

Paddling with Purpose

A charitable cause that fuelled one of the most unique coast-to-coast journeys in the world

by **Glenn Green and Carol VandenEngel**, Kingston, Ont.

We completed a five-day hike early in 2017. It was a trek in the southwestern United States through the Mojave Desert, in California. The arid conditions meant that water for us to consume and cook with had to be carried and sustained for two and a half days until we reached an oasis spring where we could refill our depleted containers. It was hot and harsh, and our tent blew down during a sandstorm. While experiencing Death Valley, California, we realized it would be far easier to paddle on water rather than hike across barren deserts while worrying about when, or if, we would find our next water source. This thought planted a seed and, shortly thereafter, we developed a dream.

With its abundance of rivers, lakes and oceans, Canada—from

the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean—would be our next challenge. With retirement just around the corner for us both, we put the wheels in motion and decided to make this our retirement cruise and paddle across Canada in a canoe. It was Canada's 150th anniversary of Confederation, and it seemed fitting to start and finish at the Nation's Capital, Ottawa.

We also decided that others should benefit from our journey across Canada, so, with that said, we aligned ourselves with an organization that shares similar core values. If you eat well, you feel well and if you feel well, you do well. Every Canadian should have access to healthy, fresh and affordable food. Loving Spoonful possesses the vision to create a healthy, sustainable and food-secure community for Kingston,

Ont. We felt that partnering with them aligned perfectly with our own vision, and so, we decided to paddle and raise awareness for this non-profit group, located in our hometown.

We set about planning. The preparation to canoe across Canada was an adventure in itself. We upgraded our canoe to a more extended, lighter model and outfitted it with a spraydeck to repel large waves. We replaced our tent with one we were confident would withstand the elements. We acquired a global positioning system (GPS) and spent hours downloading a route that would take us from coast to coast. We also spent significant time dehydrating and vacuum-sealing

Glenn and Carol travelled across the Rocky Mountains to reach the waters of the Oldman River in Alberta.



vegetables, fruits and various types of beans—the foundation of our meals. We approached a local software company that donated a website to our cause, and we acquired business cards. CBC's radio morning news and local radio and television stations interviewed us to promote the fundraising goal. As we travelled across Canada, we uploaded photos, stories and items of interest to the website. We handed out business cards and never turned down an opportunity to talk about food security.

A Lot of Paddling!

The 8,515-kilometre journey took us three years of paddling weather to complete. We decided to start in Ottawa and head east to Sydney, N.S. We completed that portion the first year, returned home, then travelled to Vancouver to initiate the two-year voyage back to the nation's capital to finish.

That's three years filled with wonderful memories we will never forget! While portaging and paddling the country, we followed portions of the Great Trail of Canada. We travelled along converted railway lines

Clockwise from right: Under the shelter of their tent fly, coffee is savoured on a frosty morning on Cape Breton Island, N.S.; Glenn and Carol traversing through Sydney, N.S., Lake of the Woods, Lake Winnipeg, Kootney Lake and other beautiful Canadian landscapes.

transformed into leisure trails and walked along roadways. We paddled historic water routes used by early explorers and Aboriginal Peoples as evidenced by red ochre-designed petroglyphs seen along the way. We pulled our canoe 400 kilometers over the Continental Divide, where the rivers get steered towards the Arctic, Atlantic or Pacific. We struggled against tidal currents and portaged around waterfalls and hydroelectric dams. We even navigated large shipping lanes!

We followed the current along the valley of the South Saskatchewan River, a spectacular gorge that few Canadians know exists, as it carves its way through the Prairies. We meandered through ecosystems rich with native plant species and home to an abundance of birds and wildlife. We battled wind and waves, at times fierce enough to keep us off the



water for several days at a time. We even capsized, remaining isolated in the remoteness of Lake Winnipeg. Sometimes, we paddled during the darkness of night and took advantage of the still calmness of the water, void of wind and waves. Our reward was the Perseids meteor shower that filled the sky around us. At times we had our disagreements, but

we worked as a team, knowing we must swim as partners or sink as individuals. We witnessed the calm beauty of tranquil sunsets and also experienced the fury of Mother Nature. We paddled through fog so thick, we did not know where the shore was. We stroked through smoke from burning forest fires drifting in from neighbouring provinces,

smoke so dense it obscured the sun.

When we finished and reached our starting point in the Nation's Capital of Ottawa, we still had to journey home, and paddled the Rideau Canal south to Kingston. Remarkable fellow Canadians engaged us all along the way, reaching out and expressing encouragement and best

wishes. Donations amounted to tens of thousands of dollars to help Loving Spoonful. We felt gratified by the accomplishment, both the journey and the assistance provided to Loving Spoonful.

Canada's vast landscape is spectacular and diverse. Seeing it at a slow, leisurely pace allows you to absorb the sights. The canoe feels like an extension of ourselves and enables us to explore and be up close and personal with nature. We regard ourselves as privileged to be healthy and robust enough to have enjoyed our three years of paddling.

This journey, now completed, leaves us to ponder: what shall we do next, post-pandemic? Perhaps head to places not visited this time around... Newfoundland and Labrador comes to mind, mode of transportation to be determined! ■

Carol and Glenn are authors of Canoe for Change: A Journey Across Canada, set to release on June 30, 2021. For more info, visit www.CanoeforChange.ca and www.LovingSpoonful.org. Many thanks to Laurie K. Simon of Mindemoya, Ont., who suggested this story idea on our Facebook page!

