

Walk for Values : Sunday May 31st 2009

A walk for me, my family and my community

Love flowed like a river at the 7th Annual Walk for Values Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto May 31, 2009

Love flowed like a river from thousands of hearts in downtown Toronto on Sunday, May 31, 2009, during the **7th Annual Walk for Values**. Hearts transformed by love sent waves of positive vibrations through the chilly, windy air of Toronto, warming the sea of people gathered together at Yonge-Dundas Square to celebrate the majesty of the human spirit nurtured by universal human values.

The Walk attracted people of all ages, from all cultures, religions, and races who are committed to transforming themselves by practicing the ideals of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-Violence in their daily lives. One person at a time, one family at a time, one community at a time, one nation at a time – this is what creates the change that we are beginning to see around the world and which will bring about the Individual, Social, and Global renaissance of the human Spirit.

Nurtured by the educational philosophy of Sathya Sai School's Founder, **Sri Sathya Sai Baba**, the very young but wise hearts of the students were able to inspire so many diverse people to come and walk together and demonstrate the unifying power of Love. This river of love has been spreading wide and far and took place simultaneously on Sunday May 31st in five cities in Canada -**Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg**. In addition, **Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver**, along with numerous cities across the globe including **New York and Seattle in the USA**, carried the flow on different dates in June. The six major cities in Australia – **Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra**, the city of **Auckland** - New Zealand, the city of **Chandigarh** in India and also the country of **Malaysia**, hosted “Walk for Values” this year.

**“Toronto” – “the gathering place”, “the meeting place”
from the Huron language “toronton”**

Toronto was truly a gathering place of thousands of beautiful souls who came to walk with the **Sathya Sai School** students and commit themselves to becoming better people. Flowing into the river of love were dignitaries from the First Nations; from the federal, provincial and municipal government; from law enforcement groups; from businesses and corporations; from community groups; from the Sai International Organization; and inspired individuals who are making a difference in the community.

Welcoming the enthusiastic participants, **Dr. Revathi Chennabathni**, Principal of the Sathya Sai School, spoke with pride for the students and this unique walk, which has become an international event, and gave thanks to Sathya Sai Baba, the universal teacher and champion of human values who has been the inspiration behind the school (*there are now over 40 such schools in 26 countries*) and the Walk for Values.

Seasoned media announcers **Pooja Handa of CTV's CP24** and **Peter Kash of Z103.5FM** then took the reins in their hands as emcees and directed the opening ceremonies with great enthusiasm, beginning with the first guest, **Jennifer Sohan**, who sang the national anthem with depth of feeling and beauty.

“the ancestors from the East and West were dancing...”

Starting off the Walk with great power, the **Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre** did the introductory prayer dance, chanting and drumming a song from the 1970s when their people were struggling, while the values of **humility, truth, love, honesty, respect, wisdom, and bravery** captured the eye on feather-shaped banners. It was a strong invocation of beings of light from all worlds and times. As **Father Terry Gallagher, the honoured guest from Scarborough Missions**, so eloquently said afterwards, *“The ancestors from the East and the ancestors from the West were dancing because we are honouring the First Nations people to drum and chant to start the Walk.”*

“Love All, Serve All”

East and West met again as two honoured members of the International Sai Organization addressed the audience. **Dr. V.P. Singh, the Central Coordinator – Canada**, and Chairperson of the Sri Sathya Sai Education Trust of Canada, introduced **Dr. David Gries, Chairman Zone 1**. Dr. Gries is a computer science professor from the U.S. He has taught at Stanford, Cornell, Oxford, and Sathya Sai University and is passionate about teaching and service to the community. He spoke about changing the way we approach life, using the game of tennis to show us the transformational potential of Love:

In tennis the score at the beginning is “Love All”.

The referee says: “Serve” and the ball goes all over, back and forth.

The person who wins the point no longer has “Love”.

The one who lost still has “Love”.

But instead, the referee should say: “Love All, Serve All” and the players should play so each makes sure the other person can hit it back, and they work together.

Official Opening

As the **Cheer Girls** revved up all heartbeats with their rhythmic movements and songs, and **Dr. Pon Sivaji, Sathya Sai School Trustee**, gave tips for walking safely, the energy level began to rise as people looked on at the ribbon cutting ceremony, presided over by Dr. David Gries, Dr. V.P. Singh, Ms. Myriam Jozsa (Chairperson, Sathya Sai Organization of Canada), Father Terry Gallagher, and Andrea Chrisjohn (Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre), with Sathya Sai School students handing over scissors to each of them. The cutting marked the official opening to the Walk for Values 2009.

The river of Love flooded the streets of Toronto

Then it began! The **Sathya Sai School Float** led the way as the assembly of individuals, families, community partners, government officials, business people, local public schools, and the media flowed onto Yonge Street, carrying banners and placards with uplifting words, proudly waving Canadian flags, wearing the bright green T-shirts representing the **“Go Green”** theme for this year, chanting, singing, smiling and sending the message of commitment to inner change through the streets, into the air, and to the world.

