

JULIANNA'S HIKE / 2012 - ten years on the trail

Ten year Celebration



This picture says it all moments after completing our 10th annual hike on the Appalachian Trail.

Ten years is a long time to do anything, but we did it. For that reason, I wanted to make this year's experience extra special for the noteworthy decade long achievement. My first order of business was to make the commute to and from Virginia a little more enjoyable than usual. I recruited a few friends to drive us to the trail to accomplish this task.

En route I quickly learned adding two additional high school buddies (Joe Innes and Dan Castaldi) was a mixed blessing.

Unquestionably, it was comforting to have additional support on the journey. Alternatively, this also meant I had five adult delinquents on board instead of the usual three for the six hour commute to the Appalachian Mountains.

Of course, even though we had dedicated drivers, I am piloting the mobile party bus for the trip south to Waynesboro, Virginia. Needless to say, there were many rest stop breaks and many many more laughs in this memorable drive fitting for a ten year endeavor.

Our travel day ended with Barfy making multiple attempts to hurdle an upright rollaway bed in our hotel room. This was an unusual but appropriate way to start the final chapter of our decade on the trail. For the last ten years, Streek, Giggles and especially Barfy have infused levity where pain once dominated. Although they may be the most reluctant hikers to ever set foot on the Appalachian Trail, they have endured, made me laugh and helped restore my life in the process.



Thanks to them and to the grace of God, the burning pain I live is slowly being replaced by joyous memories one mile at a time. More importantly, this decade long endeavor served another purpose. It has allowed Julianna's spirit to live through us. This spirit has accomplished much and has truly made a difference in people's lives.

Thank you (Barfy) Murphy Barton, (Streek) Jeff Price and (Giggles) Dave Guyer for the last ten years and giving me something to smile about.

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Day 1

The six of us awake to a room in shambles. Remnants of a day long party are everywhere. This was truly a decade earned hiking celebration, which will continue for the week. Today, our high school buddies are hanging out to join the celebration. They are also dropping us off and picking us back up at the end of our first day hike. Yes, we are wimps, but after ten years I don't really care. Our first night on the trail will be back in our comfy double beds at the Holiday Inn Express. Truth be told, I need to do this to keep my aging hikers healthy. If I don't start making this hike a little more comfortable, I may run out of partners before Pennsylvania.

Our first day on the trail will be a doozy, taking us 17.9 miles from Dripping Rock on Skyline Drive to McCormick Gap in the Shenandoah National Park. Under any circumstance this is an admirable days effort for four under-conditioned individuals whose best athletics days are thirty years behind them. Hell...I can't even run the bases in a backyard wiffle ball game without my knee swelling. As a result, I don't feel too bad admitting our final words to our two drivers before departing this morning were, "See you at Wild Wings."

We begin our quest anew to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. As you can imagine my first thoughts are filled with mixed emotion as they are each and every year. I feel joy starting this journey with incredible friends, simultaneously, I also feel deep sadness recognizing why we are here. We stop to pray.



Our tenth annual hike on the Appalachian Trail begins with Psalm 23. I cannot tell you how many times I

read this Psalm in the days and months after Julianna died for heavenly distraction and needed comfort. "Even though I walk through the valley of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me." After ten years of hiking in memory of Julianna, I often give thought to these meaningful words.

**"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of death, I fear no evil;
For you are with me;
Your rod and Your staff - they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and
I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long"**

Our journey into wilderness begins in reflective silence. My contemplative moment is swiftly sidetracked when I enjoy a mouthful of spider web within the first quarter mile. I really hate that! Our first goal today will be Humpback Mountain at 3,250'. This meager 300' incline is a welcome beginning to our ten year celebration hike. Current weather conditions (overcast and cool) combined with the fact the bulk of our hiking weight is on the floor of the Holiday Inn provides for as easy a climb as we will face on the trail. After the quick climb, we begin a nine mile descent to Rockfish Gap on Interstate 1-64. On this long way down we transition from reflective to talkative. Mr Happy or Giggles as he is known on the trail begins, "I can't believe this is our tenth year. We have gone through so freaking much together." He is so right.

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Ten years creates a lot of memories



At the seven mile mark we break for lunch at the Paul Wolfe Shelter while a thunderstorm races overhead depositing enormous rain pellets on the shelter's metal roof. The resulting loud pitter patter helps soothe our stomachs while we consume the sandwiches Barfy insisted (once again) we purchase prior to our hike.

After our lunch break we push on and approach Rockfish Gap near the entrance of Shenandoah National Park. I am matched up with Barfy this time, who starts to get deep. He conveys to me his philosophy on getting old, "You know, you should work hard when you are young", he begins. I am not sure why he was going here. I think he may be busting my chops for quitting my job at the end of 2011. Nonetheless, Barfy points out, "You know your younger self is supposed to take care of your older self - you make money when you are young and use it when you're old." I tell him, "That is prophetic, but who takes care of your overweight and under conditioned 250 pound younger self." After I insult him I deservedly trip on a root and twist my ankle. He tells me, "Good, that's what you get for judging me."

