

Walk 27,000 miles for peace

Danny Garcia, E-Club of District 7210

I first started walking back in 1996. I had gone through a divorce. I was so broken that I didn't feel I had any life. I had this idea that I could walk for peace, and I think I was also looking for some kind of inner peace.



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I took off from San Francisco, headed toward San Diego. That first day I walked 30 miles in the pouring rain. I was soaking wet and only had \$48 in my pocket. No credit cards. No nothing. I came to a hotel in Half Moon Bay, and the manager was wondering what I was doing. I told him, "Well, I need a room, but I don't have any money." But he said, "Hey, it's OK. You can stay here as long as you need to." That act of kindness really launched my 20 years of walking.

Then a friend of mine called the Marines, because I'm a former Marine, and they said, "Don't go anywhere. We're

coming.” And three Humvees ended up being my escort vehicles.

I spent three months walking across the United States. The media picked up on the story, and I got a lot of support. I’ve now done walks on six continents. What has kept me going is the love and support of the people I’ve met. That’s how I got involved with Rotary, because we’re really doing the same work, pushing to help those in need, pushing for charity and kindness and cultural exchange. Rotarians are special people. They’re like a giant family. And they don’t just talk, they do. That’s what I love about them.

And I need the support, because it can be dangerous out there. I’ve been clipped by cars. The backblast from semitrailers can literally knock you off the side of the road. I’ve encountered mudslides and sandstorms and lightning and rattlesnakes. I remember walking in a remote area in Florida, and I looked up and saw a tornado coming straight at me. Things were being tossed up in the air. I had to run for my life. Another time, I saw a pack of wild dogs coming at me. I didn’t have time to get to my escort vehicle, and you can’t assume a position of fear anyway. So I took my walking stick and I faced them down. I’ve walked in all kinds of weather. I once walked in snow up to my knees. I was wearing my pack and I fell on my face, and the pack was weighing me down. And I’ll tell you, I wanted to quit. But I didn’t quit, because I heard this

voice inside me that said, "Get up and walk." And then off in the distance I saw a French Red Cross vehicle coming to be my escort. Those are the moments that I know this is a calling for me.

I'm 72 years old now, and I thought my walking days were pretty much over. I was living in Florida, trying to downsize and retire and enjoy the sun. But when I asked what I was supposed to do with my life now, I knew the answer: I had to start walking again. I'm in Jerusalem now. I don't know where exactly I'll go from here. The way I travel is that I take one step at a time. But I do know this part of the world is in need of peace.

I don't know what's next. Actually, I do have one idea. I haven't told anyone else, but I'd really love to go to the Vatican, and I'd like to ask the pope to walk with me. Just a short walk, even, where we can talk and pray together. Does that sound crazy? Maybe so. But I've seen a lot of miracles out here.