

SUNwalk 2008

Notes from a Journey across the USA

We had a stormy Atlantic crossing. I started in Basel, Switzerland on Dec. 4th 2007. I boarded the container boat “Independent Accord” in Antwerp two days later. We have a stop over in Liverpool. And then we experience a series of 6 great storms, wind speeds up to 120 miles an hour, Beaufort 12, waves up to 40 feet. I am glad I am not on our solar catamaran this time. The menu of the galley is monotonous for a vegetarian – rice and peas for lunch, peas and rice for dinner, for a change, sometime potatoes and salads. So the Captain Fricke empathizes with my situation. He surprises me twice with a dinner that he cooks himself – a wonderful spinach casserole and fried eggplants – what a privilege to get such a Captain’s Dinner.

In Boston there is a lot of snow. I spend wonderful days with my friends Dick and Lynne Bail and their family in Newton. There is also a happy reunion with Bernard and Louise Lown. Bernard is the founder of IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War). He just finishes his book about five years of history of this organization (1980 – 1985, Nobel Peace Prize 1985). The energy and the enthusiasm of Bernie and Louise are so inspiring.

Christmas on rails – 68 hours in the Amtrak train, from Boston to LA. I have to change my seat several times so that couples and families can sit together – a case of serendipity: I meet very nice people during this trip – the talented hair designer Andre Bodmann – he shows me his creative art work in a fancy fashion magazine; Shion Sakakiyama, a young Japanese student who is learning English in the Moody College in Chicago. He wants to become a medical Doctor and a missionary; and Daniel Rodriguez, a charming physiotherapist who is on a deep spiritual search.

In L. I meet my friends Virginia and Allen Holmquist. We are deeply connected for over 27 years. I met Virginia in Santa Barbara, at a workshop of Elisabeth Kuebler Ross. “You have nice hand knitted socks,” she tells me sitting next to her. “From where do they come?” Since then we are friends. Virginia and Allen live in Monrovia. They have already made big steps towards a sustainable future – solar roof, one car – a hybrid one, class A appliances, recycling. They are also involved in the preservation of nature.

Together with other citizens they have won a vote by a margin of over 70 % to raise taxes in order to be able to buy a lot of property on the Monrovia foothills. This area has been saved from development. Today it's a wonderful natural recreation area.

Allen connects me also with Pete Nortmann of EnergyCS. Pete is the CEO of an enterprise in Monrovia that upgrades hybrid cars to higher efficiency. He changes them to plug-in hybrid and increases their efficiency up to 120 miles a gallon. Pete has also solar installations that provide electricity for his workshop – 80 % of the energy needs are covered by solar energy; at his private home even 90 %.

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9 PM, Wayfarers Chapel near Point Vicente on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, overlooking the Pacific ocean and the Santa Catalina Islands. Humming birds are swirling around the parrot flowers. I think at my meditation friends who meet at the same time, 6 PM MET, in the crypt of the St. Leonard's church in Basel. We are silent together, pray together being connected across a continent and an ocean. John Vanleer and Janie Graulich from Miami join us. They are visiting John's daughter Louisa and her husband Rodney here. John, professor for oceanography, has helped us very much when we came to Miami on our solar boat last March (www.transatlantic21.org). He walks now with me to San Pedro. As usual I am learning a lot from him, about the earthquake area we pass, about the birds we see, among them a beautiful red tail hawk that is flying away from a bush and glides with the wind, about seaweed and pepper trees.

In the evening I look for a pizza place. When the owner Isaac Romirez learns about my walk he offers me his fantastic veggie pizza for free – the great hospitality I experienced on my walk from Basel to Jerusalem is going on here. One of Isaac's employees makes a picture of us with the cellular phone camera (see images).

