

Appalachian Trail

JULIANNA'S HIKE - 2007

August 2007

5th Edition

JEFF PRICE - STREEK
DAVE GUYER - GIGGLES
MURPHY BARTON - BARFY
STEVE DOHERTY - JULES:



2007 - 99.1 miles
2006 - 96.8 miles
2005 - 88.6 miles
2004 - 94.9 miles
2003 - 66.8 miles

In five years we have hiked 446.2 miles while raising and donating more than \$200,000 to those in need

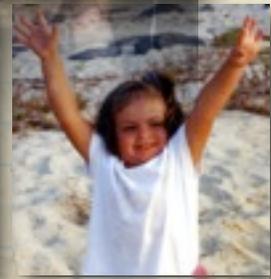
Five year celebration of Julianna's Hike on the AT from August 17, 2003 to August 31, 2007

Five years ago we began a quest to hike the Appalachian Trail to support a "giving fund" established for our forever three year old daughter, Julianna. At the Hike's inception, I needed to do something for Julianna, I needed a purpose of good to prevent me from becoming permanently lost in my misery. Like angels, three friends came to save me. They suggested a hike in the woods and the rest, as they say, is history. Little did I know what this journey could give to me. After five years of hiking, I am filled with hope, earned perspective, boundless love and unequivocal determination. Moreover, I have recognized that struggle is an integral part of life because when we endure we emerge better than we have ever been.

It seems ironic....my buddies save me by offering to hike and I do nothing but torment them in each of the last five years. The idea of walking the mountains instantly had appeal to me. How hard could it be to walk on dirt paths with your buddies? Well, if you don't count the five sprained ankles, the four sprained knee's, the 100+ bee stings, the twenty arguments about our ridiculous hiking goals, the 4 barf's, the hurricane, the rattle snake scare, the bear siege, the 100 plus blisters, the dozen lost toe nails, the forty plus grimy sleepless nights in the wild, the fifty plus times we had to walk down some godforsaken hill to retrieve water out of some pathetic crusty watering hole, this has been a walk in the park.



Hiking up Little Hump Mountain



Top of the King

THIS HIKE IS DEDICATED TO JULIANNA DOHERTY AND THE BELIEF THAT EVERY ONE OF US CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE





Barfy, Streek, Giggles and Jules prepare to embark on Day 1 of hike.



Julianna's third birthday 2001

AGONY

I am driving to work, a convenience store, a friends house, it generally does not matter. I am prompted by some trivial event and sent to a faraway place that can justifiably be called hell on earth. I may see a flatbed truck or a small accident on the side of the road or a little girl with soft brown hair walking toward me on the street. My mind races back to 2001 on a New Jersey Highway and I am lost in insufferable agony and I have died, not literally but part of me feels dead and is gone forever. These thoughts torture me until I vanquish them. After a few moments I catapult to the present. Each day the suffering gets a little less vivid. Thankfully, the happy thoughts of the good are slowly replacing the bad. The hike has been an instrumental tool for this transition.

BLESSED

The last person I see before I depart this year is my ten-year old son Jack. He tells me he loves me from the side door of our house for about the tenth time. As I leave, he scurries to the front door to tell me he loves me again. I say goodbye with a tear welling in my eye as I start to drive away. Leaving him, Nate, Joe and Denise for eight days is painful. I collect myself and drive away thinking how can I leave them. Halfway down the street I hear a distant voice. It is Jack next to my car

sprinting down the street as fast he can saying goodbye and I love you one last time. My welling turns to tear drops and realize I am a blessed man.

LIVING

In five years of hiking the AT and writing this newsletter I have had ample time to reflect and contemplate my life. Here is what I have learned about living.

First - life should be simple and good. Life tends to get out of control when I make it complex. Make simple choices and stay with it..like accumulating friends, not things.

Second - choose what is important to you and pursue it with passion. Do not do anything partially, do it fully with every effort possible. If you are not committed to your pursuit, it is guaranteed no one else will follow.

Third - genuine fulfillment only occurs when you serve others. Avoid the eventual emptiness of serving only your own needs and make a daily habit of giving time and effort to someone else.

Fourth - Pray, alot.

Lastly - live each moment to its fullest and each day like it's your last. You never know when you will be gone or someone will be taken from you. Go out and make the most of today. I now know lost time can never be found again.

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In 2007, the money we raised benefited children who are struggling in life - physically, emotionally or financially. I am pleased to report we have distributed more than \$60,000 from the 2007 Hike and the Julianna Doherty Fund. Once again our largest beneficiary is the Center for Grieving Children. Our successful fundraising has given us the opportunity to make a difference and provide needed financial support to people we have gotten to know over the last few years. The Julianna Doherty Fund donated to the organizations below.

[CENTER FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN](#)

WWW.GRIEVINGCHILDREN.ORG

For the fifth year, we are funding the Center for Grieving Children, Teen's and Families, located on the grounds of St. Christopher's Hospital in North Philadelphia. The funds will primarily be used to fund their after school program and to purchase art supplies and pay grief counselors. Most of the cities public schools continue to send kids to this organization even though no public money is provided. The center provides support for children or young adults who have experienced the loss of a loved one. This Center's program allows children to express themselves to others who have felt similar loss. Sharing the pain with those who understand the pain is a good way to start the healing process. I serve as a Board of Director for the Center. **Special Note: This organization needs financial support. If anyone can provide additional financial assistance or can recommend other funding sources, please let me know. Thanks**

[SAY YES TO EDUCATION, INC](#)
WWW.SAYYESTOEDUCATION.ORG

Last year I was introduced to a program, which provides inner city youth without financial means, an opportunity to go to college or trade schools free of cost. The Julianna Fund has committed to support and fund its afternoon activities during the summer where they hire Professional Crafters, Dancers, Martial Artists, etc to

work with the children in this program. They also have tutors available to work with the kids who are falling behind in their academic studies. During the summer, they will serve close to 200 students in grades K thru 9th. Maisha Sullivan-Ongoza directs this program, which we hope to continue to support in the years ahead.

[THE BREATHING ROOM FOUNDATION](#)

This Foundation is an organization, which supports individuals and their families who are suffering from cancer. The Breathing Room provides breathing room to families who are dealing with the daily struggle of cancer, whether it is providing a meal for the holidays, cutting someone's lawn, baby sitting or providing financial assistance to pay utilities. In the last year, my co-workers and I have participated in Thanksgiving, Christmas/Hannukah and Easter Holiday programs. We do know first hand the heartfelt benefit this organization provides to families in dire need of support.



[ST. MARY'S RESPITE](#)
WWW.STMARYSRESPIRE.ORG

This retreat, located in West Philadelphia, offers support to small children ages 1 to 5 who are either infected by HIV or have someone in their immediate family who has contracted HIV. This respite provides young children with a happy and nurturing environment for one day a week. The goal of the Respite is two fold. First, they provide a child a fun day to look forward to, and second, they give the child's care giver a break either to get medical treatment or just to enjoy some down time.

[ST BARTHOLOMEW OUTREACH PROGRAM](#)

Several years ago I was introduced to Sister Pat Denny, who has an outreach program at this Northern Philadelphia Church. After meeting with her, I consider her a missionary in the City of Philadelphia. With sister Pat's guidance, we have once again paid Catholic School tuition for a family, whose father is legally blind and whose four young daughters (They have 5 children) have severe vision problems as well. Public school is not a viable option for this family. This family continues to be in financial crises and unable to pay Catholic School tuition. Through the fund we are able to pay tuition for this family for the next school year for all four of their school age children. Your gift has allowed this family to be educated in a christian school where they have learned and prospered. Sister Pat died last year after a battle with cancer. We will continue her good works, but we will miss her warm, cheerful and loving spirit.



[VARIETY, THE CHILDREN'S CHARITY](#) (WWW.VARIETYPHILA.ORG)

Each year the Variety Club sponsors an event for special needs children and children with Autism at Sesame Place. At the end of these special days the kids receive a medal of achievement for the days activities. In 2006, the Variety Club had no money available for medals. Julianna's Fund was able to fund these medals because of you. We are now in our third year of purchasing these medals for Variety Club and participating in this great event.



“It is time for all of us to stand up and cheer for the doer, the achiever, - the one who recognizes the challenges and does something about it” Vince Lombardi

I WANT REDEMPTION

After four years of my relentless ridicule of him, this page of the brochure was supposed to be Barfy's page of redemption. In his own words, without edit from me, he was going to provide all readers an overview of the real story of the hike, especially his role in it. Of course, much like his hike training, he didn't quite get around to writing it. Consequently, I will give you Barfy's perspective in my own objective words.

After looking at the photo's of the 2006 hike, Barfy reflected on his performance and annual conditioning regimen. He made three promises to himself. 1) As my family reads this overview, I will no longer be the known as the hike jester subject to their ridicule. 2) I will be the hike MVP in 2007 and 3) I will not Barf ever again on this hike. Needless to say I have heard these promises or variations of the commitment for five years. I was confident of intent and quite doubtful of the execution.

On August 24, 2007, Streek and I departed Philadelphia Airport in the early morning. We were connecting through Charlotte on our way to Tri-Cities Airport in Bristol, Tennessee. In Charlotte, we were to meet Barfy and can you believe it, we found him in the Airport Brewery with a 24 oz beer in front of him, which was probably his third. We greeted with big hugs and with my relief that he actually showed up again this year. Of course, the party commenced immediately and we almost missed our flight out. We were flying on one of those small puddle jumpers and I was next to Barfy across the aisle. At one point during this short flight I was speaking with him and looked down at his very noticeable girth. Barfy alert to my visual scrutiny, quickly retorted, “Dude, its the angle of this seat not the lack of my training.” Yeah, I'm sure.

The last few years the night before the hike is always a treat. We have have a nice meal, sleep in a nice bed and enjoy civilization one last time. This year we had a problem. NASCAR and its 200,000 person strong bandwagon was in town at the Bristol Motor Speedway. Consequently, every hotel, motel and motor home was booked within a 250 mile radius of our starting point. I regretfully informed the troops of our predicament, who were none to happy of my proposal to pitch a tent on our last night of luxury. My understanding team went easy on me with statements like,



“You idiot, why didn't you book this room earlier?” or “You did this on purpose didn't you?” I scrambled for solutions as I cursed the stupid sport of NASCAR. After a few days my prayers were answered in a return call from Miss Janet. For those of you who don't remember, she was the kindly Appalachian Trail driver from last year whose old van broke down taking us from the trail in the middle of our 2006 hike. She fortunately had room at her Hostel, which was slightly more appealing than the tent alternative, but it also came with a drive from the Airport. Besides, even if we found a room the going rate was \$250 per night with a three night minimum. To put this into context, last year we spent less than \$80.