We pass busy Interstate 64 at Rockfish Gap and begin a gradual 550' ascent over the next 4 miles into Shenandoah National Park. The overcast skies, which had gifted us a few passing raindrops, begin to unleash a relentless rain. We are now hiking in a torrential downpour, which will continue for the entire afternoon. Streek, forgetting to bring a poncho, hikes the entire afternoon in pouring and soaking rain. That's our Streek!



Our next stop is the Shenandoah registration kiosk, where we are required to register before entering the National Park. Two signs are noteworthy at the Kiosk. One says, "Leave no trace behind" (ie trash) the second is more of an eye opener: "**Attention backcountry visitors; Black Bear Activity notice.**" Not sure what this means for us, but I know Giggles is nervous.



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We are now marching in the Shenandoah National Park with zero visibility enjoying the view of our feet and little else. Nonetheless, I am comforted to be in Shenandoah, which according to legend means, "Daughter of the Stars." That is my Julianna. The pouring rain combined with the slick muddy trail is forcing all our attention straight to the dirt. At one point I look up from my muddy focus and see a bear in the distance through the deluge. I look again and realize I am hallucinating. The big bear is only Barfy the bear in a camouflage rain slicker.

Our day's final goal is McCormick Gap, which we reach by 5:30 pm. Our trusted drivers were scheduled to pick us up at this time. It was still raining and we suddenly feel very cold once we stop moving. Our drivers, who had a single task all day, were over twenty minutes late. I don't know what it is about all my high school buddies. They finally arrive. They are late because they wanted to bring wings from Buffalo Wild Wings for our twenty minute drive back to the hotel. The way these wings were devoured you would have thought we were in the woods for eight weeks not eight hours.

We return to our Shangri-La and enjoy a restful night at the Holiday Inn Express. Dinner on Day 1 was not freeze dried meals washed down with creek water but Soft Tacos from a mexican restaurant washed down with Corona. The ten year celebration hike is off to a very good start.

Day 2

Through the kindness of two friends we all slept on mattresses last night. Despite this luxury, we are all very sore from our 18 mile walk yesterday. Physically we are all good, except Streek's knee and my knee, which are hurting from one days effort. In addition, my toe nails



are already beginning to fall off, however, when your knee is about to give way at any moment you forget about a few inconvenient toe nails. It is all about perspective - and the struggle we face provides ample supply.

After our night in comfort, we pack our gear for the next six days on the trail. Always seeking the hard road, I repack my sleeping bag only to realize it is soaked from yesterdays rainy walk in the woods. Idiot!!! I could have just left it in the room but I stubbornly wanted some semblance of weight when hiking. We enjoy cereal, toast and hard boiled eggs in the lobby before grudgingly pushing off for the Appalachian Mountains. Oh, if it were only that easy. Before we back track to the Shenandoah's, we need to find Streek a rain poncho and food for the week. Streek returns with his three food groups: Candy Corn, Carmel Candy and Starbursts. We also need to get Barfy another hoagie for lunch. Mr. " I can't eat that freeze dried crap" Barfy needs a prepared sandwich for his first meal on the trail today. These guys are more needy (by a lot) than my eight year old son Joey.

After the mornings chaos, we finally reach today's starting point at 10 AM. We are truly pathetic. Our goal today is 15.8 miles and the Black Rock Hut. They call Shelters "Huts" in Shenandoah National Park.

We stop to pray. **"And so I tell you, keep on asking and you will receive. Keep on seeking and you will find. Keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."** Luke 11:9-10.

In other words be resolute in all you seek and do.

