

# *A pilgrim walks the distance to raise BDD awareness*

*To the Editor,*

Last week was like so many we experience here in Narragansett. Preoccupied with our families, with our jobs (or the lack thereof) and with plans for the upcoming holiday weekend, it might have been easy to overlook a pilgrim who walked amongst us Thursday through Saturday. We are used to walkers and bikers of all sizes and ages here.

Thanks to the abundance of natural beauty in Narragansett, there are always people strolling and cycling along our many scenic roads. I wonder, though, if one stood out. He entered Narragansett on foot from Wakefield Thursday afternoon, and hiked the length of

Kingstown Road, carrying a backpack and a walking stick. After pausing for physical and spiritual renewal at the South Pavilion, he continued north on Boston Neck Road, over the Sprague Bridge, and past the stunning views of Bonnet Shores, until he arrived in Mettatuxet.

My eight-year old daughter was the first to spot Denis Asselin, my former colleague and friend, as he turned onto our street and made his way to our home. Denis had logged almost eighteen miles Thursday. More remarkable, however, is that he had walked over four hundred miles before reaching Narragansett.

In April of last year, Denis' 24 year old son Nathaniel took his

own life. Nathaniel suffered from Body Dysmorphic Disease, an obsessive compulsive disorder. Denis is walking from west of Philadelphia to Boston, to raise money and awareness of BDD. Along the way, he is staying with friends and family members.

This 64-year old man taught me and my family much during his brief sojourn. My favorite conversation was one about the many stories people along the way have related to Denis. Sharing one's grief gives others permission to do the same.

My daughters, husband and dog walked with Denis as he left our house for Providence on Saturday. Sharing a short segment of Denis' journey, along I-A to the North Kingstown bor-

der, was a very powerful experience.

Each step to assuage the grief of one father became the footsteps of my child, your child, all children mourned by parents. Footprints along the shore wash away with the tide; footprints in the heart do not.

A pilgrim walked amongst us in Narragansett last week. How lucky we were, in the 21st century, to host this courageous man and this most sacred of rituals.

More information on Denis Asselin's incredible 525 mile walk in memory of his son can be found at "walkingwithNathaniel.org"

*Sue Hoaglund  
Narragansett*