

PAULA
FRANCIS
author



18 PAIR OF
SHOES



bio

Paula Francis grew up in a quintessential sixties' neighborhood during the bellbottom years but to her chagrin not early enough to be a Woodstock hippie. With a mother who struggled with depression and chased UFO's, her childhood years set the stage for spiritual seeking and the pursuit of a meaningful life.

She eventually settled in Vermont where she raised three daughters who are loved to the moon and back. Always looking to improve the lot of society, she worked in areas focused on building conditions that support individual and community well-being, including co-founding **Gross National Happiness USA**. That, in addition to Paula's life experiences, led to a walk around the country. Unsurprisingly, the 10,000-mile trek became a personal pilgrimage as much as an organizational project...a journey she says changed her down to her DNA.

You can now find Paula moving around the country on wheels of a tiny Happier Camper rather than on her calloused feet.



For a sampling of newspaper, radio, magazine, podcast, and television media coverage on the Happiness Walk, go to paulafrancis.com/media



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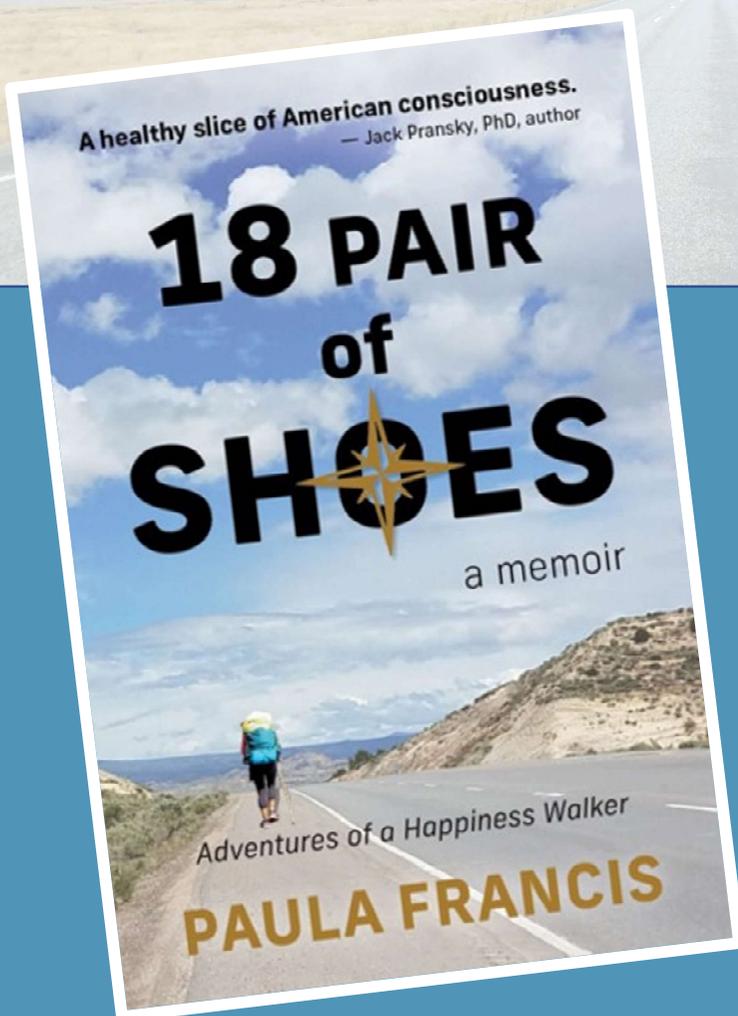
A powerful, epic, and mind-blowing book.

Readers' Favorite ★★★★★

18 Pair of Shoes

Adventures of a Happiness Walker

On a quest to find answers to what matters most in life, Paula Francis circumambulated the United States interviewing people she met along her 10,000-mile journey. Unavoidably, the Happiness Walk was as much a personal pilgrimage as a professional one. Walking through the loss of family members, her home, and her marriage, she was spurred to find meaning and happiness in new and surprising ways.



Paula Francis
Happiness Walker

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excerpt

People like the thought of me, the Happiness Walker traveling around the country on foot. With a glimpse at my costume, they see what they want to see. And since this undertaking is less about me and much more about them, I reveal little. They paint in details to their liking, and the Technicolor character they fashion projects much larger than the one inside me. My anonymity somehow invites their favor. Hearts are bared and secrets made visible. I, however, remain unexposed in their spotlight: a comfortable way of being. But the curtain is closing, and there's only one curtain call.

