

My First Walk

How I Became a Walker



By [Wendy Bumgardner](#). [Walking Expert](#)



Volksmarch Medal - Forest Grove 1984. Wendy Bumgardner ©

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It was September, 1984. I was not quite 25 and newly engaged to Rich Bumgardner. I was looking through my hometown newspaper when I spied an announcement for the very first [volksmarch](#) walk in Oregon, to be held in my own hometown of Forest Grove. How convenient!

Volks-What? Rich enjoyed walking volkssport walking events, also called volksmarches or volkswalks, when he was stationed in Germany in the 1970's. These are non-competitive walking events you do at a strolling pace, 6 miles or 10 kilometers long. A club selects a nice place to walk, marks the trail, and invites the public to come walk it. Rich had his 30 volksmarch medals framed on the wall, and he showed me slides of the fun he and his friends had on those walks. Rich said I had to walk the Forest Grove volksmarch. But I was afraid to do it -- a volksmarch is 6 miles long, 10 kilometers, and I had never walked that far before.

My Left Foot Back in 1984, I still considered myself handicapped. I had dropped foot from nerve damage following a knee operation when I was 14, and it took me 10 years to be able to walk without an obvious limp. The ankle remained weak and prone to sprains, and running was impossible. I had legitimate concerns about being able to walk a full 10K. I agreed to walk on the condition that when my foot gave out, Rich would finish the walk and come back and pick me up with the car.

Start Walking We arrived at the walk at the stroke of 8 a.m., wanting to ensure we got the medal award. There was no line-up at the start trailer. We registered, paid our \$4 each and got start cards #3 and #4. We followed the trail markings through my familiar territory, out past the houses and farms of my relatives. I got to give Rich a little tour of my stomping grounds, although I had mostly driven around them and never actually walked on any of these roads.

Checkpoint As we started up Purdin Road we came to the checkpoint -- a little table with a jug of water and some hard candies. A writer was there doing an article on the walk for *Sunset* magazine. We gave a couple of comments. We headed up David Hill, turning onto Thatcher Road at the house of my favorite cousins. By four miles I was amazed that I was still walking. I was enjoying seeing these familiar backroads at a walking pace. Our next checkpoint as we arrived back in town was at the house of a walker who had a roomful of volkssport awards from Germany. Rich enjoyed looking at those, and had many tales to share of the walks he did in Germany.

An Award! When we finished, I received my first sports award of my life, a volksmarch medal showing a lion, with a Bavarian hat and [walking stick](#), drinking a beer. I bought my first IVV Record Book to record the event and begin to earn [IVV Achievement Awards](#), although I didn't know how often I'd have the opportunity to do them since the sport was just starting in the Pacific Northwest.

And So It Begins The next weekend, Rich was busy but I took off with my roommate Susan and headed up to the Olympic Peninsula to do a walk at Quilcene. Rich and I went to every walk we could, many in Washington, and my first event book filled up in a few months. I loved the walks. Walking 10 kilometers was plenty, though. Once in awhile Rich and I did two walks in a day, separated by a meal and some rest.

A Walking Life By the end of the 1980's, I became vice-president of a local walking club, then soon after, the state organization. In 1991 I was elected national secretary of the American Volkssport Association. In 1995, I created their website [AVA.org](#) and in 1996 I became the Walking Guide at About.com. Since becoming the Walking Guide, I have been certified as a marathon coach, walked seven marathons, and learned to racewalk. I have been trailmaster for well over 100 different walking events and participated in more than 1,000 walking events.

See what one little walk can do?

Excerpts from The American Wanderer (AVA bimonthly newspaper), Oct-Nov 2014:

A Volksmarch at every State Capital in 51 Days
By Alisa Johnson

We did it! Tristan, Nicholas, Dina and I visited every state capital and Washington, D.C. in just 51 days. We completed a 5-10k Volksmarch at each capital, sometimes accompanied by Volkssporters and sometimes by ourselves.

We had planned to do a 10k YRE at each capital but it quickly became evident that between the heat and humidity, the historical signs to read and our long days in the van, a 5k route was a better option. Most of the time the YRE had a 5k route available, sometimes the club members walking with us showed us the key sites on a modified route and sometimes we adjusted the route based on a review [of] the map. That's one of the benefits of Volkssporting over more competitive walks – you are a winner when you complete whatever you're able to do. We also had some people join us for just part of the walk because they knew they wouldn't be able to complete the whole route. We're so glad to have had so many Volkssporters join us for many of the walks.

The highlight of the trip was most definitely the people we met. We especially enjoyed sharing our journey with club members, college friends, and people we met in our hotels or on the road...Some people even opened their homes to us. I could go on and on. You can see pictures of the people we met and our walks on our open, public Facebook page [facebook.com/51in51...](https://www.facebook.com/51in51...)

This summer we've had an adventure few have the opportunity to experience. We're thankful for all of the people who followed our Facebook page and commented on our posts. Knowing you were following along and being able to share it with you, made the trip extra special. We can't wait to see you again at the AVA Convention in Salem, Oregon in 2015!