



Peace activist David Adams of New Haven, who runs barefoot, relaxes in his home Tuesday, November 15, 2015. Peter Hvizdak — New Haven Register



Randall Beach

Randall Beach: A man without shoes pursues peace and simple pleasure

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The first thing I noticed about David Adams was his feet.

He was standing in a large crowd of runners before a road race and among all those people wearing expensive, colorful running shoes, he was barefoot.

"Fundamentally, it feels good. It's a pleasure," he told me last Tuesday when we spoke at his third-floor apartment near Grand Avenue in New Haven.

Adams elaborated on that pleasurable feeling: "There's nothing like running on a beach in the (shallow) water or on a golf course."

"And I'm convinced you go faster," he continued. "A shoe adds weight."

But as a runner myself, all I can think when I see him lining up at a race is: ouch!

Doesn't he step on glass or nails or other sharp objects? "Rarely," he replied. "Only a couple of times a year. I carry a safety pin so I can dig out the glass."

Adams casually told me about the time he was warming up before a race in Bridgeport and stepped on "a big chunk of glass" in a field.

"I pulled it out with my teeth," he grinned, "and left a trail of blood on the whole course!"

But he said there is a practical physical benefit to this which he learned from an earlier barefoot running pioneer, Dr. Charley Robbins, who lived in the Middletown area.

"My knees were cramping after races," Adams recalled. "Charley told me: 'You'll cure your knee problems if you run barefoot. Your leg is more stable that way.'"

Adams sees another advantage to it: "I find you run softer. There's no pounding."

Adams, who is 76, finished first in his age group last Sunday at the Christopher Martins 5-kilometer (3.1-mile) Christmas Run for Children. He ran it in 29 minutes, 32 seconds, finishing in the middle of the pack but beating about 1,000 other runners. (He noted there were two other barefoot runners in that race.)

His barefootin' has put him in some unusual situations with the law. "When I was living in Moscow, I was determined to run on every street. One day I ran 10 miles along the subway, figuring I could ride the subway back. But then a police officer said to me: 'Young man, where do you think you're going? You're not getting on the subway like that!' I had to get home in a taxi."

"And one time in Paris, I was arrested," he added. "It was a female cop. I guess she was offended that I was running barefoot. When the other police officers came in a paddy wagon, they were laughing. They decided to just call my wife and have her come get me. She told them: 'I don't know this guy!'"

Adams' worldwide travels are related to his international work for peace. I knew this would be more than a column about a barefoot runner when I saw the website on his business card: <http://www.culture-of-peace.info>. I noticed his mailbox has next to his name: "Culture of Peace Corporation."

His apartment is decorated not just with many running trophies but also art related to his peace work. A poster in his kitchen proclaims "Peace is in our hands." It's a souvenir from the international year for the culture of peace (2000) organized by the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#), or UNESCO. It calls on people to "join the global movement for a culture of peace and non-violence by signing the manifesto 2000."

When I told him I wasn't familiar with that, he told me 75 million people had signed the manifesto. But it didn't get much support or publicity in the U.S. This clearly still frustrates him, as he helped develop this initiative at UNESCO, for which he did work from 1993-2001.

When we settled down to talk, with "The Nutcracker Suite" playing in the background, he told me he gets around by bicycling and walking. Yes, sometimes he walks around downtown barefoot. "I was out walking barefoot yesterday."

He seemed surprised and offended when I asked if he owns a car. "No! No car! And no television. Because television is propaganda."

Adams, who is divorced, likes living in New Haven because you can get around without a car. He said that's a big reason why he moved back here. He first came to town in 1962 when he had a National Science Foundation Fellowship at Yale, then he stayed to get his doctorate in psychology. His dissertation studied cat brains and aggression.

Adams got involved with the peace movement in New Haven at the height of the Vietnam War protests. He was an editor at "Modern Times," a tabloid-style newspaper and was one of the many activists to be wiretapped by New Haven police.

"Those were pretty heady times," he said with a smile.

Having avoided the draft through student deferment ("which was fortunate, since I wouldn't have gone"), Adams taught psychology at Wesleyan University from 1970-1992.

In 1986, he helped organize a worldwide meeting of scientists, which resulted in "The Seville Statement on Violence," adopted by UNESCO in 1989. This was a scientific statement that said peace is possible because war is not a biological necessity. The finding was based in part on anthropologist Margaret Mead's research among the peoples of the South Sea.

When I asked Adams how he can be so committed and remain optimistic in a time of escalating conflict and terrorism, he answered, "I've prepared for it. I've been studying this for years. Nothing surprises me."

"I'm optimistic Mondays and Tuesdays, pessimistic Wednesdays and Thursdays. Then we'll see what happens for the weekend. Today is Tuesday, so I'm optimistic!"

In his latest book, "Embrace the Fire: Plant the Seeds for a Culture of Peace," Adams wrote: "The culture of peace has gained so much ground at the

level of individual consciousness that the average citizen is now opposed to war and the culture of war."

Adams' approach to peace is done on the local level as well as internationally. He has long been involved with the [City of New Haven Peace Commission](#), which was established in 1988. Soon afterward the commission got a referendum on the ballot to cut the military budget and direct the savings to the nation's cities (it won a favorable vote of 83 percent).

Adams, who is one of the commissioners, said, "My idea is a global network of peace cities. For 5,000 years nation-states have been the culture of war. In almost every state, the biggest budget item is the military. We need to have a world without a state. That's why I work with cities: they don't have a culture of war. We don't have an army or borders to guard."

Adams noted cities are intended to "protect human rights and the needs of all the people in each city. And that's what peace is all about."

He conceded, "There will always be individual violence. But people don't naturally kill. They have to be trained to think the other person is an object. War is people following orders."

Adams also admitted there have been many obstacles encountered in the effort to establish a global network of peace cities. "So far it's not working. It's hard work."

But he also understands the need for time out and play. The day after we spoke, Adams left to enjoy some time in France with his girlfriend, who lives there. You can bet he will find plenty of places and surfaces on which to run, perhaps including the beach.

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