



2004

## On That Sidewalk

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### Recommended Citation

Baustian, Mary Beth (2004) "On That Sidewalk," *Cedarville Review*: Vol. 7 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cedarvillereview/vol7/iss1/12>

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## Keywords

Creative writing, poetry

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## Mary Beth Baustian

### When Walking

The wide umbrellas and opposite cars,  
narrow sidewalks and cold shoulders  
made walking in Oxford a strategic exercise.

I walked fast and fastidiously  
in my red wool coat;  
I visualized the muscles of my legs  
as they tensed and stretched  
to cover one extra square of sidewalk.  
At the corner of Little Clarendon and Walton  
my breath was heavier,  
and at St. Giles and Broad  
my calves began to burn.

By the end I knew:  
Edge tour groups  
and step quickly right of bus queues.  
The very middle of pedestrian Cornmarket is a sanctuary,  
away from ins and outs of the shops.  
Beware of bikes, they blend into the crowd.  
No one moves aside for you. Don't expect them to.  
Be resolute in your path  
and you'll clip along nicely.

### On That Sidewalk

I know the British aren't quickly friendly.  
They stride along the ancient, uneven pavement  
under their portable, domed cathedrals and are  
private by curtains of rain, until, suddenly,  
they lift their umbrella, or tilt it to the side  
to let you pass.