

Minding Your Body

Start with the neighborhood right out your door.

But don't be foolish. Walk around your block too many times and get accused of criminal intent or "scoping." Stare at a house too long, and a curtain may fly open to reveal a half-naked, towel-wrapped beauty. All I recommend is keeping moving. Walking, unlike loitering, is still mostly legal in this country, so long as you stay in the public sphere. Whereas "admiring the architecture" is hard to discern from being a Peeping Tom, "enjoying a stroll" is still an acceptable excuse for browsing a neighborhood.

Living in a city affords an infinite number of potential walks, all of them unique. Take a left where you normally take a right; walk only on streets with the letters N or D in them;

lack even a sidewalk. They were not built for the human body's ease of movement, much less its safety or protection. Nevertheless, like visiting a foreign country that still dumps raw sewage in the street, treading these noisy corridors provides perspective and humility, step by step.

Walking in the city is not without its inherent dangers. You might be cold, caught in a downpour, mugged, raped, kidnapped, run over, bitten by a dog, talked to. Anything can happen — but rarely does. Even so, for most women, walking alone is a freedom no longer taken for granted. Our gut reaction is to tell women that walking at night is asking for trouble — better bring Fido, or a stun gun — when we really should be saying, "Don't rape women, assholes, or else we'll strip you of

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if you live in Santa Clara, walk to south Eugene; if you live in Glenwood, walk to Sheldon; be as spontaneous or as precise as you wish. The point is to avoid well-trodden bike/pedestrian paths, the high school track or the loop you've circled for the past three years; you may as well be on a treadmill, for the only muscles you're exercising are your calves.

Especially pay a visit to the ugly parts of town. Think of civic walking as a vote for a better, more people-friendly community. There's a reason certain parts of Eugene and Springfield (e.g. the most heavily trafficked)

your basic freedoms forever." But I digress.

Civic walking, reconnecting our bodies to the urban environment, appreciating the fine art of getting lost, confronting suburban blight with a heavy foot, these are all alternatives to the stress of a wilderness hike. Of course, walking along West 11th may produce plenty of tension, so then the solution will be to install sidewalks, make better choices about urban design, make everything more walkable, more livable. Our health, as they say, will follow.

For further reading, see Jim Earl's essay on walking in our July 14, 2004 issue:
www.eugeneweekly.com/2005/07/14/coverstory.html

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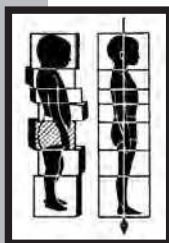
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