

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 engl. VIII

2/23 – 3/2/2008

Window Rock, Arizona – Albuquerque, New Mexico

2/23/2008

Window Rock, Arizona – Gallup, New Mexico

The Navajo people seem to read their weekly newspaper, the Navajo Times. Cindy Yurth writes an article on the SUNwalk. It appears on the front page at the day of my arrival in Window Rock. After that I experience two days of much attention and interest by the Navajo people. The lady in Bashas supermarket says: "If a 59 year old guy can walk so far, I can also walk from my home to work." She grabs the newspaper and asks, if I can sign it for her. When I leave the hotel in the morning the lady from the reception follows me. She tells me that my walking impresses her very much. "Good luck on your trip!" Many drivers are honking when they pass me between Window Rock and Gallup. Others stop and ask whether they can make a picture. A mother asks me to explain to her son and daughter why I make this long hike. She offers me a piece of pizza, a drink, and a dollar. A nurse, Lory, stops. She makes a U turn and waits for me. She wants to shake hands with me. She offers me a bundle of bananas. When I ask her whether she has a wish I could pray for she says immediately: "Oh, yes pray for me nephews. One of them serves as a soldier in Afghanistan, the other one in Iraq. Pray, please that they will return safely and in good health."

Getting so much attention and affection I have the impression the distance from Window Rock to Gallup is much less than 26 miles.

Cindy Yurth writes: "You inspired me... I'm biking to the Chapter House and the grocery store today. The car will not leave its parking spot unless I have to go more than 5 miles..."

In Gallup I stay in a hotel at the beginning of town.

2/24/2008

Gallup

When I wake up, there is bright sunshine. As soon as I start to walk, thick clouds are arriving; and it starts to rain. Today I don't get far: A friend wrote me the night before: "Don't take care only of Mother Earth; take also care of yourself!" I am thinking at that line when I see another hotel appearing, just before the end of Gallup. And checking-in again, at 10 AM...

I swim in the indoor pool – 100 times 40 feet, alternating 400 feet of swimming with a hot bath in the Jacuzzi. I take also a long nap. I buy healthy food in the next supermarket – a great rest.

2/25/2008

Gallup – Prewitt

During four days I follow a red sandstone layer – sometimes there are steep rock walls. There are also bizarre rock needles or huge polished stone balls. During four days I am walking in connection with the snow capped Mt. Taylor (11'301 feet), a mysterious volcano reaching into another world. It can be seen already from Gallup, far away. After one day of hiking it gets bigger; but it is still very remote, one of these awesome roofs of the world. Near Grants the walker is then very close to this mountain. Basalt rocks, sharp lava formations, and segmented hardened lava dough remind me of the proximity of the volcano. Cactuses grow between these dark lava rocks. Later Mt. Taylor becomes smaller and smaller. From the last hilltop near Albuquerque I am waving good-bye to this gorgeous mountain that stayed with me for almost a week becoming a part of myself.

After the days of heart-warming welcoming in Navajo land I experience withdrawal symptoms. Suddenly I am again completely alone on Rte. 66 - practically no traffic. I am hiking sometimes on a deserted 4-lane road. There is a moment when I start to feel really lonely. And just in that moment John Schaefer from Salt Lake City announces his arrival in Albuquerque for Thursday, 2/28. He tells me that we can stay with the family of his brother in Albuquerque. John has big plans how we could bring the SUNwalk idea closer to schools, communities, to the public. He wants to discuss it with me. He wants to start the next phase of my walk.

Instantly, this new impulse brings my enthusiasm back.

Rte. 66 is following again the railway tracks. The rails are glittering in the sun glow. Other surprises come up: Long, endlessly long freight trains, once in the morning the only passenger train, and then suddenly a car appears on the tracks, soon later another one. They have an installation that allows them to drive on rails. It looks funny, cars on tracks.

Between Coolidge and Thoreau I pass the “Continental Divide”, the watershed between the Pacific and the Atlantic; so far I walked against the water flow of the brooks and rivers. From now on I will walk with it. For the first time I don't have this vague feeling to have endless space in front of me, but to get closer to my destination, Boston.

Why did I choose Boston as the destination of the SUNwalk? When I'll arrive at the Boston Common, the big park in the center of the city a life circle will close: When I arrive in the USA for the first time in 1972, I leave the metro station. I find myself in the

middle of this fantastic park, at noon time on a warm Sunday. There are cheerful people all over the place, families enjoy their picnic, an old Afro-American man plays the trumpet, and rock music is hammering in the background. I experience a fantastic feeling of liberation. The 2½ years in this town (1980 – 1982) become also an important time for growth in my life – far away from Swiss tradition and structure. I am asking myself for the first time in life: “All I do – what does it really have to do with me? With Martin I am meant to be?” I leave the path of the researcher. I focus on the psychosocial aspects of Primary Care. The encounter with Bernard Lown, the founder of PSR and IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War), leads to my involvement in that area, and consequently to my activities for a sustainable energy future. When I dream about next steps or breakthroughs in my life, these dreams take often place in Boston, Massachusetts.

