

F.I.R.E.

Firewalking Institute of Research and Education


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29-Year Anniversary of the Global Firewalking Movement

History of Firewalking -- 1977 to 2006

By Tolly Burkan, founding father of the global firewalking movement

WHAT HAPPENED IN 1977?

The year 2006 marks 29 years since I began teaching firewalking. Up until 1977, firewalking was very esoteric.

In 1977, however, a radical shift happened in firewalking's evolution. In that year, *Scientific American* printed an article that essentially offered the reading public a "how to" guide for firewalking. No one knows the number of readers that decided to actually try the "experiment" at home, but there were no unusual media accounts of large numbers of people attempting this after the article was published.

However, it was also in 1977 that I myself first firewalked. I was taught by a friend, and was so transformed by the experience, I immediately wanted to share it with as many as possible. I wondered why no one was teaching firewalking to the general public, and felt it was a valuable service needing to be offered. Indeed, time has proven that I was correct; it was a valuable service needing to be offered. However, for almost seven years, I was the only person on the planet teaching firewalking classes.

I should also mention that I made many mistakes in those early years, and several dozen people were badly burned.

I used to make the coal beds six to eight inches deep. I soon learned that it was not the amount of coals, or the length of the firewalk, that created the resulting exuberance and exhilaration people experienced; but rather, it was simply the act of taking one step: one step into an INFERNO! Once I realized I could create the same results using safer firepits (less deep and much shorter in length) my injury rate dropped to almost zero.

In 1978, I began seriously researching firewalking, and discovered that there really was no definitive theory about the phenomenon. Every published theory contradicted some other published theory. No one could agree on why firewalkers were not harmed by the glowing, red-hot embers.

I also noticed that there were no accounts of other people, besides me, ever offering classes in firewalking. It then seemed to me that the best way to research firewalking was to persuade as many people as possible to do it, so as to accumulate a large group that could be observed and studied. Therefore, I took it upon myself to create such a group. It became my personal mission. No one before me had ever embarked on a crusade to convince as many people as possible to step into firepits containing red-hot coals exceeding 1200 degrees Fahrenheit.

FIRST PUBLIC CLASS IN 1979

Because I had already been teaching human-potential seminars since 1973, and had written a best-selling book on self-awareness in 1974, I conceived the notion of employing firewalking as an exercise in personal growth. So, after initially teaching it only to my friends, in 1979, I added it to some of my public seminars as a process for expanding awareness, overcoming fear, and removing limiting beliefs about oneself. When I invented this concept, it was a new, risky, and unique idea; but again, time has proven that firewalking is indeed a powerful technique that can accelerate a radical transformation in consciousness. People constantly say that it changes their lives forever.

However, between 1977 and 1982, I still only taught firewalking on a limited scale. Then, in 1982, my wife encouraged me to be more aggressive in advertising my firewalking classes. So, in that year, I began printing massive amounts of brochures and started to extensively advertise classes in firewalking. The response was immediate and overwhelming. The result was more and more people walking on fire.

Finally, in 1983, I contacted the media and described my ultimate objective of creating a global movement in firewalking. I needed a word to describe my vision. I dismissed "fad" and "trend" whenever the media tried to trivialize what I was doing. Even then, I knew this would become a "global firewalking movement." I knew that unlike passing fads and trends, firewalking would



continue to pyramid year after year. By creating that name, the reality of it also became self-fulfilling.

ANTHONY ROBBINS

Although I taught my wife Peg to firewalk in 1982, she herself did not begin teaching firewalking until 1984. However, in 1983, I taught Tony Robbins how to firewalk. Not only did he immediately decide that he himself also wanted to teach firewalking classes, he proved to be a master at generating additional publicity. By early 1984, Tony's firewalking classes were drawing hundreds of people. He also targeted the celebrity market, and suddenly, many notables from Hollywood were walking on fire. This, of course, fueled even more media attention.

By the end of 1984, in addition to the three-hour firewalking classes I was offering in Europe and America, I had conceived and presented two seminars designed to train others to lead firewalking classes using my format of creating the firewalk as a metaphor for any challenge that stimulates fear. Thus, in learning to firewalk, people were also learning how to overcome limiting beliefs about themselves and how to overcome fear in all areas of their lives.

Between 1982 and 1984, my wife was putting her attention on her own projects. Then, in 1984, she became pregnant with our daughter Amber. As she began preparing for Amber's birth, Peg pondered the future of firewalking. She suggested that after Amber was born, we begin teaching firewalking instructor classes together.

Up until that time, prospective instructors learned to teach the firewalking seminar simply by modeling my presentation over the course of several weeks, wherein I presented the class in various West Coast cities night after night. The first two instructor trainings I did involved a caravan of vehicles driving from the western border of Canada to the western border of Mexico. The caravan was comprised of a rented motorhome and rented station wagons. Every night involved another city and another hotel. It was exhausting!

So in 1985, my wife and I became a team; training firewalking instructors using a new format. No longer would I take future instructors on long road trips, touring city after city. The new structure simplified the training process by keeping it in one place, and doing firewalks every single day, sometimes twice a day, for one week. It was a plan that made the overall process less expensive, and more accessible, to larger numbers of people who felt drawn to teaching firewalk classes themselves.

COLLEGIATE AND CORPORATE FIREWALKING

During this same time, I was conducting firewalking classes on college campuses across America. Tony Robbins had also started doing firewalks for U.S. corporations. However, as companies learned that Tony was using the "Fear into Power" format developed by me, many sought me out directly; and soon I was so busy that my life was a blur. This ultimately hastened my total physical collapse. For years, I had been trying to live my life fully despite severe pain that had been plaguing me since 1975. That was the year a car had run a red light, struck me, and sent me flying, while I was simply walking across a street in a cross-walk.

Twelve years later, however, in 1987, without any warning at all, the left side of my body, including my face, suddenly became paralyzed. I had difficulty breathing and was rushed by ambulance to a hospital for emergency neck surgery. This turned out to be only the first of several major reconstructive surgeries on my neck, which prevented me from teaching for quite a number of years.

During this time, Peg continued to train instructors and teach firewalking classes for the public. Her efforts in those years that I was inactive kept the firewalking movement alive and generated many more instructors who began taking the firewalk to even more foreign countries.

In 1989, Michael Sky wrote *Dancing with the Fire*, the first book dedicated solely to the subject of firewalking. Soon thereafter, Princeton University Press published a book entitled *Firewalking and Religious Healing*. As the firewalking movement spread, more books were written. Now, in 2006, there are over four dozen books that talk about the firewalking movement and the effect it is having. (Including my own book, [Extreme Spirituality: Radical Approaches to Awakening](#), that teaches readers how to use challenges for personal growth.)

FIREWALKING EXPLODES IN THE '90s

During the 1990s, separately and together, Peg and I trained over 1,000 firewalking instructors. Though we are now divorced, Peg worked with me for many years, so her approach is similar to mine. Therefore, up until 2003, all instructors that my ex-wife certified through the Sundoor Foundation automatically received "F.I.R.E. Certification" from the Firewalking Institute of Research and Education, which I established back in the '80s.

Also during the '90s, some people who we never certified thought that they could just go out and teach firewalking classes. The result of their inexperience was disastrous. Their attempts resulted in a number of people being hospitalized, and quite a bit of adverse publicity. If you yourself want to experience firewalking, I recommend that you only attend a firewalk that is being conducted by a trained instructor. Even though over three million people have now safely crossed the fire without injury, never forget that there is definitely an inherent risk in firewalking.

Today, the value of firewalking is readily apparent by the huge number of multi-national corporations that retain certified firewalking instructors to work with their personnel. The list includes companies such as Microsoft, Met-Life, American Express, RE/MAX International, Coca-Cola, and many other corporate giants. With the dawn of the new millennium, "reality" TV shows started adding firewalks to their programs. Firewalking classes have been featured on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, in medical magazines, and in hundreds and hundreds of newspapers worldwide. Never before in history, has firewalking been practiced so often and by so many.

WHY HAVEN'T YOU FIREWALKED?

From its humble beginning 29 years ago, when I first realized that firewalking could be used as a technique for personal growth and I began teaching it to others, the firewalking movement has grown to the point that even the President of the United States has sought the experience. Executives and politicians firewalk, doctors and lawyers firewalk, professional athletes, and ministers of many different faiths, now firewalk. In fact, movers and shakers from all over the globe can be counted among the ranks of modern-day firewalkers.

Every time someone, somewhere, crosses a bed of glowing coals, I know that indirectly, I have made a positive contribution to that human being's personal growth, and that we are now somehow related. It warms my heart, and it tickles my feet, to see, after more than a quarter-century of firewalking, how large my family has grown. In 2006, maximize your potential, and help celebrate the 29-Year Anniversary of modern-day firewalking, by joining a class near you!*

** Since the Internet is open to anyone on the Web, it can be a source of misinformation. The above firewalking history also appears in books published after 1977. Researchers and students are advised to always confirm anything found on the Internet with printed references available in public libraries.*