Students from the Sathya Sai School **“Voices for Peace”** choir stood atop the Sathya Sai School Float, opening the hearts of onlookers as they sang “Walking in Harmony, spreading the name of Love”, drawing like a magnet behind them the several thousand participants – family members, friends, volunteers and trustees of the Sathya Sai School; students from schools across the GTA including **Cedarwood Public School, Markham Gateway, Middlefield Collegiate** and from the west end **St. Edmund, St. Aquinas and Lincoln Alexander schools**.

Leading the on-ground walkers were the dignitaries from the opening ceremonies, along with members of local, provincial and federal government, as well as **Keith L. Forde Deputy Police Chief, Toronto Police Service.**

Community partners and community groups walked amongst the river of people in support, including the **Arya Samaj of Toronto, the Brahma Kumaris, Brampton Rotary Club, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, Sant Nirankari Mission, Scarboro Missions, and Serving Charity.**

One group of people was singing the song “What A Wonderful World”. A participant said, “when that song was being sung, it captured the onlookers, you could see and feel the energy going out from the bodies of the singers – it was very positive and touched people going by.”

Interspersed within this great river of people were the floats for Truth, Peace, and Love, carrying Sathya Sai School students, alumni, teachers, volunteers, parents, and members of the Toronto and Scarborough Sai Centers as well as **Arlington Street Band** from the Toronto South Sai Centre – singing songs that opened the heart and transmitted the message of universal values to make this world a better place.

Despite the strong blasts of wind which seemed to almost push the throng through the streets, all participants kept smiling and cheering, showing great determination to keep positive in the face of the chilly weather. One mother said, “What I really liked about the Walk was that people were disciplined, walking calmly and in line.” Another comment from an alumni parent was:

“I feel like I went to Heaven and back.”

She was effusive about the Walk and gladly shared her thoughts: ***“I feel like I went to Heaven and back. It was so wonderful – I was really in bliss. The Walk made the world such a beautiful place – it made it Heaven on Earth. We don’t have the capacity to understand the power of God. This Earth gives us everything, why not respect her; why not give some of what we have back to our Mother. Wherever I go, I bow to the Sun and the Earth. This school and the values are so special. If I have to come back again to this Earth, I pray to be put in a family where the values are lived every day.”***

Capturing this historic Walk and sending it out to millions, live TV coverage was provided by **CTV’s CP24, ATN, Tamil TV** as well as **FlowFM’s** live radio coverage, while **ATN** and **Global TV**, studio recorded segments and broadcast them beforehand.

Passing through the downtown core and back to Yonge-Dundas Square, this river of Love purified the surrounding area, washing away dark clouds by the power of selflessness, kindness, compassion, and truth, and planting the seeds of social and environmental transformation and renewal.

Do not waste energy, food, time

Gathered back in the square, a multicultural program of speeches, entertainment and three restaurant booths provided sustenance to everyone. Lunch was available from Ancillia’s Restaurant, Chutney’s Fine Indian Cuisine and Ram’s Roti Shop – all of Toronto. Mr. Surinder Sharma, a former chairperson of the Walk for Values across Canada and an advocate for energy conservation, spoke on the Walk’s “Go Green” theme, telling us that the reduction of pollution begins by the reduction of our desires. Then he introduced Deputy Premier the **Honourable George Smitherman**, Minister of Energy & Infrastructure who in his 3rd year of supporting the Walk for Values, mentioned that the government is giving one thousand dollars to small businesses who are helping to reduce the carbon footprint in Ontario.

“We have more in common than we are different”

“Voices for Peace”, the Sathya Sai School choir, sang the song “Game of Love and Unity”, which was a perfect segue to the **Honourable Gerard Kennedy, the former Minister of Education in Ontario and now Member of the Canadian Parliament**, who spoke about “coming together on the things we can agree on, on the things that are important” and showing others what you believe in.

The lively presence of **Father Terry Gallagher from the Scarborough Missions** delighted and uplifted all, as he engaged fully with the spirit of the Walk and called for peace between nations and dialogue between the religions. He left the stage with the song *“All we are saying, is give peace a chance”* ringing in the air.

The message of one loving family was further strengthened by the very talented singer **Louise Kent**, from **“Me to We Music”**, who spreads the message of kindness and compassion to children through her wonderful songs, encouraging all to *“move from Me to We and spread some generosity”*.

In support of our worthy cause, **Deputy Chief of Police Keith L. Forde** highlighted the values of honesty, integrity, fairness, reliability, teamwork, and left the youth of today with the thought, **“Perseverance seldom fails”**.

“Respect for my fellow men”

Another great builder of community spirit, **MPP Honourable Bas Balkissoon** encouraged the young people *“to come and make our world better”*. He has always supported the Sathya Sai School and Walk for Values right from their inception.

Following the speeches, the program of music and dance presentations touched all. The **Middlefield High School choir** beautifully sang *“River of Freedom”*, encouraging everyone to join forces to make us free. The **Sathya Sai School alumni girls** sang *“Just Stand Up”*, demonstrating much talent and self-confidence. Again picking up the thread of East and West, eight students from **Viji Murali and the Bharatha Shethira School of Dance** beautifully performed *“East Fusion”*, with a captivating blend of eastern and western movements and sound.

