

Web Blog SunWalk2008 engl. 24

8/4 – 8/25/2008

New York City, NY – Boston, MA – New York City, NY

What a special day it is while I am writing this (8/23)!

Today there is no traffic on more than seven miles of the Manhattan roads – one of three Saturdays in August. I am taking a walk on the Park Avenue.

Thousands of bikers, roller skaters, no roaring cars, only the sound of human voices, steps, and laughter of children, clean air. Mayor Bloomberg wanted to introduce “road pricing “ in N. Y. C. The State Parliament in Albany, NY, blocked it. Now Bloomberg introduces smaller steps in order to reduce car traffic in the Big Apple – more bike lanes, the 3-Saturday program etc.

Barack Obama presents his Vice President in front of the solemn columns of the town hall in Springfield, Illinois: Senator Joe Biden. The highly esteemed senator chooses clear words when he attacks the politics of George W. Bush and of his friend John McCain. Obama and Biden, both of them support an energy policy that is based on renewable energy and energy efficiency.

“**WE**cansolveit”, the climate protection alliance initiated by Al Gore, invests a lot of money for TV spots. Today a climate protection TV ad shows pictures with all the smoke and environmental degradation caused by fossil fuel followed by elegant wind turbines and clean, silent solar cell installations. “100 % renewable energy and energy efficiency within 10 years” – the plan that Al Gore published a month ago in Washington D. C., is the bottom line of the film.

Let’s go back to Monday, 8/4, when Claudio and I start the last stretch of the SunWalk, from N. Y. C. to Boston. It’s a sunny summer day, a fresh and cool morning. The sidewalk is covered with hexagonal paving stones. It reminds me of the yellow tiles in the bathroom of my parent’s house. We walk along the Central Park towards north, the same way we dragged our tired limbs towards south, into Manhattan eleven days ago, in the middle of the night. We say good-bye to the park, getting glimpses of it again and again – leaves that glitter in the sunshine, a retired man who reads the New York Times sitting on a bench, joggers who run around the big pond, and a park ranger who empties a waste basket.

We leave the fancy 5th Avenue with its mansions, penthouses and museums behind. We enter the poorer neighborhoods of Harlem and the Bronx. Suddenly we stand in front of the Bronx Zoo. Our route crosses the zoo – the entrance fee

is 15 \$. There are two women in uniform sitting in a glass box. They are connected with the outside world by a microphone. “We are walking to Boston. Can we cross the zoo without paying?” I ask speaking into the microphone, because we don’t have time to visit the zoo. I see the lips of one of the ladies moving; but I don’t hear anything. I ask again. She denies shaking her head. So we walk around the big park where the zoo is located.

We arrive in New Rochelle. There are pretty white one-family houses, gardens with lawn, no fences, no walls, and big trees – middle class America. During my various stays in the USA this America has become a second home for me. “Claudio,” I tell my walking friend, “this is an area that feels so familiar, that became my second home.” The next street is called “Home Street”.

Some days later there is a similar incident: It’s evening. We are entering New Haven. We are tired. I walk behind Claudio. My thoughts are circling around the SunWalk. Somebody from Switzerland has sent a mail congratulating me for my walk. Then he asks why I didn’t go by bike. It would be faster and more comfortable. Too fast for me, I answer him. Now I am thinking how decisions can shape our life. Working at Harvard Medical School I become aware that I am not a research man. I get more and more involved with the psychosocial aspects of medicine. There was another cross road when I gave my practice to Pierre Morin and Dieter Ackermann. My life would look very different if Meret and I didn’t cancel our wedding party in 1992. And how different the SunWalk would have been had I taken the bike. In that moment I feel such a deep gratitude for my health and for the abundance of time that make such a walk possible. I had so many wonderful encounters; I saw so many unique landscapes. And especially: With every step I can get in touch with Mother Earth, with this unique planet that carries us and nourishes us, this planet of which we are a part of. I look up: We just pass “Contact Street”.

