

In Our Own Words

A significant intellectual movement swept through Western Europe in the 1930s and 1940s: existentialism. Philosophers like the German Martin Heidegger and the Frenchman Gabriel Marcel not only commented on existential themes but their works became known as existentialist, often against their will. A gossip columnist for *Clartés* signed himself The Existentialist, and, on the street, cultured men and women excused their occasional “salty” expressions with the comment, “I guess I’m becoming an existentialist!” Like silly putty, the term existentialism stretched this and that way until it accommodated almost every idea. It became meaningless. Enter the French man of letters and future Nobel laureate Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1945 he tried in “Existentialism Is A Humanism” to identify the major themes of existentialism, and today, 70 years later, when intellectuals want to learn about existentialism they most often turn to Sartre’s article.

There’s a lesson here for the Walker House. Other people are defining who we are and what we’re doing. About a dozen writers have contributed articles about the Walker House (a few syndicated) for their host newspapers and periodicals, and to them we are a Bed and Breakfast inspired by the philosophy of extreme beauty. An ABC affiliate broadcast a three-minute TV spot on the Walker House, focusing on its near-200 year history, its stone structure, and lodging. But to *Fast and Furious* movie star Paul Walker, the Walker House represented a place to relax, rejuvenate, and refocus before the launch of his next movie;* to John Morgridge, the CEO who took Cisco from a burgeoning tech company to a public and international technology powerhouse, the Walker House featured in its restaurant a regional food favorite, the Cornish pasty, when he and his wife Tashia dined here; and to Trek International the Walker House presented the perfect venue to host a three-day strategic planning meeting for its national and international executives. So, what is the Walker House? A B&B? Historical landmark? Retreat center? Regional restaurant? Center for corporate meetings?

It’s time we tell our story *in our own words*, just like Sartre did about existentialism.

The home page of the Walker House website (thewalkerhouse.org) features three sliders—a beautiful fall shot of the Walker House, a teaser with the words “A Place, A Vision, An Experience,” and a third slider giving a bit more information about the three words on the teaser. However, we want to begin our story with the phrase at the bottom of two of the sliders: “Live Tomorrow’s Extraordinary History.”

For almost five decades, I (Dan) have worked as a professor, scholar, and administrator at Loyola University Chicago, focusing my work on what makes people tick—their talents and frailties as well as strengths and weaknesses—and how people live in communities as small as two friendships and families and as large as towns, nations, and international groups. Kathy, a writer and editor, has collaborated with me in the classroom and on many scholarly works. We are now bringing this half-century of teaching and scholarly work to the Walker House to nurture people, to create businesses, and to build communities that represent the best of what people can do, in other words, to fashion tomorrow’s extraordinary history in a way, we hope, that can be lived today.

* Tragically, Walker died in a car crash the day after he emailed us to reserve rooms over Christmas.