Walking to Mackinac
This book is for our children—
Andy, Julie, and Stephen—
and for Mary Strong.
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To all the teachers and writers and friends who have opened my mind and eyes and heart to our world, I am deeply grateful. In my appreciation of what we saw on the walk and in writing this book, I called upon all of their lessons.

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Tom Butts, then with the University of Michigan, made the initial contact with the University of Michigan Press. I thank him for his faith in me. The former director of the press, Colin Day, took a chance on this book—I hope he is not disappointed. In addition, he offered constructive criticism and thoughtful suggestions in delightful letters. The lengthy, thorough comments from the readers at the press were also extremely helpful.

From the outset my mother-in-law, Mary Strong, was an integral part of our walk. She followed the details of each stage with great interest and enthusiasm. During the intermittent months of writing, she offered unwavering support and invaluable advice. I appreciate the guidance and counsel she gave me during many conversations we had about the manuscript.

Without my wife there would have been no book. I wrote and rewrote each chapter on yellow legal pads. Judy prepared the manuscript. Her insights, criticisms, and editing skills pushed the book to completion.

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material in this book and to obtain permission for its use.
I always look forward to what follows after he says, “I’ve got this great idea. . . .” As is the way with couples, my husband and I have established rituals to accommodate certain of our behaviors. They are neither original nor clever. Actually, they are simple and transparent. What is really important about them is that they work.

So, when David comes to me with another good idea, I try to be upbeat and positive in response. This is not my nature. Unfortunately, I am a pessimist. One friend said accurately of me, “Judy, you always see the hole in the doughnut.” Truth be told, there is a hole in a doughnut. But, of course, there is also all that yummy dough. This is also true of David’s ideas. A few are hollow; most are fabulous.

It is part of our ritual that I agree with any harebrained scheme that David proposes for the two of us. At least at first I agree. Occasionally they evaporate, others collapse, some mutate. Now and then I say flatly, “No!” But mainly we humor each other. As details emerge, I point out some problem I foresee. He rebuts. I reconsider. He presses forward. I equivocate. This is fun. Thrust and parry. The question slowly becomes: Where is the weight of the idea moving? Is it slipping into oblivion or heading toward reality? Is it just talk? Or have we each heard the same distant call to action?

We both share an intense interest in journeys. As a child, I daydreamed of being a pioneer. I was fascinated by Admiral Perry’s North Pole expedition and Sir Edmund Hillary’s conquest of Everest. David, in turn, enjoys reading about unusual challenges—hiking the length of the Appalachian Trail, biking across the United States, walking anywhere off the beaten track. He introduced me to two captivating books by Peter Jenkins, *A Walk Across America* and *The Walk West*.

For as long as I have known David, he has planned trips. He loves maps and is forever calculating the distance from here to there. This mileage is never to be covered conventionally. No, we
are to walk, bike, or even boat. Over the years we narrowed the possibilities.

We decided our trip would be in Michigan. We would not walk the entire shoreline of the state or go the full diagonal from Lake Erie on the Ohio border to Ironwood at the westernmost tip of the Upper Peninsula. We would not do the more commonly hiked area of the Leelanau or the North Country Trail and would not follow any of the established cross-state routes. We would walk out of our front door in Mount Clemens and go north to Mackinaw City, creating our own way.

As the concept crystallized, so also did the circumstances. At the end of 1996 I would retire, so suddenly I would have lots of spare hours. Years are in shorter supply. Now in our early fifties, we were running out of time to undertake a great physical challenge. The congressional recess in August provided the opportunity, and with great excitement we began to plan. After discarding numerous wild logistical scenarios, we settled on the heretofore unthinkable, carrying all our gear on our backs and camping. But we innocently resolved to limit ourselves to ten pounds each and fifteen miles a day.

In February 1997 we visited David’s father in Pompano Beach, Florida. David, his sister Nancy, and I walked seven miles along the ocean beach road. In March David purchased a Michigan Atlas and Gazetteer. Every night when he got home, no matter how late or how tired, he plotted our trip. It was astonishing to watch him. No general in history has more meticulously charted the course of his advance. In the end it was perfect. Not only did he find a suitable destination for each night and create an interesting walk combining trails, rails-to-trails, and back roads, but it was so firmly fixed in his head that during the three weeks of our 335-mile walk we made only one wrong turn.

The illusion of manageable fifteen-mile days gave way to the practical reality of finding shelter for the evening. Our days had to be stretched far beyond our original expectations, but in our exhilaration we were unfazed by mere numbers. In April we traced by car the first five days of the trip, making sure our chosen way would not unexpectedly dead-end and that campgrounds and motels were still in operation.

While David was engrossed in the big picture, I was sweating the small stuff. What will we wear? What will we carry? How will
we even learn about any of this? I wanted a how-to manual that I could read from cover to cover and follow explicitly. I wanted my preparations to be as thorough as David’s. After some searching, I found my bible, *Backpacking in the ’90s* by Victoria Logue. It became something of a joke between us. During many a discussion David would finally ask in mock exasperation, “And what does *Backpacking in the ’90s* have to say about this?”

Starting to share our idea with friends and family, we were met with responses ranging widely from enthusiastic support to disin- terest to critical incredulity. We vowed to proceed with our grand notion, undaunted by doubters.

In May we made a substantial commitment by plunking down six hundred dollars at the REI sporting goods store. Here we took our second great leap of faith. The experienced salesperson disabused us of our ten pounds per person goal. In fact, he said we would be lucky to keep it to fifteen pounds. Counting on the expert design of the gear to absorb the weight difference effortlessly, we went ahead and purchased our backpacks, boots, and professional socks. On a sunny May 30 we made a trial run carrying twelve pounds on our backs. We hiked seven miles. Days later we were back at REI for tent, sleeping bags, air mattresses, and rain suits. I assembled the necessary minutia. Fortuitous business travel in June and July provided additional opportunities to hike longer distances in wilderness areas.

Ultimately, of course, the walk was to be undertaken by two people. Why we were doing this and whether we would succeed depended upon us, not our gear. Our roles from start to finish would be predictable and complementary. David is a natural leader—a quarterback, shortstop, and play-making guard, not to mention second-ranking Democrat in the U.S. House of Representatives; he is competitive to his core. If there is no challenge, he creates one. At the same time he is deeply contemplative—once a sem- inarian; widely read in fiction, history, the out-of-doors, and poetry; often lost in his own thoughts; he seeks texture and meaning in the process as well as the goal. I am a very good follower.

We were ready, determined, and eager to meet the challenge: to convene with nature; to inhale the beauty of Michigan; to learn our history; to test our flexibility, resourcefulness, and stamina; to expand our vision; to see our world differently; to walk every single step of the way—one million steps to Mackinaw City.