During this last stretch of the walk we experience once again the most memorable parts of the trip: Encounters with helpful, hospitable people and beautiful landscapes:

Mike, white hair, stops his post car and asks from where we come and where we go. Shortly after he parks the car on the other side of the road and crosses the street. He asks how he can support us. I answer him: His interest in our walk is a big gift and gives us energy. But that isn’t enough for him. He gives us 20 \$ for a good meal. Claudio and I speak about Mike later. Maybe our walk triggers a yearning in him, a yearning for a freedom he doesn’t have right now. Two hours later Mike stops again in front of us, this time in his private car. He invites us to stay with him in his home in Trumbull. He also invites us for dinner. We cannot accept his offer – we have already booked a room in the Motor Inn in Fairfield; and

Trumbull is too far away. But we chat for a while together. He says he works for the postal service for 23 years already. It's difficult for him to stay there until his retirement...

Lory waits for us in Bridgeport. She has passed us and has read the address of our home page. After having read about the SunWalk she returns and asks in what way she could support us. Later she joins us with her husband and brings us a good picnic - just in the moment when the Channel13 team is filming us.

In New Haven we can stay with Matthew and Sasha Lawrence and their little son Sebastian. I know Matthew since my Boston time when his parents included me in their family life – Bob was my boss at Harvard.. Matthew followed the SunWalk on the internet and wrote me once in a while. We are lucky: Matthew misses his flight to the Caribbean where he does research as a young neuro-molecular scientist. Otherwise we wouldn't have seen him. It's like gliding into a safe harbor, a “new haven”, arriving during the night in this quiet residential neighborhood west of the Yale campus, after a day on busy roads. There is no traffic noise anymore, only the songs of crickets and cicadas. We find the yellow house, and over a healthy meal we are catching up with our life stories. Sasha is a teacher. She tells us about her doctoral thesis on artistic expression – dance and music – of adolescents that belong to various ethnic groups. Matthew explains us his work in search of a treatment for Alzheimer disease. In New Haven we visit also Pepe's pizza place that Linda in Olney has recommended warmly. And it's worth the visit. They are making gorgeous pizzas for more than eighty years already. Six men are working – the kitchen is part of the restaurant room. They knead the dough, spread it, and load it with good stuff before they put the pizza deeply into the huge wood stove. I calculate: If all the pizzas that have been baked in the last 80 years would be placed next to each other, that would be a pizza line of 3'300 miles, the way from L. A. to New Haven.

The next night we could also have stayed with Sylvia and David Loomis in Madison, in their house in the woods, near a lake; but their house is too far away from our route. We meet Sylvia and David in N. Madison. Sylvia has her roots in Switzerland. She has baked two delicious lemon cakes for us.

In Hadlyme, near the Connecticut River, we are spoiled by the generous hospitality of the Basel artist Christian Brechneff Peltenburg and his friend Tim Lovejoy. Our common friend Andi Hoffmann who has walked with me in Oklahoma, has made the connection. Christian and Tim live in a paradise, in an old, beautiful house with big rooms, a lot of corners,

stairs, a porch, and a granite swimming pool. There is a gorgeous view onto a lake, woods, and the big sky, nothing else. There is a small village nearby – a road crossing, a store, and some pretty houses in well-kept gardens that are well integrated into the untouched nature around the village. Both, Christian and Tim, are excellent painters. We look at Christian's paintings, big format landscapes, mysterious and detached, flowers and acts that he makes with a china ink pipette (www.christianbrechneff.com). Tim's paintings show scenes and people from Asia, e.g. Burma and Vietnam (www.timalovejoy.com) – naturalistic, but transcendent, much love for the details, the crease of the monk's costume, the light reflection on his forehead, and the moving crest of the water waves. The love for the detail we find also in Christian and Tim's hospitality – fruits, Swiss chocolate, and water on the bedside table, delicious food, e.g. Tim's corn salad with tomato pudding.

Beauty of nature:

Again and again during our walk along the Connecticut coast we see the sea, in Darien, in Woodmont. The Atlantic, already tamed, arrives in small waves. The seagulls walk through the shallow water, clumsy and stiff. We are lying on our bellies on the quayside looking into the water. After a while the crabs risk to move out, stretching their legs out of the cracks of the wall, leaving their hide-away slowly. We are relieved when we see that the man who is looking for crabs isn't lying on his belly, doesn't have the patience to wait and to watch.

