

Message for Melville  
Reflections in the Ripple  
By Neil Dunsmore

From the moment I could see parliament Hill most majestic buildings the flag waving in the distance I began to get emotional! I turned to senator Robert Black who had been walking beside me and said does that ever get old that view! Rob said to me, “no I pinch myself every day that I get to work here”. This had been my goal, 531 kilometres to get here to Parliament Hill. I wanted to see the view. I knew the view would be there, what I was not expecting were the emotions that came with it!

I wasn't crying because of pain. Make no bones about it I was crying, but it was not the pain that was causing me to cry, to be truthful I hadn't felt my feet in over a week! My knee had not begun to ache that day. I didn't have the usual sharp pain of somebody hitting me with a chisel in the knee that usually came at the six hour mark and today we'd been walking for a mere hour and a half maybe two hours. The emotions today came from the memories of the people I had met on this journey. Some of those people came to my aid and some of them I helped. That's who I was thinking about as the tears streamed down my face and I was almost overcome by emotion.

Those people and memories are the reflections in the ripple I want to share with you today. The ripple is what happens when you take that first step, you move people to act! When I first announced that I was going on this walk, Cecilia Marie Roberts from the Canadian Mental Health Association called me and said “wow that is such a great idea, such a needed action for such an important cause” and then she paused and said “but seriously are you crazy!” I got that a lot in the early days, “what are you doing are you crazy?” In fact some of my closest friends took me aside and said, “look you can't do this don't embarrass yourself by announcing it, and failing what are you thinking!” My wife Shawna thought I could make it. My wife Shawna knew I could make it. She didn't say you can't make it, but she did say “what were you thinking? Are you crazy? You should have asked my permission first!” Cecilia Marie's comments I would create a ripple in my community could not have been more correct. From the very first day I announced it people were calling thanking me, congratulating me and asking for help. That was my first indication how big this problem could be.

The reflections in the ripple appeared almost immediately that first day I showed up at 1 MacDonald Square in Elora to begin my journey. There were 50 or 60 people there. Something I had never expected or anticipated, yet there they were. They shared with me some personal and emotional stories. Some of them had struggled with their own mental health and their own thoughts of suicide. Others had dealt with family members who had struggled, who had attempted and one in particular who had lost several family members to suicide. The reflections in the ripple were beginning to appear and they were strong. I began my walk that day bolstered by the fact that there were so many people supporting me and so many people behind me. I can't tell you how many times on this walk I would draw on their memory or rely on the text messages and the phone calls that they sent to me. One of the things that I learned early in this walk, something that kind of shocked me, was how much I rely on you.

Have you ever stopped to think about how much we rely on other people? I would hazard a guess now in this time of Covid19 where we are isolated from one another, where we have to remain socially separated from one another, you're missing people. I am missing people, our friendships, our gatherings, our dinners. I miss your smile and I miss your laugh. I want to talk to you today about this walk and how it showed me I can overcome anything even when we are separated by huge distances. About five days into the walk I was coming through New Market. I was pleased to get out of New

Market. Nothing against the town of New Market or the people of New Market, but I hate New Market! I hate New Market because I was walking through New Market for a whole day straight up Hwy 9. If you've ever been on Hwy 9 in a vehicle, the traffic can be pretty heavy and pretty frightening with the amount of trucks and the speed. Now I want you to think about walking that on the side of the road and it is raining and it's windy and it's cold! There was absolutely nothing to like about it! It became a battle, mentally and physically, to get through that day. The phone rang just as I was thinking it's time to give up. When I answered my cell phone, it was an old friend of mine who just decided to call out of the blue and say how's it going out there buddy. He had been there the first day and he hadn't been able to come back like he said he would and walk a couple of days with me, because business got in the way and that's what happens. But Roger talked to me for about an hour, maybe an hour and a half. Just having the conversation with somebody else in my ear, I managed to get up the next hill and down the next one. I made it through the rain despite having my hat blown off several times and almost being knocked off my feet with the wind of trucks going past me. I made it because I actually forgot about what I was doing and got engaged in the conversation with my friend. That's the power of the connection. That's the power you have when you pick up the phone and you call a friend. You don't need to know what they're going through, they just need to know that you're there. They could talk about anything to take their mind off their troubles. So I ask you today, are you one of the reflections in the ripple? When was the last time you picked up the phone and called somebody that you hadn't spoken to in awhile?