After Miss Janet picked us up at the Airport we had lunch at Hooters sans Dave, who was to arrive on a later flight. After lunch, Miss Janet and I took off for the Airport to retrieve Dave without half the hiking team who stayed behind for team building exercises.



“Act as if what you do makes a difference it does” William James

Each year we begin the hike with trepidation. This year was no different. After sleeping at Miss Janet's Hostel we awoke early and proceeded to the trail head at Indian Grave Gap. For our last meal we dined on gravy and biscuits in the finest dining Erwin, Tenn. had to offer, Hardee's. As we drove up the mountain we were all prepared to hike with the exception of Giggles. His backpack, boots and pretty much everything was in Atlanta. Although he made it, his bags never made the connecting flight from Salt Lake. Hiking without equipment generally presents a problem, but the kindly Miss Janet offered to help us once again. She agreed to wait for his bag at the airport and bring it to us on the trail. The woman is a saint and a trusting one at that. She left her dog, Fabian with us. She would pick him up when we met later this day. At 8:55 am, the five of us began this years quest. Fabian on four paws and Giggles in borrowed sneakers.

With our first steps, we are quickly indoctrinated to our circumstance.... pain, pain, pain and more pain. Even though this is our fifth year of hiking you just never get accustomed to the dang back pack. No matter how you slice it, walking with thirty five to forty pounds on your back is not fun or natural.

Streek's bag was noticeably smaller and probably weighed 5 lbs less than everyone else's. There was reason for this. To our initial bewilderment, Streek elected not to carry food this year. We called him a moron, but actually his strategy was pure genius. Streek learned from past hikes and adapted accordingly. In each of the previous hikes, Barfy had overpacked food. Moreover, he typically stops eating on Day 2 of hike because he is so exhausted and/or nauseous. Consequently, most of his food is not consumed. Streek's plan was dastardly simple. Let Barfy carry food until he gets sick. Barfy would want to unload weight with Streek waiting in the wings to help. Streek now has a steady food supply with none of the baggage. No wonder he is a doctor.

We march straight and slow past a place called Beauty Spot conserving our energy and bodies. The shoulders and limbs are beginning to hurt. In contrast, Fabian is in full sprint, criss crossing across the Appalachians exploring and seeking out every smell within 100 yards of the trail. This dog is a bundle of energy. One second he is leading the troops in forward position, the next second he is chasing a squirrel, digging up grubs or exploring some distant smell left by a giant bear or

boar. At one point Streek and I are walking along the trail when a very large deer sprints across the trail 30 feet in front, scaring the crap out of us. Fabian darts off the trail in full gallop chasing this deer down an extremely steep valley through deep brush. I yell at top of my lungs to get back here, but to no avail. I now imagine Fabian chasing this deer for miles to the bottom of the mountain. I further imagine in a few miles we show up at our meeting spot at mile 10 and tell Miss Janet, "Thanks for spending your entire morning retrieving Giggles' bag, appreciate the help, but don't know where your dog went off too, I am sure he will show by tomorrow....See ya."

We walk on without our four legged trail guide and begin to realize we like having a dog around. He gives us a sense of security and he also keeps our mind off our struggle. The only downside, other than the dog's obvious problem with the heel thing, is his quench for thirst. This dog will sprint five steps for every one of our single slow steps. Every five or ten minutes the panting parched pup would return begging for water. We cup some water in our hand and let him lap it up. We get to the point where Fabian is begging for so much water we started telling him quit being a wimp and start sucking it up like the rest of us.



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“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond to it” Lou Holtz

Fabian eventually returns from his deer chase and takes the lead once again. Within moments he begins a frantic bark as we descend a huge mountain. We look down and see a very scruffy man with an unruly beard (think Charles Manson) hiking straight up the mountain with a German Shepard in tow. Obviously, this was not totally unusual as we were also with a dog. However, this dog was attached to 25' metal chain leash. Mr Manson was scary tough. This leash had to weigh 15 lbs. and his backpack was stuffed and had more electrical tape showing than nylon fabric. On the trail, people tend to be a little off beat, but this guy was spooky. After talking for a few minutes we learned he was essentially a drifter. We moved on enthusiastically, each of us thankful we are not hiking alone. After four hours of hiking with Fabian, we arrive at Iron Mountain Gap praying that Miss Janet was able to retrieve Giggles' back pack. We wait in a heap on the side of the road. After about an hour, Miss Janet pulls up the dirt rock road, the sound of loose rocks under rubber tires echoing in our ears. Giggles' bag is in the house. Miss Janet was tardy because she had to make a pit stop. My tough hiking buddies asked her to stop at Subway for hoagies on her way back. These guys are unbelievable. We are four hours into the hike and they need freaking hoagies. I declined to eat with them out of principal. We return to the trail at 2:30 pm and still had a solid 7 miles of hiking remaining.