*Excerpt from 18 Pair of Shoes
Introduction by Paula Francis*

Q & A

(with sample answers)

Your book is titled *18 Pair of Shoes*. I imagine it is a statement about the number of sneakers you wore as you walked around the country. Is that correct?

That's right! Whenever people approached me, it was often the first question they asked. Somehow, it made my project comprehensible. For most people, it was hard to grasp that I walked 500/1,000/10,000 miles, or even from the next town over.

You write that your Happiness Walk was a project of Gross National Happiness USA (GNHUSA). Can you explain what GNHUSA is and how your project was conceived?

I co-founded GNHUSA with colleagues back in 2008 in response to a growing awareness that structures and policies that guide our national decisions and filter down to our daily lives, are flawed. It's easy to see what *isn't* working well (poverty, environmental degradation, inequalities, etc.). We are less conditioned to see what *is* working well: the positive trends, creative people, and available solutions. GNHUSA works to generate new indicators of progress beyond the ones most readily used - such as our GDP.

Why did you choose to walk?

To align new measures of success and progress with what we value, it was important to establish what those values are. So, I asked the question to whomever I met, "What matters most in life?" Had I flown, driven a car, or even roller-skated, the speed would not have allowed for the types of interactions that my slow, three-mile-per-hour pace afforded me in sneakers with a recorder in my pocket.

How did you decide your route? Where did you stay? And more to the point, where did you go to the bathroom?

I am a compulsive planner! Though I connected every step of the 10,000 miles, I walked it in sections, fitting it into my family's schedules, at first. As time went by, I walked more often than not with only 28 pounds of belongings on my back and no home address. I benefitted from the generosity of people who spontaneously offered meals and shelter. My tent was my backup. As far as the other question, well, you'll just have to read about it.

Did you walk alone? Were you ever afraid?

I walked most of the 10,000 miles alone, though people would join me from time to time. I loved the quiet space between the busy-ness of frequent interactions. Being outside all day (or all day and night) is something I miss a lot: being in nature, soaking up the sun (or rain, or snow or hail...). I rarely felt alone, and even less so afraid. People were kind, interested, and giving. People just want to be seen.

How did your life change by going on this walk?

Very little of my life is the same as when I started walking. Of course, aging plays into that and being sedentary during the writing process. But I also became divorced, sold my house and car, and got rid of most of my things. My kids are grown and living all over the country, my parents have passed. For a time, I was living totally untethered and it is a state of being that suits me.

What's your favorite story?

If I had to choose, I would say the intersection of my walk with Peace Pilgrim's adventures. But honestly, when you accept the person in front of you in the fullness of their humanity, they are the most interesting person in that moment.

Where is your favorite place?