In the Boston area several very good friends of mine are living:

Julie Smith is sitting at the same table in the cafeteria of the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (now Brigham and Women’s Hospital) in early 1980: “From Switzerland? I am just reading ‘The Magic Mountain’ by Thomas Mann.” From then on we are friends. Julie works as the Chief Secretary in the department of Pathology. In addition she draws cards and makes also photo cards. She supports a family in Cuba and organizes transports with goods for poor people from Boston to Cuba. All this years we are connected by a laughing relationship. My diaphragm usually hurts when I leave Julie. There is also enthusiasm about films we share – both of us saw the movie “My Dinner with Andre” more than 10 times. If I feel hungry during a long stretch of my hike I imagine Julie’s cheese pasta that wait for me in Boston; and then I can keep going.

Dick and Lynne Bail are for me like a brother and a sister. I met Dick in Cologne in 1986 during a Congress of IPPNW. In addition to his work as a doctor in Boston he initiates and realizes projects in Africa. Lynne is very experienced in tutoring mothers and an excellent cook and baker. When I am in the Boston area I can stay in Dick and Lynne’s beautiful house in West Newton. The little attic room with its half circle windows, with the view to the old trees in the garden is one of these places on this planet where I feel especially well and at home.

Bernard and Louise Lown are for me parents, siblings and friends at the same time. John Stoeckle, my former boss at the Massachusetts General Hospital, has made my stay at Harvard possible. He became an important mentor for me with his generous, loving heart. I met Mike Nathan during my psychological training, and he became a life-long friend, together with his wife Michele and their children Lilly, Louise, and Gabriel. With Paula Gutlove and Gordon Thompson I feel deeply connected through our common involvement for a nuclear-free world. I am very much looking forward to see all of them after my arrival in Boston.

In the evening I put my tent on a plain next to the red sandstone walls that are glowing in the evening sun, between some juniper trees. I am twinkling with my eyes through the

tent curtain, until the sun glow is fading in one of the bushes and the moon is covering the landscape with its smooth silver blanket.

2/26/2008

Prewitt – Grants

During the whole day I walk in eye contact with the white snowfields of Mt. Taylor. Occasionally somebody waves to me and shouts: “Where are you heading?” “Boston.” “Walking all the way?” “Yes, from L.A. to Boston.” “Wow, long ways! What for?” “Promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency! To keep this beautiful planet inhabitable.” “Awesome. Be careful. God bless you!”

Towards the evening I arrive in Grants, a long stretched town. In the Public Library, next to the New Mexico Mining Museum, I can take up my e-mail correspondence. The helpful librarian extends my computer time again and again. My friend Ruedi Suter from Basel, Switzerland, author of Bruno Manser’s biography, writes me about the Longest Walk 2. On 2/12/2008 hundreds of indigenous people have started a walk from California to Washington, thirty years after the Longest Walk of 1978. The native people walk for ending ecological injustice, for cultural survival, for the support of young people in their development, for the rights of the native people in America. They plan to arrive in Washington on 7/11/2008. I contacted them; and I hope to meet them in Washington, D.C.

www.longestwalk.org.

Kontakt:

Ricardo Tapia: desert2stars@yahoo.com”

I try to find Carla, a cousin of Debby Tewa, who lives in Grant, but without success. I find a good lodging opportunity, the Sands Motel.

2/27/2008

Grants – Laguna

In the morning the cloudless sky and the promising dawn call for an early start of my hike. The town is still sleeping. Only a rabbit is hopping across the road and hiding behind some grass. There it stays motionless and watches me with big eyes. I don’t move either, and so we look at each other for a while. Only, when I move again the rabbit runs away and disappears behind a bush. As a lonely walker in this world of engines a part of me is feeling very close to this rabbit that tries to survive somehow in the middle of our civilization.

Rte. 66 is empty here, deserted. It leads from ruin to ruin – gasoline stations that are falling apart, motels whose name boards express still the taste of the fifties, but are slowly eaten up by the tooth of time. Some remaining walls surround dark window holes. Like lost souls some dogs come out of the ruins and bark. In their voice there is aggression, fear, but also a longing for loving strokes. But once in a while also houses appear where there is some life left – a trading post with a store, with a rodeo arena, and stables; or a prestigious farm with a nice mansion and old, thick cotton wood trees. Sometimes there are also dwellings of Native American people, cottages, adobe houses, and trailers.

Spring is in the air. The warm weather wakes up all kind of living creatures. Again and again I hear the song of a small grayish bird: “Eeeyoueesayoueesayou”. The first bee is showing up. It sits on my hand and crawls up my arm, still slowly, staggering. A thick, yellow-green caterpillar pushes itself across the emergency lane towards the more natural parts of its habitat.