The afternoon hike began with a severe incline. The guys learn quickly

that hoagies and hiking are not a good mix. The afternoon's torture was now beginning. Giggles had his boots, but we have no watchdog to keep us company and we are fully loaded with gear and water. **Due to severe drought we are forced to carry as much water as possible when ever we can get it.**

It would be at least three days until we have human contact or so we thought. We assumed no intelligent human being would hike in the Southern Appalachians in the middle of August during the worst drought to hit this part of country in decades. We would be thirsty but we would have the woods to ourselves in peace and harmony. As the day wore on my legs began the annual pain ritual. Shoulders ache first; next the legs begin to get heavy and last your feet/toes start to burn. Fortunately, my injured and medically repaired knee is holding up. The afternoon hike is brutal. Barfy keeps to his word and is hiking well but unusually quiet. After hours I grow curious and ask Barfy, "How did you make this dramatic change, you are a hiking stud and haven't said one word about this godforsaken hike yet?" He looks at me and quips, "I'm not complaining because I'm too tired and I'm about to pass out." Twilight is approaching and our first destination is within reach. We can't wait to collapse in our shelter. We arrive at Clyde Smith Shelter at 7 pm and disappointingly find no less than twelve hiking bags but no hikers in the shelter. We are stunned.

We have not seen

twelve hikers in an entire year of hiking much less in one spot. We ponder for a few moments realizing we have no tent and have heard the distant roar of thunder much of the afternoon. Voices come from below, and we see a stream of very young people entering camp. We are more stunned. We make introductions and learn these kids are first year students from Wright State University in Ohio doing some freshman, "Get to know your fellow student retreat orientation thing." Based on their age and appearance they seemed to know nothing about hiking except the one leader who calls himself "Bear". The youngsters gaze at us with admiration and awe as we now take on the role of seasoned woodsman. I laugh inside at this whole scenario. This kindly group offers to share the shelter with us. We reject this idea as we are too tough. However, we do quickly revert to form when they offer to let us use their tents and we accept. The next scene is classic. We step aside and watch these kids assemble our tents. At the same time Streak pulls out dinner - two leftover Italian hoagies and begins to unwrap. The four seasoned outdoorsmen are now eating Subway hoagies while watching these kids (mostly girls) assembling our tents more efficiently than we ever could. We do not have an ounce of pride left. After cleaning up, the entire group sits around a campfire, that they put together of course and we each tell the story of how we earned our trail names.



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“There is little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. That little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative” W. Clement Stone

Our first night on the trail is a good one. We sleep comfortably in two-three men tents. I sleep with Giggles and the only sound I hear is a light rain pitter pattering on the nylon outer tent shell throughout the night. Streek gets the short straw and draws Barfy, whose snoring overwhelms the gentle sounds of nature and he sleeps much less peacefully. We wake the next morning. Bear and the Wright State students, true to form, offer to disassemble the tents, and of course we again eagerly accept. We are pathetic. Despite the fact they did not prepare us oatmeal and coffee for breakfast, their hospitality was exemplary and we greatly appreciated their genuine thoughtfulness. I also think they took pity on us. We say our goodbyes.

As we begin our days hike, we are all sore. My knee has held up this first day, but my arthritic hip is killing me and my big toes are throbbing. Yesterday we experienced a viscous attack not from bear, not wild boar, not even snakes but a more sinister creature engineered for our torment and inflicting pain....bees. We are stung a combined twelve times this day resulting in unlimited torture. After this first day we were in constant alert the rest of the week for ground hives, which house the menacing attackers.

Our largest obstacle today is Roan Mountain, which will put us at nearly 6,300 feet of elevation. To put this into context, this will be our highest point on the AT for the next ten years. Consequently, we have some climbing today. The first three miles are a combination of steady up's and down's, however, the real struggle begins in mile 4 when we will be required to elevate 2,200 in three miles. We prayed for

strength this morning and we will need it right now. Roan Mountain will be worth the climb. The trail is bisected by a highway, which offers a scenic nature trail and parking at this intersection. By the time we reach Roan the tourists had already filled the lot. This was unexpected exposure to civilization and Barfy was back in his element. He scopes out the situation and finds his target. “Excuse me, do you have some pop?”(Barfy lives in Toronto and no longer calls it soda). The stunned travelers say “Yes, we have a cooler.” “Can I have one?” They say, “Sure.” Barfy, the consummate team player goes a step further and asks for three more pops for his buddies. They hesitantly but generously comply. Barfy comes through again as we consume the best Sierra Mist any of us has ever had. Barfy is not only the funniest member of our team, he is the boldest. He is a steamroller never afraid to ask for anything. If we need something from someone, Barfy is the guy to get it done.

We continue forward on the trail and find some wild blue berries and eat hardily for several minutes. We now have seven miles to go until we reach our shelter at Overmountain. The terrain is ugly. After the manicured trail at Roan, which stretches 3 miles from the highway, we hit the jungle. The trail is full of roots, overgrown with plant life and swarming with dreaded bees. We are stung again. We traverse up and down high mountain ranges. We are all hurting. Even the imperturbable Giggles is now perturbed. After hours of harsh hiking we arrive at Overmountain Shelter at 6:45 pm. The water source is located prior to shelter and Giggles and I take the duty. We are pumping in misery. I try to make Giggles laugh and

he would have none of it. “Pumping water from this disgusting creek is the last thing I want to be doing right now so F off” After two days Giggles turned into Grumpy. I am in big trouble. We quickly rebound as we walk back to shelter and are treated to the prettiest valley you could imagine. Our shelter is a huge barn located at the end of an endless valley providing a panoramic view for miles. We start a fire and are happy. Barfy is exhausted and heads right to bed without eating. His final comment before collapse, “I will not Barf tonight, but I will tomorrow.”



“Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is courage to continue that counts” Winston Churchill

In the morning we arise in glory despite bitterly cold temperatures throughout the night. We are in the midst of a picturesque valley with the morning sun starting to glow behind the mountain ridges, which are now enveloped in puffy white clouds you can almost reach out and touch. This is very cool. In 1776, this valley was the meeting point for Tennessee back woodsman who were assembling in mass on this spot to join the cause for American Independence.

The third day on the trail is usually a tough one. We are grimy. We are sore. We are irritable and miss our daily routines and families. We are very good friends and have generally agreeable personalities, however, after two days in the woods conditions are ripe for tensions between us to arise. My stubbornness is a large contributor to these tensions. I have tried to be sensitive to the group consensus, but I'm generally not. I have been very set in my ways regarding the hike and our daily agenda. Going forward I recognize it is critical for me to be open to the thoughts and concerns of others, especially my good buddies and co-hikers. Also, I don't particularly want to finish this hike alone.

As we depart this spectacular camp, Barfy dumps our leftover water onto his head. Refreshed, he boldly proclaims, “I am ready to eat the trail right now...of course, I will be crying in ten minutes.”

We have a rough morning. We are climbing two mountains: Little Hump and Hump Mountain. We walk uphill in the shade for several miles. Halfway up the mountain we turn around and see the Big Red Barn sitting in the middle of the beautiful valley and we enjoy one final mental snapshot of our fine accommodations. As we ascend the top of Little Hump Mountain we come to a clearing. Both Little Hump and Hump Mountain are magnificent and bald. They provide open and panoramic views of the entire Appalachian Mountain Range in this part of Tennessee. Giggles' sums up the majesty of this scenery with one word he repeats often, “Incredible!!” After Hump Mountain we have 5.5 miles straight down to Highway 19E. Although downs are good on

the lungs they are very bad on the body and in our third day our bodies are starting to break down. This, our third day, is usually make or break day for the hike. Every year I establish a hiking mileage agenda and this pivotal day always seems to be the day we collapse. On our descent, the drum beat begins, “Off the trail, off the trail”. Everyone is in great pain. We are once again attacked by a swarm of angry bees and stung 8 times. As we reach Highway 19E, we need a break. We call Miss Janet to discuss options. She tells us to walk one mile down mountain until you run into the Mountain Harbour Inn. We walk down highway in quiet discontent. We reach Mountain Harbour, which has an Inn house and a barn. I knock on the Inn House front door. The owner opens door and I slammed in the face with arctic blast of air conditioning. I told him we are interested in getting a bite to eat and taking a shower. He gruffly looks at me, points me to the barn and tells me to call him when we want to get something to eat and retreats back to the igloo. I walk back to the team, which is now sprawled on the ground in front of the barn,. The hiker hostel is on second floor of barn. As we drag our bodies past the goat, past the horses and through the distinct aroma of cow manure, we reach our barn reprieve. We are shocked and find an immaculate room filled with comfy beds, chairs, a stove and a refrigerator filled with soda and candy bars. They also have a real toilet with real toilet tissue. Everyone was ecstatic but me. It is 1:00 o'clock and we have over 8 miles left before we finish a 17 mile day. I thought I will never get these Turkeys to leave this little oasis. Bill, the owner, takes me and Streak up the road to a hole in the wall restaurant filled with three tables, a jute box, and a family wearing camouflage gear. I order from the lady behind the counter. Even though we both clearly speak english, our dialects are so different it takes us five painful minutes to communicate what I want to order.

Barfy and Giggles are showered as we return. We sit down around a nice table and eat our large cheeseburgers and fries. It is now close to 3 o'clock and I know these guys are content...too content. I now have a

dilemma. How do I get the team moving? Today, actually this moment, will determine whether we reach my hiking goal or not, even though I remember what I said from last years hike, “It's not the goal that is important, it is the journey that counts.” At this moment I am thinking bull---- on that. We need to make our goal one year, so I offer them a proposal and wince. I tell them we can stay if you want, no problem whatsoever. However, we just need to make up the 8 mile shortfall tomorrow. Barfy and Giggles look carefully at their maps, outlining mileage goals and elevation estimates for the week. I gave these out to everyone on first day of hike. They respond, “We can't hike 21 miles in our fourth day over that terrain.” I wince again and say, “Ok that's your choice so lets get moving” as I begin to gear up. In shock, I hear no complaints, no comments on my idiocy, no rebuttal. As they gather themselves I hear a wimper or two but that's it. I am truly amazed. At this very pivotal moment, my buddies and me and have become tough AT Hikers. There is no doubt in years past we would not have budged from this oasis.



“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail”

Ralph Waldo Emerson



We strap up by 3:15 pm and start our ascent up a sunny steep meadowed mountain. We are loaded to the brim with tap water, we have full bellies and our bodies are stiff as hell from the break. As we march we encounter a very sad site. No less than a few hundred yards from highway we come across a trash laden valley filled with several tons of garbage. Giggles, our hike team naturalist, justifiably curses every pathetic redneck who would maliciously destroy these majestic mountains.

