

Keep on walking

- [Gillian Bouras](#)
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We have to acknowledge and accept that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed almost everything in life. But it also has to be admitted that some unexpected changes are for the better.



Here in Greece, for example, people seem to be smoking less and walking more. Gone are the days when long walks were measured in the time it took to smoke x number of cigarettes, the cigarettes being considered compensation for the walking, for the latter was equated with work and certainly not with pleasure.

But the practice of walking can, of course, accomplish great things: just think of Captain Tom Moore, who raised more than 30 million pounds for Britain's NHS, simply by plodding around his garden for a month before his 100th birthday. Travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor started his career at the age of 18, when he set off on a walk from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople in the year 1933, before old Europe changed forever. An inveterate walker, the eminent historian G.M. Trevelyan, author of a famous essay on walking, always said he had two doctors: his left leg and his right.

The Jains of India believe that while the Buddha found enlightenment while sitting under a tree, their original leader had enlightenment come to him while he was walking, and so Jainist nuns and monks walk everywhere, using a fan as they go, so that they do not inadvertently harm any living thing.

My Greek mother-in-law, the redoubtable Aphrodite, did not suffer any physical incapacity, but one day she simply decided to stop walking, took to her chair, and then eventually to her bed. It was as if she had retired from work, but in fact she had also retired from life: once in her bed, she never got out of it. We had many differences, she and I, and one thing she found impossible to understand was my daily habit of wandering off on my own, up into the nearby mountains, or in order to make a circuit of the village.

The important thing was that I used to feel, once established in a rhythm, that all care had lifted, had simply floated away. Trevelyan said that after a day's walk everything has twice its usual value, and I, for one, can see what he meant.

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But my practice of walking apparently bothered some villagers. 'People worry about you,' my neighbour told me.

'Why?' I asked, genuinely puzzled, even though I knew solitary walking was not the done thing.

'Because you walk where there are fairies,' my neighbour replied. Seeing my bewilderment increase, he went on to explain that fairies had their favourite haunts, and that it was quite possible they would spirit me away into their world. (*Why not go for it?* suggested another friend later. *It might be preferable.*) But my neighbour, taking all these matters for granted, reassured me that I was safe in my house, because it was situated in an area of white magic. I kept on walking regardless, but also kept on wondering about fairies, although none appeared.

There is a type of kinship in any kind of outdoor activity: recently I noticed and made contact with a dogged older man I judged to be well into his 80s, who seemed to cover great distances, and in energetic style. His black armband showed his widowhood, and he often carried a plastic bag of dry food for the several stray cats that have their favourite places along his route. I said hullo one day, and realised another aspect of his doggedness, for he fished in his pocket for the gadget that enables him to talk. I deduced he had had an operation for throat cancer, as he had to press said gadget into his neck in order to activate his vocal cords.

He told me that he walks every day, sometimes notching up as many as 90km a week. I was very impressed, and felt on reflection that Trevelyan would have been as well. I thought summer's heat might have discouraged him, but no: I still see him often, determined and brave. I don't think he gives much thought to fairies: he is content in his own world. He will keep on walking. And so will I.



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