Oddly enough it would be the day after that day when I found another reflection. Walking from New Market to Oxbridge was a 38 kilometer day and as I hit kilometre 25 I waned and I thought this is it, time to pack it in. I'll call Graham, he'll come pick me up and I will start tomorrow from here. My speed was slowing and I was dragging my backside up a hill when a car zinged past me on the opposite side of the road but going in the same direction as me. It stopped at the top of the hill. I looked up and I saw a man get out. Now it wasn't an unusual situation because it was garbage day and everybody had their bins lying by the end of their laneways. This was out in the country now and so they were rather long laneways and I figured, oh look there's a guy stops at his driveway, picks up his blue box and his green box and throws him in his trunk and drives them up. He walked past the blue boxes and he started down the hill. As he was putting his jacket on, I thought if I didn't know better I'd say that's my old friend Ross Mackay someone I hadn't seen in about four years. As he came down the hill and got closer, that big booming Scottish accent came out, "Aye laddie do you know the inspiration you've been to me?" He came over to me and he said "Come on let's walk up the hill!" There I was in the middle of nowhere walking, wallowing in my own self pity, the throbbing of the knee, the aching of the feet, the cold and the rain again, and a friend came out. He didn't do much. he just walked with me up to the top of the hill because his wife Margaret, who suffers from dementia, was sitting in the car and she doesn't like it when she can't see him, so he just walked to the top of the hill. I waved and smiled at Margaret from across the street. I took a picture with Ross and he slapped my back and he said "Y

ou are inspiring so many people keep going son". Now he had no idea what I was thinking at that moment. He made a decision an hour ago to drive out to the country, to find his friend Neil who was walking but that moment, that 10 minutes of time to walk up that hill, was all I needed to bolster my spirits. Ross became a reflection in the ripple!

There were many reflections in the ripple on this walk and I could go on and on and on and I know some of you think you already have! However, I want to share with you two incredibly important reflections in that ripple for me. In what was a defining or deciding moment in my walk I was well past Sharbot Lake, up in that area of the trans Canada trail where they allow ATV's on the trail and ATV's beat the heck out of trail. This part of the trail, being in the old train route, cut through two swamps one on either side the barrier between the two had been beat down. In all the rain the swamps had come together across the

