

A real education

BY ANNE CASSIDY

Sometimes when the weather is right, a bright fall morning or a soft foggy day, I walk my three daughters to school. This may seem unremarkable, but when you live where we do—in a small, sidewalk-less subdivision sandwiched between two busy roads—getting somewhere on our own steam is an accomplishment. The school lies outside our subdivision's boundaries. I can't let the girls walk there without me, as they'd have to cross a busy road. But I can walk them. When I do, the trip is more than a way to get to school.

A few years ago I discovered that if you cross our street and slip through our neighbor's backyard, you enter an alternative universe of five-acre farms with horses, berry patches, and woods. The road is unpaved—prestigious proof that landowners here drive SUVs—and it meanders for about a mile



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through the slightly rolling countryside before emptying into a busy road across from school.

The path we follow is equal parts shade and sunlight, open pasture and shadowed woods. It's not the kind of road we usually walk, where we must jump to the side when a vehicle approaches. Cars move slowly on gravel. They announce themselves with the sound of crunching rocks, so we can stroll down the middle if we want to. There is a curious freedom in this, a taste of life before automobiles. I hold the hand of my 5-year-old, Celia, but only because she'll lag behind if I don't.

Depending upon how much time we have, we either

march or saunter to school. The sauntering days are best. Our first stop is a fenced pasture with horses that approach us at first but turn away when

they see our empty hands. "Let's bring a carrot next time," says 9-year-old Claire. I say yes, trying to match her enthusiasm. Of all the things we have to think of in the morning, I know it's unlikely we'll remember a carrot.

Next we pass a shaded stream with prickly bushes and birds fluttering in the brush. "Remember when we picked blackberries here?" asks our oldest, Suzanne. As we talk of the berries and pies that await us in July, I'm aware that next year, Suzanne will ride the bus to middle school. It's too far to walk.

Our pace makes us pay attention to things we wouldn't otherwise: water drops on fir boughs and

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that steady paycheck, the thing that made me feel secure for almost 20 years, I've already earned half of my previous annual salary in two months as a freelancer.

But the biggest revelation is that writing is not what I want to do for the rest of my life. In the end, money isn't what matters the most to me. Or having a job

Who you gonna e-mail?

For the most part, coaching is a high-tech business. A coach and a client talk on the phone and e-mail as a rule, so you should be comfortable with those forms of communication. Here are some other good resources:

To find a coach: www.coachreferral.com

To learn more about coaching certification:
www.coachu.com

To learn more about the profession:
www.coachfederation.org or call
(888) 423-3131

To contact coaches mentioned in this story:
PAMELA MCLEAN: www.hudsoninstitute.com or (800) 582-4401

KATE LARSEN: www.katelarsen.com
or (888) LIF-WALK

CANDACE HAMMOND: www.personalpowercoach.com

SIOBHAN MURPHY: www.quest-coaching.com

SHERRI MILLS: smcoach@home.com

title. With the help of my life coach, I've learned to slow down in order to make better decisions. I now know that what I want is to have my own business, and to spend more time with my baby. I'm going to open that yoga studio.

I guess that life-changing answer was always inside me. I just needed someone who could see the bigger picture beyond the soap opera. W

RAMBLINGS

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hedges tinged with autumn color well ahead of the neighboring trees. Children seldom walk places these days, which means they have fewer chances to notice such details. I walk my kids to school to subvert the trend.

I want my kids to know the feeling of moving through space. I want them to share in conversations that flow naturally from the rhythm of footfall. Our talks seem more wide open and contemplative than ones we have in the car; words glide from horses to berry-picking to the kind of house we'd live in if we could live in any kind at all.

The final approach to school winds down a hill that's steep enough to give sleds a good slide in the winter and bicycles a hard ride in the summer. Strolling it on a fine autumn morning with the girls running ahead of me, I smell hay and leaves. My legs and heart are pumping, and I think of how lucky we are to live where there is still some texture to the land. A few miles away, we would have nothing but cut-throughs and cul-de-sacs.

By the time we cross the busy road, our pastoral spell is broken. But we have one gleeful moment as we march up the driveway alongside vans and buses. We feel a little smug because we know kids and parents can look out their windows and see us walking—yes, walking—to school.

"Are you glad we walked?" I ask the kids as we hug good-bye.

"Yeah, it was great, Mom," they reply, already preoccupied with schoolwork and friends. As I look back at them mingling with the other backpacked students, I notice their hair needs brushing and their socks are down around their ankles. But their cheeks are rosy and their eyes are gleaming. As are mine.

Anne Cassidy is a writer living in Oak Hill, Va.

WALKING (ISSN 1079-705X; USPS 003-253) is published seven times a year by RD Walking Inc., 260 Madison Ave., 5th floor, New York, NY 10016. WALKING vol. 16, no. 5 printed in the U.S.A. Copyright © 2001 by RD Walking Inc. WALKING® is a trademark of RD Walking Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. To subscribers: Reader's Digest may share information about you with reputable companies in order for them to offer you products and services of interest to you. If you would rather we not share information, please write to us at the customer service address below. Subscription Rates: \$14.95 U.S.; \$30 Canada (in Canadian funds, include GST tax); and \$23.95 Foreign (in U.S. funds). CPM agreement number 14,47793. Send subscription correspondence and change of address to: Reader's Digest Association, WALKING, Customer Service Department, P.O. Box 5073, Harlan, IA 51593; (800) 829-5585 (U.S. and Canada), (515) 246-6952 (Foreign). For back issues, call (715) 247-4344 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: WALKING, Customer Service Department, P.O. Box 5073, Harlan, IA 51593. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices.