

## Promoting peace, one step at a time

BY CHRISTEEN JESSE

Jean Beliveau walked away from his Quebec home eleven years ago and hasn't stopped walking since.

Beliveau owned a neon sign factory in Quebec, and when a major ice storm hit in 1998, the storm not only took a negative toll on his business, but also on his life. He was forced to shut down his company.

"What it affected the most was myself. It was like 'Oh, this is enough. I'm tired, I don't want to do this anymore,'" remembers Beliveau. "I became a little down on life and then we turned off the factory."

With no job and a feeling of emptiness, Beliveau felt the need to escape. He started thinking about traveling around the world; planning different routes and estimating how long it might take.

"Suddenly I had planted the idea," says Beliveau during his stop in Moosomin on Thursday. "I could not stop the idea in my mind and I said 'I can do this!'"

Beliveau wasn't sure his plans would go over well with his loved ones.

"I was afraid it was too crazy. So I didn't tell my family for eight months . . . I kept it secret," he says. "I was scared that they would say I was crazy."

"So finally I told other people around, out of the network of my family, just to see in their eyes if I was healthy or not," he says with a laugh.

When his idea was met with positive feedback and encouragement, Beliveau decided he would follow through—he would walk around the world.

"For me, it wasn't for anything . . . it was just for me. It was a pure escape. Maybe to find myself," says Beliveau.

But, Beliveau still had to tell his family.

"Three and a half weeks before I left I was nervous and I couldn't eat breakfast . . . I didn't sleep well that night and then I told my wife Luce."

"I said 'Listen I'm going for a long walk around the world.'"

Bewildered, Beliveau's wife had to ask the obvious question.

"She said 'Is it finished between us?' and I said 'No. I love you, but this is for other purposes' and I think I took a big risk at that moment," says Beliveau.

After she shed some tears and absorbed in the fact that her husband was really leaving, Luce looked at her husband with sad eyes and said, 'Do this for peace.'

And so began Jean Beliveau's World Wide Walk for Peace and Children.

Beliveau began his trek and took his first of many steps on August 18, 2000—his 45th birthday.

Beliveau began the journey by tackling the United States in 2000, and then moved on to walk across 62 countries over the next decade. After making his way across North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, he took his journey into Australia, and is now back in Canada to finish the final leg of the world wide walk. Sixty-four countries later, Beliveau will take his last step on October 16, 2011.

"It will be at the end eleven years and two months without returning back



Jean Beliveau walked through Moosomin on Thursday as part of his World Wide Walk for Peace and Children.

home," says Beliveau. "And sometimes I had a hard time. If you ask me if I had some desire to break? Yeah, sure, I did."

"In Ethiopia, it was my hardest time—this is the middle of Africa and I just could not absorb anymore culture shock. So I e-mailed my wife 'I want to come home, I cannot go on anymore.' Then she replied to me after a few days and said, 'First we love you, and you're welcome home, but to break your walk now, it's like you did nothing; all this effort behind you will be erased.'"

It was at this point that Beliveau encountered the most difficult intellectual challenge of his entire journey, and for the

first time, felt like giving up. "Finally I said 'I'm crazy! Don't do that now,'" he recalls.

Beliveau also felt the urge to return home when his father passed away in 2006, but knew that he had his father's blessing and must continue on with the journey.

Over the years, he has dealt with not only emotional challenges, but physical challenges as well. Beliveau's walk has led him through countless different climates and challenging terrains. He trekked through six deserts, conquered the Andes mountains in Peru and spent 3 months walking in 45 degree weather in Australia: all the while keeping his eyes on his ultimate goal.

"You keep walking, you have the soreness, and the pain in the muscles in your feet," says Beliveau. "I began to have problems in my feet . . . so I will have to be operated on, but I don't have to complain, I have to finish."

As he makes his way across the world, Beliveau only has one permanent companion; his buggy.

The trademark three-wheeled blue stroller holds fifty kilos of essentials like food, clothes, a small tent, sleeping bag, and a First Aid Kit.

"For me, it's perfect," says Beliveau.