Again and again we can have a look over the wide green waves of the Connecticut wood hills. And then at the Connecticut – Massachusetts border we are in the middle of this green sea, in the Douglas State Park where the forest is left alone, where it develops this spooky darkness that provoked goose-bumps on the back when we listened to mother's fairytales.

I enjoy very much walking with Claudio. He is an amazing young man. When he shifts into the highest "walking gear", it's a challenge for me to follow him. He has a high basic trust and is very independent. He is very open-minded and friendly to people. If something unpredicted happens or if something we have planned doesn't work out, he sees it as an opportunity for new possibilities. He sees the positive aspect in everything. He lives very consciously and takes his time to do things. If he eats, he eats, if he writes into his journal he does it fully, with body and soul. I feel a deep kinship in the essential things, in the enthusiasm for Earth, for life, in the concern about our planet – they have shaped his decision to study environmental sciences at the ETH (Swiss MIT). He has also a deep respect for other living beings – Claudio is also a vegetarian. There

is a lot of resonance between us. That makes Claudio an ideal hiking buddy. I can learn a lot from him. I am very grateful that he joined me in Newark, NJ, after a 7-week internship in Arizona, and that he walked with me the last stretch of my journey.

Entering Massachusetts and approaching the Boston area is like coming home for me. The town names sound familiar – Natick, Wellesley, Newton. People stop us. They read on the banner “L. A. – Boston” and realize that we are almost there – a PR man, a lawyer and his wife and son, and Jessica who makes a breath taking turn with her car in order to find out why we walk. Then she invites us to the studio of the Wellesley local TV station and makes an interview. It’s already dark when we arrive at 295 Highland Avenue in West Newton, at the home of Dick and Lynne Bail. I left these beloved friends in winter, before Christmas. Then the garden and the trees were covered with snow, the street was icy. Now it’s a warm summer evening – crickets and cicadas perform a wonderful serenade. The little white dog, Chewy, greets us with joy and licks our hands. Soon we get some sleep in the cozy rooms in the attic of this hospitable house.

It’s so different to arrive after a long walk compared with arriving after a flight or a car or train ride. I could link Los Angeles with Boston, with my steps, without a gap. I am so grateful that I could do it without any vehicle – an uninterrupted chain of footsteps from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from L. A. to Boston. There are many nets of tracks, with smaller and bigger meshwork. The hiking nets formed by uninterrupted step lines that surround our planet are thin. They have big meshes. Some of them are very old. The strings of the hiking nets are very strong and durable, like the strings of a spider web; and those who come close to such a net or are crossing one, they slow down, they become aware, in the here and now: What a miraculous planet we live on that provides the best possible conditions for life, for those who touch the planet carefully with thoughtful steps, but also for those who stamp on it without respect.

On 8/15 we start our walk to the center of Boston. Emil Wyss from the Swiss Consulate has organized an arrival ceremony at the Boston Common and a reception at the Swiss Consulate in Cambridge in the evening. Peter Smith, an architect with a broad spectrum of ecological and social activities has also mobilized some people who want to join us for the last mile of the walk; but we have underestimated the distance – once more – and therefore we approach the final destination in a running mode so that our friends don’t have to wait for too long. Everybody is already there when we arrive at the Boston Common some minutes after noontime, at the beginning of the noble Commonwealth Avenue. From far away a Swiss flag is shining through the tree trunks of the Avenue. Next to it we see many red dots – “Think Swiss” hats that Emil Wyss has given to all the people who came there.

I am deeply moved. Many friends are waiting – some of them I haven't seen for years: Peter Smith from Newton, also Heidi and Peter Smith from Rhode Island. Heidi comes from Basel. Her daughter Fiona works here in Boston – she is also present; my former boss at the Massachusetts General Hospital, John Stoeckle. He made my stay in Boston and my reorientation in life possible. With Peter Zheutlin, communication director at IPPNW, I share a lot of fond memories during our struggle for a nuclear free world – we met at the annual world congresses and in Oslo when the Nobel Peace Prize was given to IPPNW in 1985. Sajed and Rosie Kamal, successful solar pioneers, Sajed from Bangladesh, Rosie a second generation German. They are active for the promotion of solar energy in the Boston area and worldwide for many years. They cook all year around with the solar cookers on the windowsill or on the roof of their Fenway apartment house. Now they can experience with satisfaction how one solar installation after the other appears on the roofs and facades in their neighborhood, thanks to their untiring efforts. Sajed received recently an award for his life's work by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). Janice and Bruce McFadden just arrived from Monroe, CT. We have met in Wilmington, NC, in April 2007 when Bruce saw our solar boat. They visited it and were so enthusiastic about it. They invited Beat von Scarpatetti and myself to their home after our arrival in New York. And there were other people I didn't know yet who joined us.