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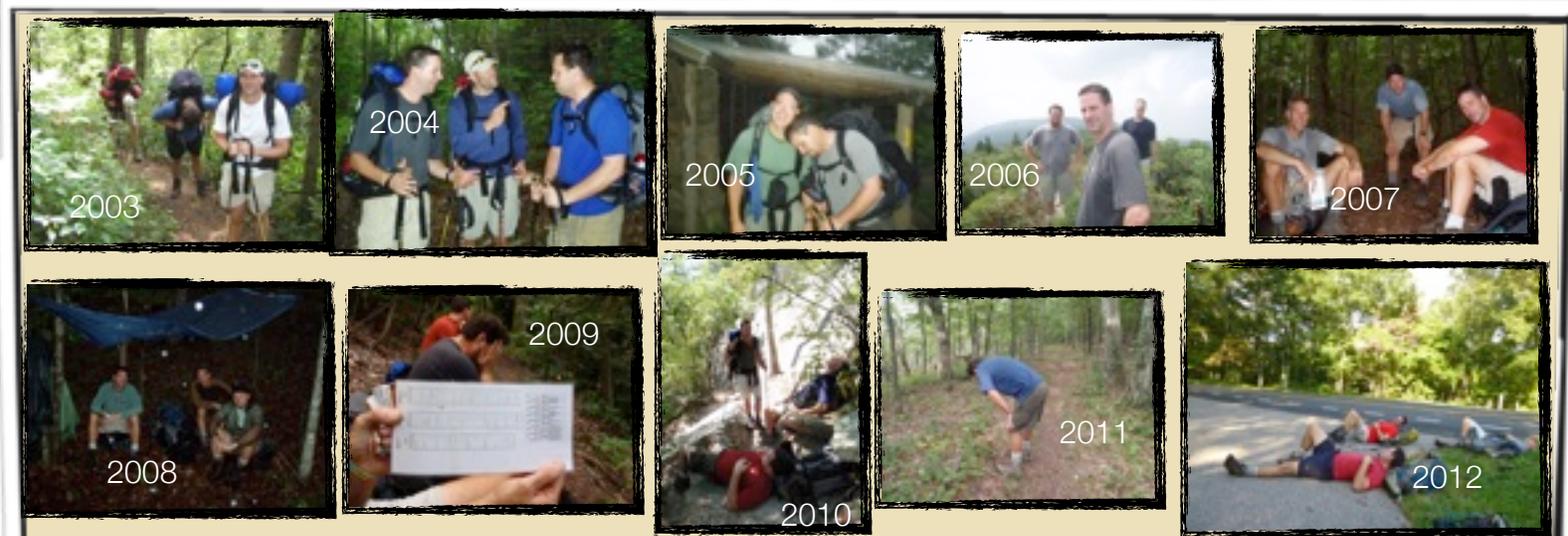
We finally depart our friends Dan and Joe. We head back to the woods with my mind in clutter. I have too many thoughts this morning (my life, my purpose, my family, my friends). I realize I need a clearer vision where I am heading. In the middle of my thoughts Giggles begins to chatter as he usually does. "You know to be anything in life you need a strong sense of self." I like this thought, tell me more. Giggles goes deeper. "You know first you need to be your own person and second, you need to commit to something. I can't stand apathy. We all need to believe in ourselves and do something. Personally, I can't stand trash. Since I can't stand trash I regularly do trail maintenance in my neighborhood and just pick up trash." I think it about. Wow...imagine if everyone stood for something and actually did something. The world would be a much better place with more people like Giggles. Probably a little happier too.

I continue my joyful jaunt in the woods with Giggles. We pass the menacing sounding Bear Den Mountain then traverse the less intimidating Beagle Gap and Little Calf

Mountain. At this point, we stop to rest. I hear Barfy, who still has remnants of Apple Jacks cereal in his belly say, "You know, this is almost enjoyable." If he only realized it was already 12:30 pm and we still had 11.6 miles to go, he may change that point of view.

We continue the hike over accommodating terrain finally stopping for lunch at Saw Mill Run Overlook on Skyline Drive. After lunch we face a series of 500 to 700 foot elevations and alternating declines. This was painful. Making matter worse, the elevation maps I supplied each hiker had four miles of steep incline/ declines missing. The out of shape team trusted my maps and were especially demoralized when learning of my error.

By 2:50 pm we were in the midst of our suffering when the sunshine made its first appearance of the week. It lifted our spirits slightly...very slightly. By 3:30 pm we were out of gas and still had 6.6 long miles to go. In ten years we have suffered immensely. I can't even begin to portray the struggle, but here is my effort.



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The trail we are walking is adjacent to Skyline Drive. We hear the sound of civilization so close but still so maddeningly far away. At 5:30 pm, we are exhausted and drained. A full pack on your back (unlike yesterday) really sucks. We pass a sign for the Black Rock Hut indicating 2.8 miles remain. I ask Giggles what time he thinks we will arrive. My most upbeat hikers turned on me when he says, "I don't know, I don't care, I just want to get there."

At just past 7:15 pm we arrive at our destination to a full shelter and camp site, which appeared to be occupied by a large extended family. We pass them by and just grunt. We do not talk to them, we do not cook dinner and we do not clean up. We set up our tent, took off our hiking gear and went straight to bed. By 8:10 pm, in the fading sun, we lay down for a needed nights rest.

Day 3

Early in the AM, I awake on my back in pain. I turn to my left side then immediately roll over to my right side. This routine is now repeated over and over again. I am wrestling with myself inside my sleeping bag trying in vein to find a position where I actually can go back to sleep. My knee, back, hips, and in fact everything are throbbing in different levels of dull and sharp pain. There is little doubt I am getting old. We have now completed two full days on the trail and I am thoroughly beat up. Mercifully, the sun rises before long and my hiking team starts to stir. Barfy tells us he now needs a pee jar as he can't muster the energy to get out of his sleeping bag anymore at night. The morning's progress is slow as usual. With each day we are getting started later and later. This morning we languish not ready to depart before 10:15 am. It is getting harder and harder to imagine us hiking ten years from now.