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David Freeman – for me he is the Hercules of the upcoming Solar Age. David was energy advisor to President Carter, then over the years CEO of

the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Lower Colorado River Authority, the Sacramento Municipal District, New York Power, LA Water and Power, then advisor to Governor Gray after the Californian energy crisis, and now at the age of 82 President of the LA Harbor. I invited Dave to a speaking tour through Switzerland in the early 80ies and we became friends since then. In May 2007 I see his big cowboy hat at the North Cove Harbor when we arrived in Manhattan on our solar boat – and I heard a Texan voice shouting “Martin”. This time I see his hut first, walking towards the headquarters of the LA harbor and shout “Dave”. Dave contributed so much to improve the energy system in the USA. He just published the book “Winning our Energy Independence - an Energy Insider shows How” (Gibbs Smith, 2007). Now he is cleaning up the LA harbor improving the clean air standards for boats, trains and truck as well as the water quality.

Dave, his staff and some media people (www.dailybreeze.com) come with me to the harbor. I fill a little bottle with water from the port that I will bring to the Atlantic across the country. David walks with me for some hundred steps before I start my 5-day walk from the harbor to Redlands.

Highlights of this walk: A break in the Whittier Recreational area where I can share my bread with wild geese and hundreds of other water birds. Some of them are black, with white beaks and toes like leaves. A farewell party at Virginia and Allen’s home in Monrovia with friends and media people (Pasadena Star News) where I can share my visions and plans for the SUNwalk. I enjoy the hike with Allen through wonderful neighborhoods of Monrovia, Azusa, Glendora, with their old trees, wonderful gardens and old houses. We walk also on a former railway track where there are now lanes for pedestrians, equestrians and bikers. Good news that some of the railroads that have been dismantled earlier in the 20th century have been built up again, like the Gold Line between L.A. and Pasadena.

I am hearing with pleasure about the buds of hope that are growing in the State: The Solar bill 1 (Aug. 2006) that will create 1 million solar roofs within 10 years – 3000 Megawatts, cutting the prize for solar energy in half. The program to increase the number of solar water heaters (2007), the shipment of the first 1 Megawatt thin film solar power plant to Germany by Nanosolar (www.nanosolar.com) just before Christmas 2007. The revival of the GM electric car by Bob Lutz who “killed the electric car” earlier – he wants to bring this project into serial production until the year 2010. I hear about the evangelical movement in the USA who discovers climate

protection as an important issue for the preservation of Creation – I read on a poster next to a church: Have a chat with God! Before there was e-mail, there was knee-mail...

In Claremont I meet the Claremont Forum people. They organize a talk for me in the Thoreau bookstore. The “Prisoners Library Project” has been founded by Ram Dass and Bo Lozoff in Durham, N.C. in 1973. It came to Claremont in 1986. Now Rick Moore is the soul of the project that brings education to prisoners in order to reduce relapses. I mention in my talk that I saw only 3 solar installations on my walk through LA. Mark von Wodtke, former professor for architecture and landscape architecture, invites me for a guided tour the next morning. He shows me a whole range of solar houses and solar installations that he has built in this town. He and Rick are excited about my MBT shoes. Some hours later Mark writes that he has already bought a pair of them in the “Oh my sole” shop – an alliteration to “O sole mio”...Claremont is a great place, nice stores, a cozy French bakery coffee house with organic food, posters in the gardens “War is not the answer” and “We love our troops. Bring them back!”

It’s a long stretch from Rancho Cucamonga to Redlands; but I am lucky: storms in the North, heavy snowfall in the mountains; for me only some hours of walking in the rain, but no dangerous situation. Finally after 6 days I can leave the big city behind me. I smell the scent of orange orchards and enter the hills of Redlands. At the end of a remote Canyon I find the new house of my dear friends Russ, Sandra and Toby Rice. A hot spa, a delicious meal and two days of resting and writing are waiting for my exhausted body and happy soul.

I am very pleased with my little cart, the carrix (www.carrix.ch). It carries about 40 pounds including all my camping gear. I call it James after Johannes/ St. James, the patron of the pilgrims and those who have to carry heavy loads...