With the combination of a cheeseburger lunch, extra water weight, steep ascent and burning direct sun light, we begin to overheat. We are completely drenched in perspiration fifteen minutes after starting. It is like we never stopped or cleaned. We also faced our nemesis once again. Bees are swarming in these flowery meadows. An hour into late afternoon hike we pass a river. As soon as Barfy hears the sound of running water, like a fly to manure, he takes the quickest route to water and heads down a steep embankment to rivers edge. His wingman Streek accompanied him. After a 30 second dip, I still can't understand the benefit of taking a half mile detour down a severe mountain slope to get wet, we continue our afternoon 8 mile walk. We are now agitated and drained. Late in day, we are walking down a another switchback mountain trail when Streek and Giggles stop to read a note on a tree. Barfy and I passed the note in our typical “lack of attention to detail” fashion. As we round a sharp corner and step over a small log used to prevent erosion on the trail, we are simultaneously attacked by about 30 bees. We are stung seven times. We are screaming and sprinting downhill to evade the onslaught. A rush of sensations swarm over us. Giggles and Streek had cut a path through the woods and avoided the ambush. I say to the other two hikers, “Didn't you guys get stung?”

They said they did not. They stopped to read note, which said, “Be aware very aggressive bees ahead on trail.” We finish our 17 mile day at 7:30 pm at Mountaneer Falls Shelter.

We are now physically and emotionally drained. Although, after three full days we are beginning to get into hiking rhythm, our bodies and minds are suffering. No one wants to suffer, but that is part of life. I have realized demanding times allow us to focus on what is truly important and achieve genuine perspective. At these challenging times the petty distractions or as I like to call it the “*Static of life*” are removed from our minds. Starting Day 4 of the hike, our static is finally starting to clear. We have continued our tradition of saying a prayer each morning before we depart. Today, we pray to open our hearts to others and to sacrifice each day, to gain perspective and emotional balance. If we do these simple things we can begin to grasp and eventually master the essence of who and what we are.

We depart camp and begin to talk about life and our shared experiences. As we pass through an exceptional Rhododendrum grove I feel serenity, which would be perfect except for the extreme pain in my lower back and recently repaired knee. In fact, everyone is worn down. Barfy begins to develop severe rash on his legs, Streek's knee is in great pain and Giggles is experiencing ankle and knee pain and general lethargy. Today, however, we are lucky. We have thirteen miles of relatively flat terrain. We talk about many things and I begin to appreciate the small talk between buddies. We ascend another mountain and come across a forest service road. We hear the roar of an engine. Barfy's ears go on full alert. We stop. Like a bloodhound on a scent Barfy follows the noise and finds two front end loaders. Nature boy asks for some necessary provisions and returns with two bottles of Sprite. The joy on his face is priceless. He savors every drop, quickly finishes and subsequently begins to fake cry when the bottle empties. We move on toward White Rocks Mountain, Tenn. We have two primary recurring themes this year...swarming Bees and no water. Halfway through this day

we are without water and all available sources are dry. Our best shot is Moreland Gap. At this spot everyone is beat up. I head down with pump and plastic water container. There is a small white crusty bucket underneath a half inch pipe dripping water very gradually into this bucket covered in slimy algae, leaves, sticks, rocks, and who else knows what. I place the pump nozzle into this grimy bucket and begin to pump. Even after filtering, the water had a distinct brown tone. We have no other options so I continue to pump. The scum bucket begins to empty and I am transfixed on the the remaining water. Then BAM, I see a killer cray fish jump from the depths (like three inches from bottom) and lunge at me with those razor claws. I am stunned and jump back. I am at a loss and I am grossed out but quickly figure that if that thing can live in this water it must be ok to drink. I pump on and stare at my new friend. I look closer and realize this thing only attacked me with one claw, because he has some dead prey in his other claw. I am feeling nauseous. I want to dump this water, but that leaves us a big problem. I yell for advice. Barfy, after five minutes, wakes from his nap none too happy he had to make the trek down to this “so called” spring. I explain the situation, show him the crayfish and dead animal in his claw. Barfy glances and quips. “Looks ok by me” and returns up the hill to his nap. Sadly, I am comforted by Barfy's apathetic decisiveness and we drink.



“Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play it safers, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary” C. Beaton

We depart with brown water in our jugs in very low spirits. As is commonplace on the trail, the going gets tougher. As we progress we experience another bee onslaught. The enemy is the yellow jacket. The name yellow jacket refers to the yellow and black bands on the "tail" or abdomen. Upon my return, I learn populations in hives can be as large as 5,000 in southern yellow jacket colonies. Due to the large colony size and defensive nature, yellow jackets are extremely aggressive. Yellow jackets have effective means of defending their colonies. They often have "guards" or "sentinels" at their nest entrances. They attack when colony is disturbed by rapid movement and vibrations near the nest or as I thought, when some nit wit hiker sticks his hiking pole into its ground nest.

By late evening we arrive at our nights accommodation at the Kinkora Hiking Hostel, whose owner is an exceptional man Bob Peoples. Bob retired to this destination several years before and has become an icon of the trail ever since. He is active in trail maintenance and oversight. Tonight he has a house full of hikers set to go out the following day to complete trail work and this includes our new friends from Wright State. The Appalachian Trail can only exist through the tireless effort of generous folks like Bob and his wife.