Community Service Awards Presentation

The highlight of the program was the new **Community Service Awards Presentation** to members of the Toronto community who have demonstrated outstanding community service and spirit of self-sacrifice. Each of five students gave touching speeches honouring these individuals for putting each of the five Human Values into action. Then five plaques were presented by five dignitaries to these community members who serve as excellent role models.

The plaque for the value Love was awarded to **Mr. Abbas Jahangiri, President of El Mocambo and of Serving Charity**, which serves love to the poorest of the poor. Every night between 2:00 am and 7:00 am he gives food, tea, water and friendship to the poor on the streets of Toronto. The students from Sathya Sai School are learning much from his love in action and his example.

The Right Conduct plaque was awarded to **Louise Kent of “Me to We Music”** for using her music to help others learn to practice selfless service, and assisting those in need all around the world, including China, Kenya and India.

Ms. Andrea Chrisjohn of the **Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre**, received the plaque for the value Truth. She gives counseling and material assistance to First Nations people, holding the deep belief that all are deserving of the right to be respected. She gives of her time selflessly and upholds the truth of Oneness.

The plaque for Non-Violence was presented to **Dennis Keshinro** who spends all his time creating programs to help youth, such as mobile computer labs, soccer teams, and Saturday morning parent classes. He gives care and understanding, and encourages teamwork to build non-violent communities.

Father Terry Gallagher of **Scarboro Missions** received the Peace plaque for promoting peace among the various religions and building an interfaith network – a family of peace with an emphasis on social justice. He comes to the Sathya Sai School and sings songs of all the different religions so we can learn to live as one.

Inspired volunteers strive for perfection

A Vote of Thanks goes out to the long list of **volunteers from the Sathya Sai Baba Organization of Canada** who joined forces from across the Toronto area, who gave their support and dedicated work for the past six months and over the past seven years. Inspired by the universal teacher and role model, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the volunteers' dedication, devotion, discipline, and silent work behind the scenes shone through all the detailed, well-planned and well-executed tasks of the many Walk for Values committees and teams. The volunteers are too many to name, but their loving and selfless service enabled so many people to share in this very grand event. Special thanks to the **Sathya Sai School Parent Council** who hosted the Walk for Values 2009, and particularly to the **Co-Chairs Mr. Kesh Maharaj** and **Mr. Jeyarajah Ahamparam**. A thank you, too, to **Mr. Ramesh Maharaj, Chairman of the Walk for Values Steering Committee** and publisher of the **Values Today** magazine which was distributed at the Walk, and to **Umesh Solanki**, member of the **Walk for Values Steering Committee and Project Manager 2009**, a silent worker and the man behind the scenes.

We would like to acknowledge **Pacific Regeneration Technologies** who donated *2,000 red pine saplings which were available for free distribution to the Walk participants* to support the greening of our community. The company is a protector of the environment and supplies the government with saplings to replenish the parks and public areas. Thank you.

The contribution by the **Richmond Hill SDG** of 2,000 Canadian flags is greatly appreciated. The flags provided the lively red presence and Canadian identity to the whole parade.

We express a big thank you to **Bigman Transport** who donated the use of a large school bus, and to **Mr. Ratnarajah** who supplied additional buses.

The **Carnival** this year was arranged by teachers from the Sathya Sai School and manned by Sathya Sai School alumni students and **Sai youth volunteers**. Thank you for a fantastic job.

"I can see clearly now, the rain is gone..."

The night before the Walk, one woman said she was "praying all night to see a star, to show that the Sun would shine the next day. I kept waking up and looking for a star, but the sky was cloudy. Then finally, when I again woke up and looked at the sky, there was one bright star and I knew the Sun would shine for the Walk. Everything flowed very smoothly and Divinely."

By the blessings of God we did have sunshine today, in the midst of many rainy days, so that we could successfully complete the Walk for Values 2009. Just as the sunshine clears away the rain, so the human values rising from within the heart clear away all pain and negative feelings, bringing hope and joy:

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

*I think I can make it now, the pain is gone
All of the bad feelings have disappeared
Here is the rainbow I've been prayin' for
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

-- written by Johnny Nash, 1972

A special thank you goes to the students, staff, teachers, volunteers, friends, and trustees of the Sathya Sai School who together are practicing the human values and working to create a unique environment in which to nurture the future citizens and leaders of our society. One mother from the school said that when their family first applied for admission to the school, she had written the following for the reason she wanted her son to attend the school: "I want him to be a Son among sons, a Brother among brothers, and a Father to this world."

This is the nobility of spirit that blossoms when the universal human values are allowed to flow from the heart and manifest in the world through our actions.

***A SOCIETY without values will cease to be human.
The more human values are cherished,
The better will be the growth of society, the nation and the world.
We cannot rest content with an educational system
which is confined to academic achievement.
It has to promote simultaneously human virtues.
-- Sathya Sai Baba***

*Ms. Edith Recht, Admin. Asst.
Sathya Sai School of Canada
For and on behalf of
Walk for Values 2009*