

Walking *the* Walk



photo: Lissa Millar

By Shannon Linden

Long before she could toddle, Emily Ferguson walked.

At just four months of age, she was a participant in the 1987 Kamloops Walk for Peace and she hasn't stopped stepping toward serenity since. She may have been pushed in a baby carriage back then, but this young woman's continued commitment is self-driven.

"I haven't missed a walk," she says, "But my involvement has grown over the years to include planning, promoting, co-ordinating and speaking at the event."

All grown up at 23, Ferguson boasts an impressively long list of non-profit community involvement, but being a member of the Walk for Peace, Environment, and Social Justice planning committee is particularly close to her heart.

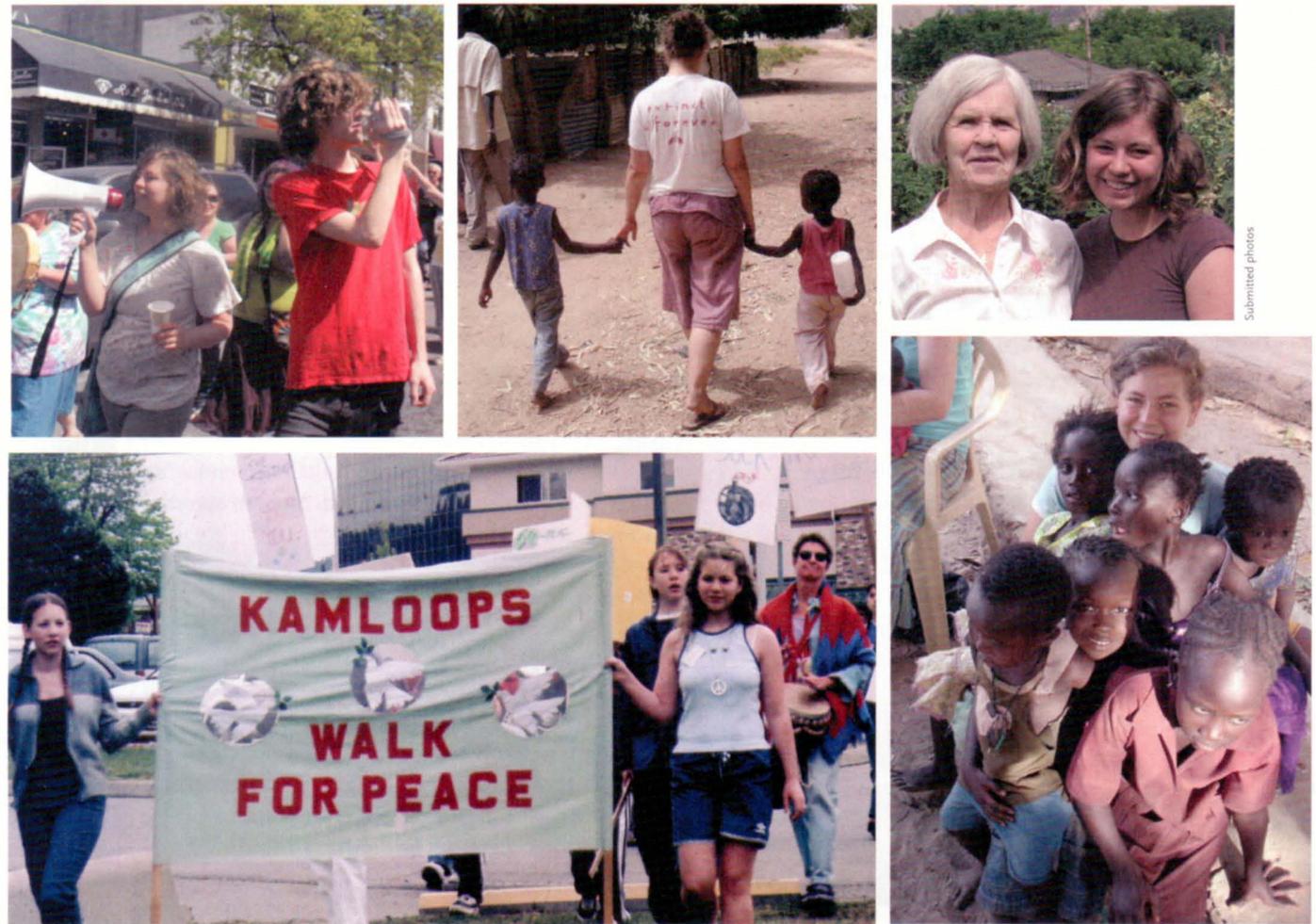
Her paternal grandparents, former CUPE leader, Bill Ferguson and Charmain (affectionately known as Chum) Ferguson, were founding members of the 1979 Kamloops Shuswap Peace Council. Chum wrote, published, and then distributed a newsletter

entitled Peace News. She also played a key role in the Kamloops chapter of Voice of Women, a national, nonpartisan organization in favour of disarmament through education and political lobbying.

Ferguson recently unearthed details surrounding her family's activist roots through her own research.

"I needed one more course to graduate from university," she explains. "Anne Gagnon, a history professor at Thompson Rivers University and a member of the peace walk committee, encouraged me to turn my family research project into a Service Learning Course for credit." With that course complete, Ferguson will graduate this spring with a bachelor of arts and a deeper appreciation of her family's history.

Something she learned? There is some discrepancy over the walk's start date. Google the Kamloops Walk for Peace and you'll find a website full of colourful characters carrying placards for peace, proclaiming the walk to be in its 35th year. But according to Ferguson, for the past few years, members of the committee have debated which year the walk actually began.



Submitted photos

Clockwise from top left: Emily Ferguson uses a bullhorn to lead chants on the 2009 Kamloops Walk for Peace, the Environment, and Social Justice, while her brother Will videotapes the event; Ferguson walks the walk with two children in Soma, a village in northern Gambia; Emily Ferguson and her grandmother, Charmian Ferguson, a longtime peace activist who was one of the founders of the Kamloops Walk for Peace, the Environment and Social Justice; A photo opportunity is a good excuse for children from Soma to pile onto Ferguson's lap. She spent time in the village in 2007 and returned in 2009; Peace walk photos appear at regular intervals in the Ferguson family albums. At 12, Emily moved to the forefront and helped to carry the banner.

Her pale blue eyes twinkling, she admits, “According to my research, the walk officially began in 1980. But the founding members and other community people have been unofficially walking for a lot longer.”

Propelled by her politically active family (maternal grandfather was North Kamloops mayor Don Ellsay) Ferguson was always keen to do the walk, but at 12 years of age, something clicked.

“I remember that time in my life, when it became more than ‘this is what I do.’ It became this is what I want to do.”

“That was a big year for me,” she laughs. She joined Amnesty International, became a vegetarian, and actually led a fight — of the non-violent kind.

A nostalgic smile sweeps across her face as she

recalls the campaign that changed her life — and preserved a downtown landmark.

Royal Inland Hospital’s numbers were up but the parking space was down. In a bid to buy more room, a development proposal was put forth calling for the demolition of the heritage trees gracing the hospital’s front lawn.

“It was literally a ‘pave paradise and put up a parking lot’ situation,” Ferguson explains. An elementary school student, she took up the cause to save the giant trees that lend such beauty and character — not to mention shade — to the hospital’s landscape.

“My family and I snuck down there in the middle of the night and put ‘save our trees’ signs on the trunks.” Media were baffled by the unknown identity of the perpetrators but Ferguson’s mom, Pamela