At the hostel we shower and sit around a picnic table. At the table is Bear, the leader of the Wright State group. He had fallen on the trail and now is incapacitated by a severe ankle sprain. He is in great pain. Next to Bear is a man thru hiking who looked like a fat Danny Devito. This guy started in Georgia and lost 40 pounds since he began. Although we respected his effort, the guy was annoying as he knew everything about everything according to him. Apparently, he had physical injury issues and has shacked up at the Hostel for several weeks healing his own injury. Bob Peoples was a very good man to let this guy hang around. Bob told us it is commonplace for hikers to come to the trail who are facing some crisis. He has met countless people who are trying to defeat

obesity, drug abuse, depression etc. As I can attest, there is something healing in the AT.

The hostel was full and we were offered a tent site around back. The boys would have none of it. They wanted to go to the closest motel and would pay any price. We did and they did. By 8:00 o' clock we were eating steak and onion rings and watching ESPN. Everyone was happy.

Today is new beginning. We are refreshed and clean. We return to the Kinkora Hostel and say our goodbye's to Bob Peoples. As we depart, Streek, Giggles and Barfy are so fresh they begin to do a beautifully choreographed STOMP routine. They were so pathetic it was hysterical. We depart by 8:20 am this morning. We have much to look forward to today. Within 25 minutes of departure we were directed to a secluded swimming hole, deep in a steep valley surrounded by magnificent evergreen's with a small waterfall providing the soothing sound of running water. As you would expect Barfy was the first to hit the water. He stripped down to his shorts and stood by water edge and hesitated to jump into the dark frigid water. We prodded and he gracefully belly flopped into the depths. We roared with laughter and followed our leader of leisure. This was a spot you could relax for hours in peace and tranquility. Of course I would have none of that so we quickly regrouped and continued the quest.

We enjoyed the flat terrain for the next several miles as we crossed several log bridges. Our next meaningful goal was the highlight of the trip, Laurel Falls. We had not seen a meaningful water fall since our very first day on the trail five years ago in Georgia. We were all eager to swim under the 75' Falls. As we follow the River Gorge called Laurel Fork we get closer to the Falls and begin to hear the very distinct roar of water falling. Giggle gives out at an enormous cheer when the Falls come into sight. It is spectacular, even in the midst of the drought the water is cascading over the Falls beautifully. We swim for a half hour. Barfy slips on wet rocks posing for a picture and we all crack up.

We continue hiking along the River Gorge for some time, walking along rocky ledges and beautiful rock formations. We are astounded by the scenery and miss our turn off to ascend the next mountain. We continue to walk for several miles along the river gorge. I am the idiot in the lead. We find a fork in road and separate. Neither way is our route and we track back to the fork. As I am walking back, an 8' black snake is staring at me from a few feet. I screech (a manly screech) in terror. The snake slithers off the trail through the brush and into a tree stump. Our snake charmer Streek pursues the beast but cannot access the stump. We move on and find our hidden turnoff. We begin the long ascent up steep and rocky terrain. The team mood turns quickly negative as the trail begins to take its toll on our bodies. It is now hot with no breeze and we are low on water again. I forgot my water bottle at the motel last night and I am now bone dry. We were at rock bottom mentally when someone yells out "I just want to jump off this mountain and end it." He doesn't and we depart the woods several hours later and find Watauga Lake. This will be our third swim of the day, but probably our best. The lake was formed when the 320' Wautaga Dam was built in 1949. At the Lake we order a pizza and have it delivered to us. At this point there is no hope to achieve hiking dignity so why fight it.



“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” J.Christ

After our Pizza, we strap on our gear and head to the Wautaga Lake Shelter. At this point everyone was negotiating to get off trail again since we were at a road. They figured the pizza delivery man offered the perfect exit from this hell and could drop us off somewhere...anywhere. They lost this negotiation and we moved on to the shelter. My stubbornness wins again. On the way we pass the shoreline and witness a travesty. Apparently all the boneheads who wouldn't pay or get rooms for Bristol Race weekend decided to camp along the lake. They left piles of trash behind, which makes you wonder what people think. Here we are, in arguably the prettiest part of this country and people have no respect or appreciation for what is in front of them. It is just sad. We arrive at the Shelter, start a fire and talk for a while. Before we go to bed the guys entertain themselves making shadow hand puppets from the light of the fire. It is good to be simple.

quitting the hike?” I tell him “Nope, I'll quit when I die.” He asks Barfy same question, who responds “Yep, every damn day”, but thinking thoughtfully added, “But if I did I would have no friends left.”

After several hours the easy part is now behind us. At this point we have 9 miles of incline to battle and we are low on water. Tension begins to pervade our hike team. This tension is compounded by the constant cries of pain heard from all. Each time you hear the cry of pain, you know it could be one of two things: a turned knee or ankle or a dreaded bee attack. After seven miserable miles of hiking we reach Vandeventer Shelter. We are exhausted and in need of water and energy. Barfy is beyond tired and Giggles knee is extremely swollen. I of course, realize we are very close to reaching our objective. I am unequivocal, we can make it. I receive some vehement disagreement and an argument ensues. This goes on for several minutes with several expletives exchanged. We go to our separate corners. I ask who wants to try to get water with me. Streek, the least injured, volunteers. We bring pump and water jug with us and begin our descent. We walk down, down and down a very steep slope until after about 10 minutes we find the weak and crusty spring at very bottom of this valley with bee's buzzing around us. We fill the jug slowly. I tell Streek, “We will alternate on the carry up.” Streek says, “I got it” and off he goes. I figure he will stop but never does and 731 steps of 45 degree slope later he is back at shelter. Sorry Barfy and Giggles, that effort hands Streek the hike MVP in 2007. After we fill up with water, we all hug and everything is well again on the AT. We continue the quest. Never give up...You cannot fail if you never quit.