trail. I don't know about you, but for me the thought of walking through swampy water in the middle of September is not a pleasant thought. The bacteria that is in the swamp water is incredible. Now I had prepared for this because days earlier I had to go around another washout and that took me on a 4-kilometer detour. Four-kilometre detours are nothing in a vehicle but tends to hurt your feet and knees when you're walking. I did not want to have to take another detour that day, so I brought sandals. There I was taking my shoes and socks off and putting the sandals on so I could walk through this. The sandals were because you never know what's in the bottom and walking barefoot is dangerous, sandals would be dangerous enough. I was preparing to put my sandals on when I heard a vehicle coming down, not an ATV, but a pickup truck. It was hunting season and they were temporarily allowed out on this trail. I paused, this truck was coming at a good speed and it was creating a wake of water. That was my first indication at how deep this would be, probably just a little bit above my knees. The truck was not slowing so I got off the side of the trail and up onto a rock. Then the truck slowed as it came toward me, and it washed water from its wake towards the stone. I had to grab the tree branch and pull myself up as the water washed over the stone and then receded. I jumped back down onto the rock. The window rolled down and a gentleman looked at me, he was about my age, "Where you going?" I said "Ottawa". He says "You gotta go through that? That's the way to Ottawa isn't it?" "Yep", "You're gonna get wet" and then he laughed and drove away. I paused for a minute and thought he's not a reflection in the ripple! I continue to pack my boots in the backpack with my socks and put my sandals on when a second truck came. This truck came slow, real slow, but I still jumped back up on the rock! The window rolled down a young 20 something man was there with a big bushy Grizzly Adams type beard and a smile on his face, "what you doing Bud?" I told him I'm walking to Ottawa. He says, "You're walking to Ottawa, why you walking Ottawa?" I explained to him what I was doing. He turned to his friend and said "We can't let him walk through that, it's freezing cold and the bacteria alone will kill him". They looked at me and said "Well if you want Bud, up you get" and I got into the back of their truck. I sat there next to the three dead partridges that they had hunted that morning! Jay and Wyatt backed me all the way through that huge puddle which was about a half a kilometer it turned out in the end. They let me use their tailgate to put my shoes and socks back on. I thank them for their kindness and then I turned to start down the trail when Jay said "What are you eating for dinner?" I said "my son is out there and he'll have dinner prepared" and that's when Wyatt reached in and grabbed a partridge and said "here take, this you can have fresh meat for dinner!" Now I think I might have looked the part with my reflective vest, my hunting knife and my bear spray, but I'm not a hunter. So I had to confess to these boys, "Guys I would love to have that partridge and that is a kindness I am humbled by, but I wouldn't know the first thing about plucking it and gutting it. I could probably figure out how to cook it but I'm not a hunter." They said, "Well we can show you in a minute or two how to do that". I said, "Thank you gentlemen but I have two hours maybe three more of walking and by the time I'm done that will be rotten me so thank you and thank you so much for the ride." Wyatt and Jay became reflections in the ripple.

There were many reflections in the ripple that I was thinking about when I walked up that Hill on September 27<sup>th</sup>. Some of the reflections in the ripple were there with me, they had been there at the start of this walk in Elora and they were there to finish the walk with me in Ottawa. Their presence drew emotion out of me that I wasn't expecting. There were, however, three people I was drinking about as I walked up that Hill. There was a young man who reached out in his darkest hour On Facebook Messenger at 6:00 o'clock in the morning, grasping at straws. Through the grace of God, Graham and I were able to talk him not out of suicide but to talk him down a little bit to the point where I could find another family member on Messenger and get him help. It was a terrifying moment for both of us because neither of us knew how to make a 911 international call and if we could, I didn't even know where he lived, where to send him. He was a distant relative. I knew approximately the village he might have lived in but I didn't know where it was. I managed to get his father on Messenger and we got him

the help he needed. He is with us today and he is one of my reflections in the ripple. I was thinking about a young woman who had made a decision to change her life and to get out of an abusive relationship that nobody should be in. How she was running out of steam, how she was about to give up when she bumped into me on the trans Canada trail. We found her help and she walked with me and I walked her to a road where professionals picked her up and gave her the help she needed. I'm happy to say she's safe and sound. She was on my mind that day, but most of all, as I looked up at that Hill, I was thinking about Cody Shepard, a young man from this community that had his life before him. A young man who was a great athlete, well liked loved and respected in his community, and yet he fought silently demons he could not overcome. Cody died by suicide on October 20th, 2017 he was foremost on my mind as I got there. I finished on Parliament Hill 795,184 steps 531 kilometers, but this journey is not done! The next step we must take together as a community. The next step has to include you. I ask you, all of you, to think about somebody that you know that you haven't heard of from awhile. Pick up the phone and call them. Be their tether to sanity. Ask them if they are OK. If you suspect they are not, encourage them to call here 24/7 to get help that's 1-844-437-3247. If they are in dire straits call 911. If you are struggling with depression, loneliness, pick up the phone and call somebody. Reach out to somebody, those are the next steps we have to take as a community if we're going to heal.

I took the first 795,184 steps and I ask you today, take the next one with me. Thank you.