

Badgering David Tucker '69, MA'72

Seven questions with an alumnus on the move, by Nadine Goff '94

A self-described literary historian, university lecturer, journalist, and lifelong thanatophobe who admits to a pronounced antipathy toward authority, David Tucker and his British wife, Mary, own London Walks, the oldest urban walking company in the world. In a recent article in *The Guardian*, his thesis adviser, John Sutherland, noted that, "Tucker's Original Dickens Walks do not shirk the filthy chimneys where apprentice sweeps like Oliver Twist would — after a year or two's clambering — contract cancer of the scrotum."

How did a farm boy from Platteville end up becoming a Londoner?

There's an old military axiom that says no battle plan survives contact with the enemy. I went to London in 1973 to get my PhD at University College London. I wrote my dissertation on Dickens. Whilst there, I became a war bride: a little English Rose thought I was her ticket to California — but I fooled her.

What did you do after you earned your PhD?

For many years I worked as a news editor at Worldwide Television, but I haven't done an honest day's work since they made me redundant in October 1998.

How did you become involved with London Walks?

I was pipping and pocketing around London in the mid-1970s with my great friend David Hall [MA'76], and he discovered London Walks. My Fidd on Dickens was how I got my big German-American winkle picker-encased foot in the door in 1980. Ian, who owned London Walks at the time, didn't want an American guide for obvious reasons, but I knew something about Dickens, and we do a lot of Dickens walks, yadda yadda yadda.

Besides its age and size, what makes London Walks unique?

The quality of the guiding. We use lots of actors as guides because we like what they bring to the party — timing, presence, and great voices. Mary and I own London Walks, but it's run as a guides' cooperative — a throwback to the old Madison hippie days.

What do you most remember about your time in Madison?

I'm completely flummoxed by that question. I'm a child of the sixties. All I can remember about my UW education is clouds — some of them out of the barrel of Riot Policemen's not-nice nozzles, some of them out of hookahs, some of them out of the sky.

Seriously, don't you remember anything about your classes?

I transferred in as a junior in the autumn



COURTESY OF DAVID TUCKER

David Tucker brings a Madison sense of style to the London tour business.

of 1966, and I do remember my first wonderful professor, Karl Kroeber, who taught English 460: The English Novel. He told us — rightly, of course — that Jane Eyre was to be pronounced *Ire*. I also remember the pale gold light streaming in the windows of Bascom Hall and that some of the coeds — that word dates me terribly, of course — were very beautiful.

What are your future plans for London Walks?

Keep it vibrant and healthy. Keep it glorying in — and reflecting — the plurality of London. Add to the existing repertory of 370 different London Walks.