

Life in ninety degrees.

I've walked 214 miles in my brick red hiking boots around Eden Prairie this summer. It's a lot of hours. A lot of hours to think.

Ninety degrees.

The family is biking up Valley View Road and the smallest child lags behind. They turn onto a side street. The boy is blond and is wearing a Batman costume. It's stretched tight, like last year's Halloween costume. He tosses his bike to the sidewalk and jumps off. The backside of Batman's costume is spread wide open, and he's golden tan. Hot. He walks close to the edge of the sidewalk and I see what he wants - the weeds. You know the weeds that grow so beautifully in Eden Prairie? The yellow clumps hanging into the streets. I love them. He picks the bunch up, roots and all. Dirt dangling from the bottom. And he gets back on his bike, that seven year old Batman, to get those flowers home, to his mom, I imagine.

Ninety degrees.

The man walking towards me is swaying from one side of the sidewalk to another. No shirt. Headphones. I wonder if he's drunk. To the right. To the left. Again. His gait is odd. Maybe it's the heat. Maybe it's the music. I wonder if I'll need to call 911. He gets closer. I look down, under the brim of my hat, so as to avoid eye contact, just in case. And then I see it fly towards me on the sidewalk. He's kicking a stone. The stone goes to the right. To the left. And again. And so does he. I almost kick it back when it gets near me, but I don't. It's ninety degrees. Anything can happen.

Ninety degrees.

I'm sitting in the dental chair, having my teeth cleaned. A bit of talk first. I mention taking control of your health, even when it's hard, even when the diagnosis is difficult, and the doctor is curt. The hygienist who I've never met begins to work and she's quiet. But not for long. My mouth is ajar. She scrapes my teeth and pokes deep in my gums. And tells me about her 18 year old daughter with a rare form of thyroid cancer. Of taking control of the situation, changing doctors, her treatment, her surgery, the challenges. I can not participate in this conversation yet. I listen. Finally, I can respond. I ask, I listen. I suggest her daughter come to the Eden Prairie Relay for Life. She's in Tennessee and won't be able to. The woman then asks, "So why are you involved in Relay? What's your connection?"

I hesitate. It's ninety degrees outside. Relay for Life is today, now. So why Relay? Why do we do this? It began when my father died of cancer. But that's not why I do it. I do it for you. For your kids. For your parents. For my kids. For my mom. For my neighbors. For the rest of Eden Prairie. For the rest of Minnesota. For the rest of the country. And beyond. I am not being silly. Start here. Think grand.

I told her that I do it because it's what you do. It's what you do to help others.

And it's ninety-one degrees now.