Rob follows us. He replaces Jessica from the Wellesley local TV station, because there was an emergency in her family. First I ask myself whether this heavy, slow Italo man is able to make a film when we meet him at the Boston College church on our way to the center; but Rob is with us during the whole day. He does everything to document our arrival in a comprehensive, competent way. He is also the last one who leaves the Swiss Consulate with us in the evening.

I am deeply moved – being in the Boston Common, this very beautiful park that gave me my first US impressions in 1972. It was a place that attracted me often during my Boston years, also in winter. Once I bought a Christmas tree. I transported it by bike through the fresh snow in the Common, brought it to my little attic in Brookline. There I decorated it – it shocked most of my friends here – with real candles that I lit – illegally behind closed shutters – for my European Christmas celebration. Or Lucy with her candy shop at Charles Street, the old lady with the silver curls. I always went to her when I expected Swiss visitors. “Today you should try the English mints. Temperature and humidity are just ideal for them today.” Or: “Yesterday night I woke up, horrified. I was afraid that a nuclear war has started. There were light rockets all over the place, and loud detonations. Until I realized that the ‘Red Socks’ have won again.” All that

comes up when we walk through the park, through the happy crowd to the Government Center.

Emil Wyss has also prepared a wonderful evening reception at the Consulate. There is plenty of delicious food from a local Swiss bakery for all the 100 people who join us for my talk. There is also a little “Think Swiss”- teddy bear for everybody. He wears an apron with the SunWalk logo. Emi Wyss reminds us at the Carter era. Jimmy Carter let install solar collectors on the White House. It was christened with a ceremony on June 20th 1979. 1986 President Reagan had the installation dismantled. 1990 it was installed on a roof of the Unity College in Maine and was used until 2005. Emil Wyss also congratulates me in advance to the 40th anniversary of my 20th birthday...

My friend Julie Smith has organized a heart-warming arrival party at the evening of 8/16. A circle is closing also here: Before Christmas we have celebrated our reunion in her pretty apartment in Brookline, with her legendary cheese macaroni and enjoying a good movie. Now Julie is expecting us with great food and a circle of friends, some friends I have already met before, Ted in the early eighties, Ed during his visit to Switzerland. We share a lot of memories during this evening. Some of them make our diaphragm muscles sore, once again. One example: Before the big peace demonstration in New York in 1982 I made a PSR Switzerland poster with a picture of our blue planet, with the words „Take care of me and of each other.“ Suddenly I realized I have forgotten the word „care“ and wrote instead „Take of me and of each other“. I must laugh loudly. I call Julie and hit the massive oak table with my fist – a big part of the table top is breaking off and falls onto the floor – a concrete example of the unintentional slogan, in the here and now. — Mary Smith, the over 92-year old mother of Julie, has the same refreshing sense of humor like her daughter. We spent time in Switzerland together. She sends me a moving letter to our arrival.

During the last few days I made visits to friends in New England, at first to Marianne New in Bluehill, Maine. When I was in Boston I wanted to write an article about my most beloved teachers, among them the zoologist Adolf Portmann. I was lucky – when I started medical school in 1967, he gave his last courses. He drew the whole evolution of the vertebrate animals on the blackboard. We followed his lines, his drawings, and lived through this evolutionary process ourselves. He not only taught us good science; he also taught us respect for life, the awe about the mystery and the secret of life. I had written a letter to him announcing my visit when I am back in Switzerland. This letter waited on my desk to be sent soon to Basel.

