurant down the street? Is it safe?"*

Friend: *"What do you mean you don't want a ride home? How are you going to get there?"*

Despite being viewed as something of an anomaly, not only do I continue to walk, but I find myself walking even more as the years pass. While walking is a choice that makes a lot of sense to me — for many reasons — this natural use of two legs apparently requires justification in our twenty-first century culture. After years of describing to the people in my life the many ways their own lives would improve if they would only follow in my footsteps, I decided to write this book. While in some ways this is a personal book intended to provide a look at my life that I hope is fun and informative, my larger goal is to convey the simple message that walking is a route to a much better quality of life for everyone.

My interest in walking, while largely personal, is also directly tied to my career choice. I'm an architect and urban planner and have made a career focused on creating more walkable and bike-friendly places across the country. My friends and colleagues from the world of architecture and urban planning can discuss

JARGON ALERT: *Walkability*

Yes, planners have coined a term for places that are best suited to walking on a regular basis. Not surprisingly, we call it *walkability*. Places that have walkability are then called *walkable communities*, *walkable neighborhoods* or yes, *walkable places*. All of that translates to places designed for people to navigate primarily on foot rather than primarily by driving.

in great detail the many environmental and societal benefits of walking, as can I. The list of books dealing with these topics is long and interesting, especially to planning wonks like myself. Much of the literature describes how walking can save the world.

This book is not one of those books.

This book is about how my choice to live in a walkable place and actually walking, biking and (gaspl!) even riding public transportation on a daily basis benefits me — and how and why I believe it can benefit you as well. In these pages I explore the positive impact of walking on various aspects of my life including my finances, my sense of freedom, my health and my social life. Hopefully, sharing my experiences will encourage you to explore different ways of getting to your destinations.

Despite advocating for walking and walkability, by no means do I think cars are evil (as some people suggest), and everyone should immediately give up their vehicles. I own a car and have continuously owned one since I was sixteen years old. I use my car regularly for trips across town, to other towns and, of course, on the great American road trip. From an early age, my parents opened my eyes to the virtues of traveling across the country by car. Those trips and many since have been some of the best times of my life.

The difference between me and many Americans is that I do not let my car define me, nor do I want to be beholden to it. I

love having the freedom to go where I want to go and do what I want to do without needing to fire up a vehicle. When it comes to transportation, I'm firmly pro-choice.

This book describes quite a bit of my daily life, which is based in Savannah, Georgia, as I write this. Those of you who are familiar with Savannah will know some of the city's wonderful qualities — including its walkability. The streets, squares and parks of the city's historic district are indeed beautiful, and among the finest in all of North America. (If you visit, please give a tip of the cap to General James Oglethorpe, who master-planned the city.) But in truth, Savannah is like many places in America. It has an old city that is compact and walkable surrounded by a vast sea of modern suburbia that is not arranged well for walking. The historic district here offers many enjoyable places to walk, but you don't need special places for your walks; you can pretty much walk anywhere. I experienced this myself when I lived in places that were much less pedestrian-friendly, and still found daily opportunities to walk. I suspect all of us can do the same.

In my particular case, I made a deliberate choice to live in Savannah. Occasionally I joke that Savannah chose me due to my love of city planning and architecture, but in truth that is not far off the mark. I moved here almost three years ago after spending the first forty years of my life in the Midwest. When the Great Recession hit, it sent a shock wave through my industry, and made an awful lot of us think about our career and life choices. For me, it created an opportunity to relocate, to start fresh. At first, I thought of it as my own (male) version of *Eat, Pray, Love*, but that quickly turned into something else entirely as I realized how much I enjoyed the city I chose.

When I thought about relocating, I considered many cities, with walkability being a requirement that was at the top of my list. Whether I looked farther south to Miami, west to Denver or Los Angeles, or even north to Chicago, I tried to imagine

FACTOID: Choosing to walk and bike

More and more young people are showing a preference for walking and biking over driving. One recent survey found that from 2001 to 2009, young people who lived in households with annual incomes of more than \$70,000 increased their use of public transit by 100 percent, biking by 122 percent and walking by 37 percent.

