

When you walk along the street with the houses facing out at you, you're in 2005; when you walk the alleyways, or this bike path, it seems like 1950 again. It feels a lot like the neighborhood I lived in then, in Murphy's Meadows, Ind. I take a little detour and walk along the street for a few blocks — Hayden Bridge Way — to see what the fronts look like. Out there people are heading off to work. Grown-ups out the front, kids out the back, just like when I was a kid. Two different worlds.

Out toward Hayden Bridge, Springfield thins out to a lovely example of edge-of-town spaciousness, back yards opening up right into fields. You can see remnants of the old farms and orchards that used to be here. Finally you walk up what feels like a country road, then you cross the river, and surprise — there's a *highway* there, Marcola Road. Country's on the other side.

Traffic is heavy. At the Hayden Bridge Store you get another cup of coffee, and then, at last, you head down Camp Creek Road along the McKenzie off to the right. There's 11 hours of walking ahead, and those are the hours you're doing this for — but at this point your head's still full of Eugene and Springfield.

As a Eugenean, whenever I'm in Springfield I'm struck by the difference between the two towns. Springfield thinks of Eugene as elitist and liberal, and Eugene sees Springfield as blue-collar and conservative. On that day the difference was especially easy to see, because from Olive Street to Marcola Road I could watch the election signs on front lawns gradually red-shift from mostly Kerry to mostly Bush. Enough said about that!

But it made me remember how a few months ago there was chatter in the newspaper and on TV about whether Eugene and Springfield should merge. What a crazy idea! Obviously we could save a lot of money with just one government instead of two, one set of agencies and districts instead of two. And if government is supposed to save money, why not?

taper off at 6 feet. And I can tell when I've bitten off more than I can chew.

Wait: who am I, in the middle of a *40-mile walk*, to be talking about balance and moderation? Wisdom consists in knowing your limits, knowing when to slow down and stop; and five hours into my day, when I reach that country store halfway to Walterville and find it's been boarded up, all I can think about is how nice it will be to slow down and stop — four miles from now at the Walterville Store.

By noontime, *seven* hours into my walk and half-way to Russ's, I've had my rest at the Walterville Store and I've doubled back about a mile on Route 126 down to Deernhorn. Now I look forward to many hours of peace and quiet walking along the south side of the McKenzie. Five or 10 minutes go by between each passing car. Under the magic spell that rivers inspire, when time seems to slow down, and maybe even disappear — "Old Man River, he just keeps rolling along" — it's easy to fall back into my nostalgic reverie about old-time, small-town America.

A few months before, my daughter and I canoed 40 miles of the Willamette River from Armitage Park to Peoria, stopping for lunch in Harrisburg's lovely river-bank park. If coming into a town *on foot* gives you food for thought, you should approach one by canoe! Even industrial Harrisburg is utterly charming as a river town, like something out of Mark Twain. A few miles south of town, a bald eagle dropped out of the sky right ahead of our canoe, plucked a fish out of the river and flew off over the trees. We were in a mythological America, like Lewis and Clark.

You don't feel exactly like Lewis or Clark as you're walking the asphalt of Deernhorn Road, but between the eternal calming pace of the river, and the patient business of moving ahead one step at a time, you do fall into a very different sense of America's history. One reason to go on a long walk is precisely to escape that sense we now live with of faster and faster change. Sometimes

Twice during my long trek I halt my forward movement long enough to go down to the river and soak my feet — once on Camp Creek Road, once again on Deernhorn. Walking is solitary enough, but the river's more solitary yet. As I scramble down the bank through bushes and around rocks, I can't help anticipating a special encounter, mythological maybe — and of course what I feel instead is the inevitable letdown: no sublimity, no poetry, no river god; just sore feet. The image of soaking them in the river seemed so perfect, but the river turns out to be overwhelmingly just itself.

I can't tell if I feel disappointment or relief. When you walk you're not really in search of the extraordinary anyway. The hiker and the mountain climber may be after something big, but the walker's after the ordinary. Not a new thought. Countless writers over the centuries report finding refreshment, revelation, or even salvation in the everyday, the ordinary, the obvious — in the earthworm, the sparrow, the leaf of grass, the scrap of newspaper blowing in the street — in the world staring us straight in the face while we look away.

No looking away today. This water's painfully cold. *Hot* water would be a lot more comforting right now. Still, it's a river, impressive just for being there and for flowing so constantly, and it's great to be here. Five or 10 minutes later, though, back on the road and back in the groove, my body can't even tell it stopped to rest.

Now I'm going to tell you the thoughts that occupied my mind on Deernhorn Road all the way to Leaburg. The morning's observations about the divide between Eugene and Springfield flowed on in a rambling meditation about the river that runs through the middle of Eugene. Eugene, it occurred to me, is really two cities.

Eugene nestles into the hills at the far south end of the valley. There's a natural barrier to the south and east, where development slows down as you get farther into the hills; but to the north and west it's old farm country, and in that direction development can proceed



But can you imagine a City Council meeting of a combined Eugene/Springfield? The Eugene council is divided enough as it is! There'd *never* be any agreement if you added Springfield into the mix. What was Rick Dancer thinking about night after night on the evening news? I think that guy's a trouble-maker!

What is it, anyway, that makes people think bigger is better? It's in my nature to believe in moderation and balance as goals. It's an ancient Greek ideal: moderation in all things. Nothing's more natural than growth — grass grows, trees grow, people grow, families grow, cities grow — but it seems to me everything has a right size. As a teacher I know when a class is too big. It's nice watching your children grow, but it's good when they

everything just seems too big and too fast for this little human body to bear.

Well, walking returns you to what I call human time-and human space. It's the only completely natural mode of transportation, a direct expression of the bodies that nature gave us. Maybe $E=MC^2$, and maybe light years are the only constant in cosmic space-time, but in human space-time a mile is 20 minutes, and a long day means from my house to Russ's, right up the McKenzie. Before white settlers came into the Willamette Valley, Indian tribes who lived that far apart spoke different languages, and a full day on the road will tell you why. It's a lot of effort to get your body from here to there! You wouldn't want to do it very often.

It actually feels daring for me to write about being a normal human being walking down the road, instead of big ideas. Maybe that's why I walk the roads, to get my nose out of a book, to get back in touch with the world, to get back to the surface of things.

relatively unimpeded. That explains why the urban growth boundary was drawn so close in on the south, hugging the ridgeline, with almost no room left for growth, but so far out on the north, way out beyond Belt Line, to leave lots of room for expansion. Thirty years after the line was drawn you can drive out River Road to Beacon, where new neighborhoods press on the inside of the boundary, and Tom's Apple Orchard, that classic slice of old-time Americana, sits nervously going in and out of business right across the road.

Because of this geography, Eugene south of the river is still pretty much a sleepy little college town, with the ambiance and down-scale economy of a hundred other college towns in America. Like a lot of them, it struggles