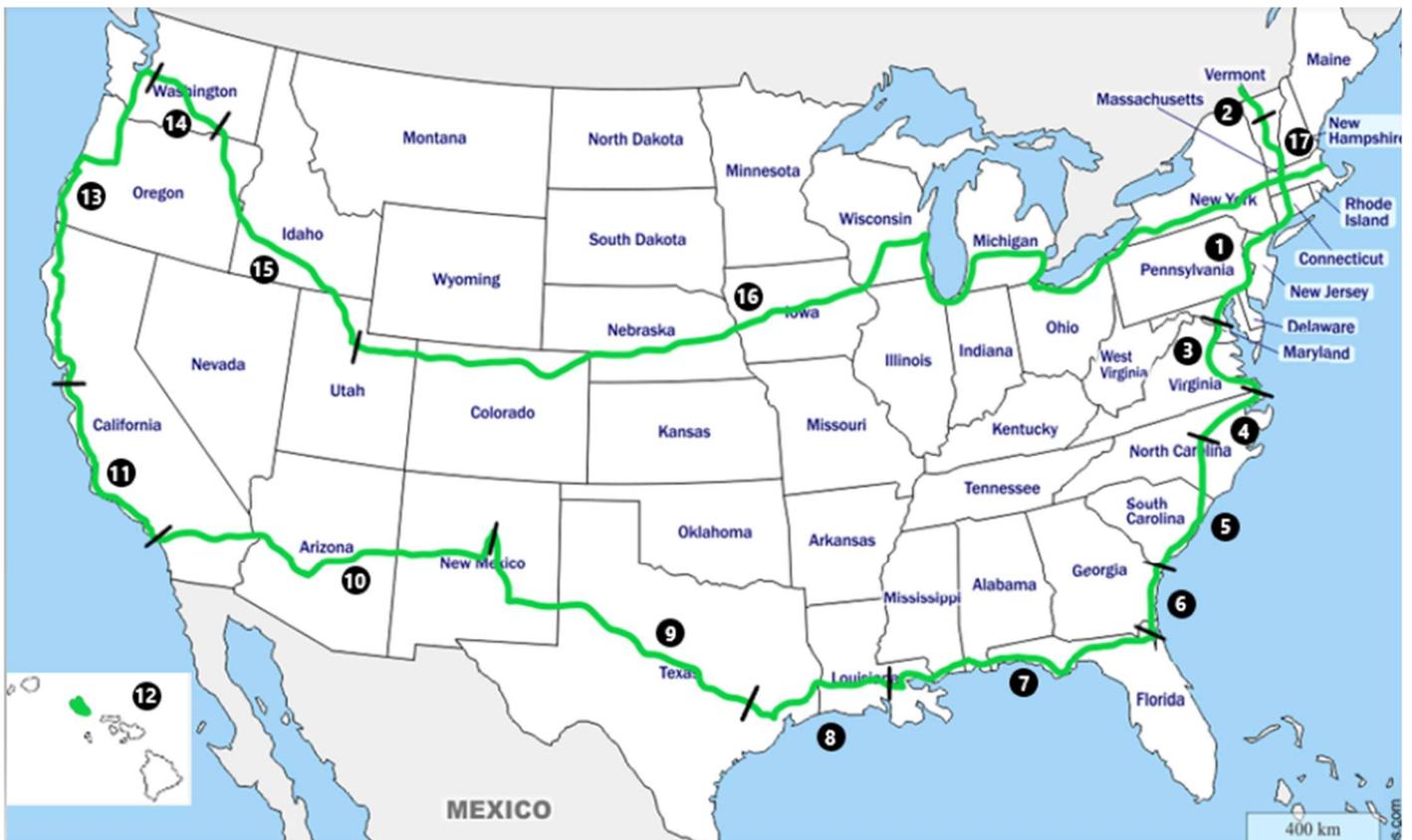
Over the course of my seven-year journey, I wondered if I would find that right-for-me place to put down new roots. That never happened. In fact, I considered myself an ocean-person when I began but I quickly became a fan of the desert and the mountains. I'm still open to finding "that" place, but until then, I default to anywhere on the ocean with a sandy beach.

Now that your walk is over, your research project is complete, and your book is written, what's next for you?

I'm putting all my learning into practice. And it is a practice as I falter way too often on my path to being my best self. I am slowly introducing things back into my life – but with discernment! I have purchased a quaint Happier Camper and car so I can begin exploring on wheels. I want to visit places and people along my route plus travel where I couldn't walk. And my daughters can expect me to show up in front of their homes!



At White Sands National Park in New Mexico on my maiden voyage with my Happier Camper, 2022.



what people say

I couldn't help being reminded of Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* or Steinbeck's *Travel with Charley*.

~ David Patrick Adams, *American Talking Circle*

A beautifully done memoir that will bring a liberating spiritual influence to whomever reads it, it cannot fail to do so! A gorgeous medicine for our times.

~ Sister Clare, *New England Peace Pagoda*

There are no words to express how much I enjoyed every single page. I laughed, I cried and reflected on all you wrote. I am so grateful you shared your story and wisdom with the world. I would like to buy ten more copies for my family and friends.

~ Kathleen Eaton Paterson, *Newfoundland*

18 Pair of Shoes is unforgettable. A refreshingly inspiring memoir told with compassion, candor, and humor.

~ Ginny Sassaman, *Author*

A book I'll go back to again and again. A touching and beautiful memoir of self-discovery with imagery that touches the soul.

~ Cynthia Crosson, *EdD
Social Worker, Author, and Pastor*