

My 350-Mile Hike for French- and English-speaking Canadian Unity

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Canadian Flag and Quebec Provincial Flag

Rosy-cheeked and stooping under the weight of a 25-pound hiking pack, I arrived at city hall in Montreal in March after a 350-mile walk from Toronto designed to call attention to the need for more respect and understanding between French- and English-speaking Canadians.

I was met at city hall steps by church members and reporters, to whom I spoke of all the wonderful people I had met on my route down Ontario's Highway 2 along the shores of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River.

Obviously by doing this one action (the walk), I'm not going to solve the problems of Canada. But I was able to explain to the many mayors, reeves and newspaper editors I met along the way that we were seeking mutual understanding between French and English. I found there were a great many Canadians conscientiously concerned about this. They are a peace-loving people who want to continue to live in peace together.

Canadians hear a lot of separatist sentiment in Quebec and Ontario, but we don't hear the other side too much. There are people with truly good intentions who really want to work together and do something for this country.

About 60 miles outside of Toronto, I almost gave up the walk because of the freezing temperatures.

My knees were swollen to twice their size and I sat down and just couldn't move. My whole body said, "That's enough, I'm not going to do anymore." I almost had to shout at myself to get the will to move and had to remind myself why I was doing the walk -- that I wasn't doing it for myself.

I spent three nights in police station jail cells, one night in a farmhouse, and another in the hallway of a motel. But the event that symbolized the whole trip for me took place at Welcome, Ontario, about 70 miles east of Toronto. The owner of a motel there was a French-Canadian woman who was married to an Englishman and was very interested in what I was doing. She supported the whole idea completely, paid for my meal, and gave me a bed for the night.