(Source: "Transportation and the New Generation," The Frontier Group and US PIRG Education Fund, 2012)

which place would give me the quality of life I sought — the ability to roam freely on foot as much as possible, ride a bike comfortably and safely, and be able to afford a slower pace of life. Putting a premium on these quality-of-life factors is not unusual — it aligns me with an increasing number of people who put qualities such as a walkable, bike-friendly place at the top of their list when choosing where to live. This is especially true with the younger generation (*Generation Y* or the *Millennials*) and a little less so among *Gen X'ers* like myself.

I lived in Kansas City, Missouri, for seventeen years before moving to Savannah. Even in Kansas City, I did my best to choose a walkable lifestyle — I lived in the Midtown area — and I walked to as many destinations as I could. The going was more difficult in Kansas City than in Savannah, simply because the city isn't as well-suited to walking, but I made the best of it.

For my friends, family and colleagues in Kansas City, I hope this book answers the question they often direct my way: "Why Savannah?" And I hope it also addresses the follow-up question about when I'll move back by explaining why it's difficult for me to consider moving back to Kansas City (or anywhere that lacks these qualities, for that matter). Savannah is certainly not the only walkable city, but it's one of the best. But for the many places in our country that are not especially walkable, there is hope.

As architects and urban planners, my colleagues and I work on both existing and newly planned neighborhoods with the aim of improving our world and the lives of ordinary people. Creating better places to live can in turn improve our lives. And better places are places where we can walk.

1

An Ordinary Monday



View from our stoop.

There is this to be said for walking: it is the one method of human locomotion by which a man or woman proceeds erect, upright, proud and independent, not squatting on the haunches like a frog. Little boys love machines.

Grown-up men and women like to walk.

— Edward Abbey, *Postcards from Ed: Dispatches and Salvos from an American Iconoclast*, 2007

Why They Walk



Dawn Kirkwood

I'm an independent cuss, and I make most of my life choices in support of that trait. I like having access to as many options as possible, and that includes mobility. Walking is always my first choice. I set my own pace and route. I'm out in the fresh air, I let my mind wander, and I can really look at/listen to my surroundings. I believe in doing one thing at a time, so I do not listen to music or audio books or talk on my phone while walking. It's a bit of escapism I build into my daily routine.

Since one's survival depends on being hyper-alert when biking in my city, I am not a bicycle commuter. I live near a major bike path, though, so I frequently hop on my ten-speed and peddle as fast as I can along Cherry Creek. I love that surge of power when my legs

really start pumping. That and the sense of freedom, knowing I'm completely in control, equal pure joy.

For practical considerations as well as sociological observations, I am a frequent user of public transit. Major bus routes and light rail stops are within walking distance of my apartment. And yes, I own a car — an '04 Toyota with 53,000 miles on the odometer.

— Dawn Kirkwood
Denver, CO

I work from home these days. As I considered my workplace options, I also looked at sharing an office space or renting a private office. Either might work for me at some point, and I found some nice professional spaces that would be either a thirty-minute walk or a ten-minute bike ride away. That would take a bit of time, but it's honestly not that much, and it would be very enjoyable time, for the most part. But more on that later.

Some people who report to an office every day idealize working at home and think, "Wow, it must be great to have that kind of flexibility." But in actuality, working from home is not that different from going to an office or other workplace. In my twenty or so years of working in the professional world, I've worked in small offices, large office towers, my own living room, coffee shops, conference rooms and cafés. In any situation, you develop a routine and habits in order to maximize your day, and you also entertain distractions to rest and refuel. At home, I might flip on the TV at some point to take a break, whereas at work in one of my former jobs we routinely played a video game called *Redneck Rampage* whenever we could. The truth is, work is work, and we build flexibility and rigidity into our days, often without giving it much conscious thought.