The same day Christine and Kurt Ballmer Hofer returned from a journey to Maine. We were friends and neighbors in Brookline – an apartment became available next door, the same day when Christine called me and announced their

move to Boston. “Guess whom we met in Bass Harbor, Maine? We entered a store. The owner saw my T-shirt ‘I love Basel’. ‘Do you know Adolf Portmann from Basel? He lives here in Bass Harbor in summer.’ “ And the Ballmers met Portmann and his late life partner Marianne New. During the next weekend I could borrow Christine and Kurt’s car and visit Adolf Portmann and Marianne New; and we became friends. After my return I could spend time with him and Marianne during his last days. “Do you see the little lynx there on the bookshelf?” he asked me – his eyes already looking into the other world. He died in June 1982.

With Marianne New a long friendship developed. We feel like sister and brother. She lived for a while in a house in the middle of the woods in E. Holden near Bangor where I visited her several times. She had a big stone labyrinth in front of the house that the pilots liked flying over it. There was a beaver pond where I could watch these unique animals and hear the sounds of the young beavers in the dam cave during a cold, clear winter night. But now Marianne lives in a community for senior citizens in Bluehill in a beautiful apartment with a stunning view - the sea, the wooden hills, the birds, goldfinches, humming birds and many others on the balcony. She is luring the wasps away with honey from the feeding-glass of the hummingbirds. Marianne is very active. She does everything she can that Obama is elected. She introduces me to some of her friends, a painter, a poet.

The next day Marianne gives me a ride to Belfast where my friend and former boss at Harvard Bob Lawrence picks me up and brings me to Rackliff Island where I can stay for a relaxing day with Cynthia, Bob, their daughter Hannah and her daughter-in-law Dana, and also with the four grand-children Ellie, Cyrus, Maya, and Jona. With Bob I make a walk across and around the island. In the morning there was heavy rain. Now the weather cleared up. The air is crisp, fresh, and clean, the light is bright and clear. Fall is already in the air. In the 19th century the island was highly populated. Granite was cut here and shipped to Boston, New York and Philadelphia for the construction of the big buildings. Later the island was deserted. About 40 years ago a family bought the island and sold lots here. Now there are some beautiful houses. Some of the inhabitants live here all year around.

I return from Rockland to Boston the next day. I wish to visit Granny D, Doris Haddock, in Dublin, New Hampshire. Doris is 97. At the age of 90 she walked also from Los Angeles to Washington D. C. Her concern for loss of democracy due to Big Money lead to her cause: The public financing reform, the financing of elections with public funds. I heard a lot about her and her walk; Bernie Lown played me once a tape of a radio show. Granny D inspired me for my SunWalk. I told myself: When she can cross the country at the age of 90, I can do it too. When I started my walk I was not sure whether Granny D is still alive;

but my new friends Maxine and Steve in the Appalachian Mountains know David Blair, a friend of Doris. He reassured us that she is alive and in good shape.

But how can I get to Dublin, NH? Thanks to the “magician” Emil Wyss I could visit her – he organized transportation for me, a driver, Robert Woods and a hybrid car – I couldn’t walk – it would have taken more than a week. There is no public transportation to Dublin. We found Granny D in the woods. She lives in a former Waldorf nursery school. We connected immediately. We had so much to share – we discovered similar experiences and adventures, the big hiking sister and her younger brother. And I was so touched that she has prepared tea and homemade chocolate chips cookies, the first ones she has baked for a long time. For the photo session she looked for her straw hat, with color ribbons and an eagle feather. Her eyes were shining in the beautiful old face of this old tough lady, a landscape of smile lines.

On my way to New York I visit Janice and Bruce McFadden in Monroe, Connecticut. We have seen each other already at the arrival ceremony in Boston. When they pick me up at the train station in Bridgeport they ask me whether I am ready to be part of a radio talk show. We walk into the radio station, and Bryan includes Bruce and me in his ongoing show juggling phone calls, information about local events, from the BBQ baloney to boat rides with music, always connecting all kind of issues to my cause. The boat people he asks whether they have already considered to introduce solar boats, the BBQ people he encourages to walk to the party. Soon we arrive in Janice and Bruce’s beautiful home and garden in Monroe. Janice has prepared a delicious eggplant-parmesan dish. Judie and Joe join us. Judie works for the US branch of Hoffmann-La Roche.

Now I am in New York again – last days before I take the train today to Florida.. I follow the Tango music in the Central Park. There is a tape recorder with loud music. Many couples dance on a square in the night, no words, cheek to cheek, perfect steps, two people become one, becoming music - secret circle of love and life.