



WILLIAM CARTER

Readers Write

WALKING HOME

IT IS EVENING, AND I AM FISHING AT my favorite spot on the Falls River. Though I catch nothing — I don't even see a fish — I am content, satisfied with the sound of water finding its way, the fading light in the sky, the birds darting along the banks. When it is too dark to see my line, I head for the car. I open the back hatch and carefully stow my expensive rod and my vest with all its little gadgets. Then I close the hatch and realize my keys are still pinned to the vest I have put away so carefully. The car is locked. My cellphone is in there, too, safe from being dropped in the river.

I consider my options: I could hitchhike, but there aren't many drivers on this dirt road. I could walk to a friend's house nearby and call my son to come get me, but I don't know his cellphone number. (It's in my phone.) I'll have to ask my friend for a ride, I decide. But when I get to his house, no one is home. I am going

to have to walk.

It is a lovely night: cool, dry, moonlit. Though I am sixty-three, I discover that not only do I have the stamina to walk, but I enjoy it. "This isn't so bad," I say out loud. I try to remember the last time I went for a walk at night, but I can't. I do remember cross-country skiing once under a full moon. Perhaps I should do this more often — not lock myself out of the car, but go for a walk in the dark.

I hear what sounds like a large animal somewhere in the shadows to my left, perhaps twenty or thirty feet away. It is blowing out breaths with flapping lips, the way a horse does. I don't remember seeing any horses on my way here, or cows. Could it be a moose? I wonder if I should be scared; then I decide not to be. I never find out what made the noise.

On the main road the trees are farther back, so the night seems brighter. I pass the Frenches' house. They would

give me a ride, but I'm so close now I just keep walking.

When I arrive home, the lights are on, and my son is there. I grab a spare key, and he drives me back to my car. It is three and a half miles. After I get home a second time, I run a hot bath with Epsom salts and soak my tired legs. But I don't feel old tonight. I feel satisfied.

*Dan Sachs
Gill, Massachusetts*

IN APRIL 1945 MY MOTHER AND I LEFT our home in Neupetershain, Germany, fleeing the advancing Russian front, which had begun its final push toward Berlin. A month earlier my father had left with the Volkssturm, a national militia created by Hitler in the last months of World War II. We had no way of knowing if my father was still alive.

After walking twenty kilometers we reached Buchholz, a small village where

we found shelter in an old manor house. The coal-company executives who lived there had opened their doors to refugees. The electricity was out, so the nights were pitch-dark. As I lay beneath a wool blanket, my sleepless mind replayed a memory from a few days earlier: My mother had shrugged, held out her hands, and said, “Too young,” to the Russian soldier threatening to rape me. “Just ten. Too young.” She had taken three years off my actual age. Apparently convinced, the soldier had grunted and moved on.

After ten days in Buchholz, my mother made an announcement: “We will walk home today. We have nothing to eat here anymore.”

To build our strength for the journey we drank a cup of mint tea made from leaves one of the men, too old for the Volkssturm, had picked in the meadow. Then we walked home, not knowing if we still had a home to return to.

As we rounded the corner onto our street, we saw the place. The windows were broken and the ground covered with debris and roof tiles. We entered through the gaping front door and gasped at the stench of excrement in our ransacked living room.

My mother hurried out to the garden and returned beaming, arms loaded with dirt-encrusted Mason jars: the goose and rabbit preserves she had rushed to bury just before we’d fled. The precious jars of meat had survived the bombing and looting undamaged. We opened one of them and ate.

*Anna Winkler-Reibnagel
Bozeman, Montana*

WE PRISONERS SAY, “MAN, IF THEY let me go right now, I’d walk home barefoot and butt naked.”

I once knew a man here whose seventy-year-old parents told him during a visit that it was precisely 143.5 miles from their home to the penitentiary. I had never seen this man on the track before, but after his folks’ visit he started walking the pebbled trail that surrounds the recreation yard. I watched him as he passed the tower, the concrete bleachers, the Porta-John, the horseshoe pit. He tracked his progress on a tattered yellow piece of paper: three laps equaled one mile. After several weeks of

this, one day he crumbled — dissolved really — onto the path, snot-nosed and blubbering.

“I made it,” he said. “I made it home.”

*Greg Goodman
Lawrenceville, Virginia
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