But still, I'm sure my routine is different from yours. A big part of what makes my workdays distinctive is not just that I work from home, but where I live. If I lived on a typical suburban street with a cul-de-sac at the end, my daily routine would be very different. For one, it would involve a lot more driving whenever I want to leave the house. Here, most of my excursions out are walking trips. Let me walk you through (pun intended) an ordinary Monday in my life.

I roll out of bed and get cleaned up. My girlfriend Jamie rises earlier than I do, and she's kind enough to make sure there's coffee waiting downstairs. A small cup gets me started and is handy as I scan my messages and e-mails. My clients and my work span the country, so I might have e-mails from a variety of time zones

to deal with at any given moment. Also, early morning is a great time for me to catch up on the news of the day, and I browse a few favorite websites that keep me abreast of what I care about. Sure, like most people, I take a look at Facebook as well.

It's not long before I've got a full belly from breakfast, and the workday is underway. At some point mid-morning, I love to take a short break and walk to my favorite coffee shop. They make a particularly great version of *café con leche*, the Cuban coffee concoction, and it puts about ten thousand watts into my veins. As the coffee shop is about a seven- or eight-minute walk

Jamie and I met shortly after I moved to Savannah. We met in large part due to a social group on Meetup.com, which used to have regular pub crawls downtown. On one fateful November evening, we pub crawled into each other at Sixpence Pub, a notorious local tavern (where Julia Roberts was filmed in the movie *Something to Talk About*). After a couple of hours of getting to know each other (and a couple of pints), the rest was history. And yes, I walked to the pub crawl, and I walked home as well. Fortunately for me, Jamie also enjoys being active and walking around the city.



*Walk your
way to love.*

away, it also gives me a chance to walk off some food and enjoy a little fresh air. On most days, I like to sit in the shop and drink the coffee, which calms down the morning work anxiety and stirs my creative juices. Some days, there's not enough time, so it's café con leche to go, and back to the laptop.

Without my quite realizing how much time has gone by, lunchtime arrives, and it's down to the kitchen to find something to eat. A lot of days lunch is something very simple in order to maximize my working time and keep my focus. On this day, I keep it light and quick so I can also get out and run a couple of errands. Today, I hop on the bicycle (my fifteen-year-old Schwinn hybrid mountain bike) and head downtown. Ten minutes later (to walk, it would take about twenty-five minutes) I'm at the post office, where I lock up the bike. From there, I'm able to walk across the street and go to the bank as well, so two important tasks are complete. Back on the bike, I head home through some beautiful streets and around tree-lined squares, feeling invigorated and ready for the afternoon. One of the beauties of this bit of errand-running is that each day I can vary my route just a little, and experience something new. Worries like traffic and parking don't even cross my mind.

Once the workday is done (which is really *never* when you work from home), it's time to do some real exercise to get my heart rate up. On this day I choose running, which is my default option. It's an easy walk of about ten minutes down to Forsyth Park, a thirty-acre city park in the midst of the neighborhood, and it's a one-mile loop around the perimeter. Today, I run three miles in the park and then run out of the park on the city sidewalks for another quarter mile or so — just to officially feel like I've done 5K. The stroll home from there is very short, but it gives me time to cool down a bit before going inside. Then it's shower, eat and get ready for the evening.

Monday nights are trivia nights when Jamie and I are in town together, and we walk over to Crystal Beer Parlor for its version

of the fun. It's about a twenty-minute walk, but our route takes us through the park and some beautiful streets, so even chilly nights don't bother us much. In fact, it's often invigorating physically and mentally to stretch our legs like this in the evening. We play, and enjoy a couple beers. Valiantly, our team (Grab Something Random) competes, but we come up short of the prize money. Oh well — maybe next time. Who knew that a group of unicorns is called a *blessing*? Clearly, not us. At any rate, we stroll back home and call it a night.

All in all, it's a day filled with activities similar to a lot of other people's. I worked a full day, ate several meals, exercised and spent time with friends and loved ones. It's just that the way I went about it seems *not* so ordinary.