

Around the world in 11 years

By **Tori Elliott**

Eleven years and two months, 51 pairs of shoes, three buggies and continuous support from his family—these are all the things required for Montreal native Jean Béliveau to walk 75,000 kilometres across 64 countries and five continents around the world. On Friday, May 27, the world wide walker passed through Virден on his way home.

Unhappy with his working career, Béliveau was running in his Montreal neighbourhood one day late in 1999 when he offhandedly wondered how long it would take him to reach New York, and then Mexico. Returning home, Béliveau researched the distances and just like that, his dream to walk around the world was born.

Concerned that his

wife, Luce Archambault, would influence his decision to leave, Béliveau harboured his secret for eight months, telling her only three weeks before his departure on August 18, 2000, his 45th birthday.

“At first, I was astonished!” writes Archambault in an email interview. “After thinking about it for a few minutes, I thought that it was a wonderful project and told him that I would support him.”

Leaving Montreal with a ten year plan, Béliveau headed south, reaching San Jose, Costa Rica a year later. Realizing that his pace reflected a 12 year journey, he contacted his wife with trepidation. “I told my wife that it would be closer to 12 years, not ten. She said ‘why not 14!’” he recalls

with a chuckle. “Well, I thought that if every year he extended it by two years, he would never be back,” says Archambault.

Her support for Béliveau never wavered though, and for three weeks out of every year Archambault would journey to wherever in the world her husband was for another ‘honeymoon,’ as they call it.

Though his son has joined five times on his walk, Archambault never once considered it; “his role is to do the walking. Mine is to take care of logistics and take care of our family heritage while he is away.”

“At first I wanted to think about myself” he says. “I don’t want people to follow me, I want them to follow themselves, to create their own dream; you only have one life.” However, soon after he began, the walk adopted the United Nations’ proclamation for a decade for a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world. “It’s given the walk a soul and it’s become a

beautiful evolution of thinking.”

Their manifesto, to respect all life, reject violence, share with others, listen to understand, preserve the planet and rediscover solidarity is “like a bible in itself for [Béliveau]; it’s amazing,” he says.

As an advocate for peace, the walker has spent the last decade meeting incredible people across the world. He has crossed the paths of four Nobel Peace Prize winners, including Mr. Nelson Mandela, which was a “great, short moment.”

There have been celebrations and walks coordinated to correspond with his route and he has received generous donations from organizations and families all over the globe. For his night in Virден, Béliveau stayed at the Virден Motel courtesy of the Knights of Columbus.

Now on the final stretch, Béliveau doesn’t think he’ll miss the walk when he finally reaches home mid-October. “[The walk] was a physical movement but



For the past 11 years, Jean Béliveau of Montreal has been walking his way across the globe. Beginning in Montreal in August of 2000, Béliveau is on the home stretch and is scheduled to return to his home and family on October 16. Photo/Tori Elliott

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I’m bringing all the intellectual baggage back to play with. I want to be with my family.” He plans to continue advocating peace by speaking publicly about his journey. Archambault is excited to “resume [their] lives as a couple with the family around, the children and the grandchildren.”

Béliveau admits that his incredible journey hasn’t always been easy. “Sometimes you want to give up...but sometimes you are a prisoner of your dream and you have to fulfill it...you just go step by step and day by day and the time and the distance passes.”

The walker and his wife are currently working on a book chronicling his decade on foot and hers at home. More information regarding Béliveau’s worldwide walk can be found at www.walk.org.

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