A white car stops in front of me. Carla appears. She has seen me in the morning, on a bridge; but she couldn’t stop. She had to rush to work – she works as an employee in the administration of the Navajo reservation. During the noon break she is now looking for me, on all the roads I probably could have chosen. She just wanted to connect once again and chat for a while.

I am sleeping under a bridge of route 66. The space is too low for my tent; therefore I just crawl into my sleeping bag. The tunnel forms a frame for a nice moving picture: In the foreground here is some grass and dry yellow bushes with small round fruits. Above and behind it there is the railway dam. Half of the picture is filled by the slowly changing sky. For a while I enjoy the slow motion picture, this outdoor TV screen. The white cirrus clouds are slowly turning orange and red. Four birds cross the picture in a symmetric formation. In the dusk the only passenger train of the day roars through the picture, two months after I was in this train traveling from Boston to L.A.

2/28/2008

Laguna – Rte. 66 Casino Hotel

It’s still dark when I leave the next morning.

At 6 o’clock I arrive at the freeway 40. I find a good breakfast in the store of the gasoline station. There is another stretch waiting on the winding Rte. 66, through a beautiful, red canyon before I walk again on the freeway for 23 miles – because Rte. 66 has a gap here. I put earplugs into my ears. I choose the side of the freeway where the airflow of the trucks comes from the back. It’s much easier this time than in Arizona – warmer, broader shoulders of the freeway, less uphill stretches.

During my noon break a big purple truck stops, on the emergency lane of the other side of the freeway. It’s a nice truck. Its front part is round, with its purple color almost

psychedelic. The driver opens the window and waves to me. I don't risk crossing the busy freeway. Maybe the driver thinks I am maintenance person because I wear the orange jacket that Gilberto Schaefer gave me for such occasions. But I cannot help him technically. Therefore I wave back and stay where I am. As soon as the big truck has left I regret my decision. Maybe the driver was an employee of Robert Phelan - the truck company owner from Ringling whom I met in the Grand Canyon Cavern. Which story did I miss here? I didn't finish the thought when the purple psychedelic truck rolled towards me and stopped – on my side, next to James. It had driven to the next exit, it left the freeway, it crossed the freeway on a bridge; it got on the freeway again, on the other side. “Can I give you a ride? I have to go to Albuquerque anyway“, a friendly dark face asks me, surrounded by black curly hair, a big smile, beautiful white teeth. I thank him and explain to him my walk. “I never thought somebody would walk here. Take this!” He bends over and disappears for a moment. Then he gives me a half-a-gallon bottle with an orange soft drink. After that the angel on 18 wheels continues his trip.

In the evening the new casino hotel appears in a desert valley – a white hotel complex, the casino next door with flashing lights, a huge parking lot. This hotel will be expensive – I think; but it costs 66 \$ a night – because of Rte. 66, a good prize for a well equipped and beautifully designed hotel room. The ladies at the reception want to know everything about my SUNwalk. “Wow, when I will be 59, I would like to be in your shape,” a beautiful young woman says. “Maybe I have to quit smoking for that.”

The casino is trembling of gambling excitement. Hundreds of people sit behind the slot machines and invest into their good luck. In the restaurant there is nothing available without meat. Therefore I buy some food in the store next door and eat in the hotel room.

2/29/2008

Rte. 66 Casino Hotel - Albuquerque

Before I leave the hotel Anessa at the reception brings me a big box with 24 mineral water bottles. I am delighted about all 24 of them, but I carry only two of them with me.

Soon I am in Albuquerque, only about 14 miles to go, uphill, downhill, sandy, dry hills and slopes. Suddenly the view opens towards the town and the Manzano Mountains behind it. Far away I can see the skyscrapers of downtown. Rte. 66 becomes Central Avenue. It leads straight on down to the Rio Grande River and the city.

I meet John Schaefer on the road. He just arrived from Salt Lake City. He parks his car on a parking lot and walks with me to the house of his brother Richard and his sister-in-law Jo Ann Schaefer: “The first two people who entered Albuquerque by foot!” Richard works as a professor for communication, Jo Ann as a librarian. I buy some roses for Jo Ann in a flower shop. Jennifer and Christina are having a high environmental awareness.

They make a beautiful bouquet. They make a special prize for me. We make photos of each other.

Richard and Jo Ann welcome me cordially, and I can enjoy their generous hospitality during two days. The beautiful house overlooks the river, in the sand dunes of the riverbank. Also wild geese are landing on their long journey.

John has a lot of good ideas how the SUNwalk could be better connected to schools, communities, and organizations. Two days of conversations, filming, planning. Richard and Jo Ann's son Adrian, an elementary school teacher, invites me to his school for Monday. With John's help and all his connections my walk may enter a new phase. I have the impression that a lot of surprises and new activities are waiting for me.