As the day progresses we finally conquer our last hill. Both Streek and Giggles collapse completely out of gas. During my final descent into the Iron Mountain Shelter, I am finally at peace. I spend 1/2 hour with Julianna and I am the happiest man alive. We arrive at 7:15 and fall asleep by 8:30 pm completely drained. Finally, our last day is at hand. Over the last six days we have hiked remarkably well, meeting each day's daily

mileage goals completing a total of 84.3 miles. Our seventh day requires 14.8 miles, an enormous challenge considering our collective physical condition. 99.1 miles here we come.

Saturday	16.8 MILES	16.8 MILES
Sunday	12.8 MILES	29.6 MILES
Monday	17.2 MILES	46.8 MILES
Tuesday	13 MILES	59.8 MILES
Wednesday	10.5 MILES	70.3 MILES
Thursday	14 MILES	84.3 MILES
Friday	14.8 MILES	99.1 MILES

We have two goals today. 1) Finish 2) Finish early enough so everyone can start partying as soon as possible. Because of goal # 2, the last day of our hike is an early day. Everyone is eager to return to the comforts of life and a cold can of brew. We have 14.8 miles today, which is an extreme amount for a final day. Thankfully, the terrain is flat. . We depart at 7:00 am enjoying a slight down gradient hike for most of the way. Even the flats are hard now is the common thought amongst us all. After 4 miles of walking thru the woods we come to a clearing at State Route 91. As we pass the road we see Miss Janet's familiar beat up van. The woman is our guardian angel. At 8 AM she is waiting for us with a breakfast burrito and cold bottle of water. Barfy, the happiest of all, gives Miss Janet a big hug for the effort. Unfortunately, we have twelve miles of hiking remaining. We push off and enjoy our final few hours out in the woods. At 3:30 pm, we arrive at our destination, McQueens Gap. We have completed our fifth year on the AT hiking a total of 446.2 miles. We are better and stronger today. We have struggled every mile and endured. Thank you for your support.



IT CAN BE DONE. We have reached our hiking goal in each of our first five hiking days (71.3 miles). This is unbelievable. We need to go 28.8 miles in the next two days. This is possible. We can do it. Today, we have a great hiking run for the first three miles. We pass over the Watauga Dam and follow a level trail path enveloped with majestic Pine and Fir trees. “This has been the best hiking experience yet,” Streek reflects. He continues reflection asking me, “Did you ever feel like





2003 - GEORGIA

"This happy feeling came to a quick end as the never ending mountains approached. In the fourth mile - the real hike began - **Straight up, straight down, straight up, straight down.** We were completely exhausted before 10 miles of trail. In retrospect, this exhaustion was understandable as we were all over packed and under conditioned. In preparation of this trip the four hikers all had their unique training styles. Some of us actually hiked w/ backpacks a few times in preparation; Some of us walked around their house in hiking boots to break them in as training; While some nameless person got on a tread mill once (for 30 seconds) a few weeks prior to the hike and said "Screw it- it is too late to get into shape anyway."

2004 - Georgia and North Carolina

"Early this morning we savored our last moments in civilization and began our passage to the trail. We made it to Dick's Creek Gap prior to our estimated 8:30 am departure. This was a good start. However, with this crew it could not last. As we approached our starting point in the deep Georgia Mountains the skies began to look ominous which frightened the nameless two hikers on our seasoned team who failed to bring raingear. At this point, without driving an hour, our only option was the Hiawassee Gun store. As luck would have it they sold guns, knives, camouflage gear, Georgia Bulldogs sweatshirts and fortunately \$0.99 rain ponchos."

2005 - North Carolina and Tennessee

The following day Hurricane Katrina had passed us by. I threatened to go back first thing in the morning but the Park ranger did not recommend due to many falling tree's. We had lost power for several hours, which was extent of hurricane damage I saw. We passed the day going to church, eating, and playing double's ping pong. All the hikers tried to console me in this delay. The most poignant came from Streek, who acknowledged my disappointment but said it was the right thing getting off the trail. That was comforting, yet a little empty as he said, "Are you ok now, because I'm going back to the hot tub." He also said he was happy to go on, but half tongue in cheek said Giggles and Barfy needed the break. He also told me the story of his mom's reaction when he first mentioned the idea of a hike for Julianna. His Mom with sincere concern for her little baby boy suggested that we should just do a bake sale like normal people to raise money. That made me laugh. Our Gatlinburg detour was good for all of us physically and especially Barfy, who excelled in this forum and earned MVP for the Gatlinburg part of the hike.

2006- NORTH CAROLINA AND TENNESSEE

We arise in poor spirits. It rained hard last night and the pitter patter of raindrops aided most of us in our efforts to sleep. Unfortunately for me I had a miserable night. My knee swelled and ached and my other pain was on fire. Sometime during the night I remembered Barfy talking in his sleep. I could not comprehend him at first so I listened closer and closer. His words were faint and muffled but they eventually became clear to me. He repeated over and over again. "Are we done yet?, Are we done yet?"

Unfortunately not.

5 year's - A Look Back