Throughout his travels, Beliveau has stayed in the homes of over 1,600 families, spent hundreds of nights in his tent, and even slept in nine different jail cells.

"One time they forgot me in a jail in South Africa," he recalls with a laugh. "In the morning it was another shift of police and they didn't pass the word that I was a guest. Finally I was shouting through a small tiny grid, I said 'I'm Canadian, please come let me out. I'm just walking around the world. Please come and open the doors, I'm not a prisoner.'"

Eventually Beliveau was released from the cell and continued on walking. Quirky experiences like these are abundant and are things that he will remember for the rest of his life.

When Beliveau left Quebec, he had \$4,000 in his pocket and one word in his head—peace.

As he walked around promoting peace, Beliveau was welcomed with open arms.

"The people, they helped at different levels; a guy in India gave me these glasses, this vest is from New Zealand, these shoes are from a shop in Montreal, and my buggy, my things, almost all the things are donated."

Many of Beliveau's flights were donated; some by organizations, and others by individuals who were inspired by his cause.

Everyone that Beliveau has encountered has been very generous and helpful along the way, offering him food, shelter and support.

"They said 'You come to the supermarket tomorrow morning and fill your buggy, we will give you a place to stay and some money as well or different sort of support. So it gave a lot of help.'"

There was financial support too.

"About 80 percent of the need came along the way, the rest my wife supplied. She said it was \$4,000 per year about on average."

Beliveau planned the huge undertaking himself, and made sure that the trip took him where he wanted.

"For me, going around the world was more about crossing symbolically the five big continents, not necessarily going across it all," says Beliveau.

He was careful to avoid certain areas, not wanting to get caught in high risk situations due to political conflict. Forced to avoid walking through Columbia, Libya and Tibet, Beliveau realized the threat of political turmoil.

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# Peace walker on final leg of his journey

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"We changed some routes because of political conflict . . . it's different than just walking your fingers across the map," he says.

It was also inevitable that Beliveau would run into language barriers along the way, and sometimes he found this difficult.

"For example when you are in China and you cannot talk to them and you want food, and sleep and you have a whole day behind you; you're tired and you're impatient."

But experiences like these were essential in the overall learning experience for Beliveau; as he walks, he learns. He says it feels as though he is in a big university, learning about culture and

political movements around the world.

"People say to me, 'Did you teach? Did you help?' No, I came to learn."

Beliveau humbly explains that his world wide walk was very symbolic to a number of other nations, who just needed some inspiration.

"Me, I feel as though I didn't do much. Most of the things were made by people on the way," he says.

"In Manila, the street children's foundation, they knew before that I was coming so they prepared a walk with Jean Beliveau," he says. "1,000 people came to walk that day for three kilometres. They raised funds for

local charities . . . so they used the walk for their own purpose."

After touching many lives, and promoting peace around the world, Beliveau has reached the final leg of his journey.

He has gained national attention and acts as an inspiration to many, and has already been asked to work with a group to organize a structured conference that will take him around to schools and other groups to share his story.

Both experienced writers, Beliveau and his wife plan to write a book chronicling the incredible experience that lasted more than a decade.

As he gets closer and closer to home, Beliveau reflects on the lessons he has learned. Through

all the challenges, experiences and steps taken, there is something that will always resonate with him.

"I think I am going back home with a beautiful baggage in my heart about values. Human values . . . family values. You see all these people around you in different countries, and you see

plenty of love in these homes," says Beliveau. "Life is not easy but they are very tight and that is what I am bringing back."

"I don't bring money, but I feel rich . . . about values. Untouchable values. There are materialistic values, sure, but the emotional values like love and sharing—those you cannot touch."



Above: Jean Beliveau draws a crowd in Nepal in 2008 and shows people the map of his World Wide Walk for Peace and Children. Right: Beliveau stopped in Moosomin last Thursday on the last leg of his eleven-year walk around the world.



## St. Lazare News

Congratulations to Solange Simard and Samuel Tremblay for their performance in the children's musical Honk in Binscarth two weeks ago.

Happy 92nd birthday to Rosa Lemoine who was celebrating with family all weekend and had a come and go tea on Sunday afternoon.