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Walker puts heart, sole into hospice

Craig Pearson, The Windsor Star

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Colin Skinner, who walked 6,000 miles on two continents 21 years ago -- once fainting from heat exhaustion and nearly freezing in the Rockies -- had such an enriching experience that he's doing it again.

The 43-year-old British molecular biologist strolled into Windsor Friday for the second time, roughly following the journey he took on his first odyssey to raise money and awareness for hospice care, with somewhat whiter hair but just as much exuberance.

"Seeing the help hospices give people really keeps me going," said Skinner, who carries a 40-pound backpack. "In Windsor I talked to one patient who said how wonderful the hospice is taking care of him. He said it was like a five-star hotel. There's always someone to take care of him."



Colin Skinner walks along Tecumseh Road East. He has walked 6,000 miles raising money for hospice care.

Dan Janisse, The Windsor Star

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Skinner, who has raised about \$20,000 for hospices, blogs about his journey for the National Hospice Foundation in the U.S. and speaks to media as he goes.

"The message I'm trying to spread is that hospices are there to help people with serious illnesses, but that hospices need help, too," Skinner said. "They need community support and volunteers."

Skinner first launched his global walk after seeing cancer patients suffering at the hospital where he worked in England. He revisited the idea when his mother died of pancreatic cancer in 2003.

He took eight months to complete his first journey. This time around, he's breaking up the trek to San Francisco in two four-month stints, now and again in 2010, for a practical reason: "I'm now married and my wife won't let me go for more than four months."

The first time he often spent nights in a tiny tent. He once ate lunch in a rural heated toilet since it was the only place with warmth, and once slept in bushes by the World Trade Center.

He started his second trip Aug. 21 in New York City and thus far has only spent four nights in his tent, thanks to welcoming hospice volunteers. The first trip cost him the \$4,000 he earned taking experimental drugs as a human guinea pig and this time around he and his wife are spending a good chunk of their savings.

"It's great to see the difference in hospices 21 years apart," said Skinner, who has also walked through Iceland and New Zealand. "When I came before to Windsor I went to office buildings. But now you have these amazing residential units. Hopefully that will continue. Hospices are about making the most out of life."

Skinner has written a book about his experience, *Beyond the Setting Sun*, which he sells to raise money for hospice care.

Cal Little, the director of resource development for the Hospice of Windsor and Essex County, said Skinner helps immeasurably by raising awareness about the needs of people facing life-threatening illnesses.

LONG DISTANCE

To follow Colin Skinner's blog visit www.nationalhospicefoundation.org/colin. To donate time or money to the Hospice of Windsor and Essex County, visit www.hospicewindsor.essex.com or call 519-974-7100.

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