We stop to pray just outside of camp. **"This is a day the Lord had made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it"** Psalms 119:24.

We are especially glad for this day's modest 7.9 mile hiking goal. More importantly, we are staying at the Loft Mountain

Campground, one of the many full service campgrounds in Shenandoah. They have shower facilities, a washer, a dryer, and basic food stuff. In other words, it will be heaven to us.

Our first hike of the day is a heart racing 500' climb to BlackRock Mountain. We are completely exposed to a brutal morning sun. As the sweat pours out, I am realizing I much prefer rain.

Barfy is thinking about fluids as well when he asks, "Do you think they sell beer at the campground tonight?" We arrive at the

Blackrock, a tumbled mass of lichen covered blocks of stone with breathtaking views.

After our ascent we head back down this mountain talking about the past decade and our favorite memory of the trail. After ten years of hiking in the majestic Appalachians the consensus favorite memory for Giggles, Streek and Barfy is Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where we were forced to get off the trail in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.



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It is pathetic, but somehow apropos that their most fond memory on the trail is at a place not even remotely close to the trail. Their love of hiking is truly inspiring. Some of my favorite memories for the last ten years are below - definitely not Gatlinburg!!!

Sensing my disappointment in the groups selection, Barfy recounts that we went to church the next morning. He further states, "Isn't it sad that no one goes to church any more." Like anything in life you get out of it what you put into it. People don't want to put in the spiritual effort anymore. It is their loss.

Streek now puts his game face on. "We will crush these guys in Appalachian Horse Shoes tonight", he boasts. The ten year celebration party is back on. We have an extremely easy afternoon. We talk about simple things including best athletes we have ever known growing up. We all have different answers. Streek, of course, nominates himself.

We arrive at Loft Mountain Campground early in the afternoon. We wander aimlessly around looking for our reserved campsite in this noticeably quiet place. Apparently, people don't go to church or go camping anymore. I guess both are too difficult for this self indulgent generation. We find our site. It is a crappy location so we plop ourselves in another. We shower, clean our clothes and buy a six pack. Not necessarily in that order.

I walk around the campground trying to find any place to make a cellular call. I run into a fella named Dick from Pittsburgh, who directs me to a ridge overlooking a valley near the empty and



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obviously under used amphitheater. Before I depart, I learn a little bit about the man who is hiking the Appalachian trail alone. This committed soul was driving his car as well. He hikes the trail than walks back to his car and than drives back to the spot he just ended and then repeats the process. He is actually hiking double the miles. I feel bad for this guy. I can't help but wonder why he doesn't have anyone in his life that can help him. I think about my loyal friends who have already committed ten weeks of their lives to hike with me and Julianna. This commitment doesn't even factor in the ten hours of training they have collectively done in the last ten years either. I am a very lucky man!



Dinner choices are limited at this campground. We eat Baloney and cheese sandwiches with a Fritos side for dinner. Barfy compliments the meal. "It's pretty good for prison food." We finish dinner and play Appalachian Horse Shoes. Streek's afternoon pep talk falls on deaf ears. We are crushed by team Barfy and Giggles.

Day 4

We are now in mid-week form. After three days on the trail we are now finally loose...the cobwebs shaken off. Actually, we are just as pathetic as we were on Day 1, except we are really sore now. Adding to the discomfort is the temperature. It is extremely cold out this morning feeling more like late October than late August.

Barfy, in an anticipated move, is the first hiker out of the tent craving anything from the camp store that will remind him of his normal life in Canada. We all savor our microwaved breakfasts and delay our departure as much as possible clinging to civilization and access to chocolate milk.

Finally, at 10 am we depart. We stop to pray **"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring it's own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today"** Matthew 6:34.

Let's live in the moment, let's live to the fullest. I say this every year, but it does get more important. We are losing time.



On the trail, Barfy asks me for Advil for the fourth straight day. Note to self: Bring two of everything, one for me and one for Barfy.

Our first incline of the day is a doozy, but Shenandoah rewards hard work. We are treated to a beautiful scene at the apex of this mountain. We head north again for the day's 14 mile journey. We start talking about bears. According to the woman at the camp store this morning, a motor cycle driver ran into a bear last night in Shenandoah. Barfy, the motor cycle enthusiast, is especially empathetic to this unfortunate biker. Giggles changes directions and asks us if we know the Berenstain Bears - a bear family. I don't, but I immediately flash back to the last program I watched with Julianna. It was Little Bear, a poignant cartoon episode about a little bear and her family. I have trained my mind to deflect my sorrowful thoughts but I allow my mind to wander toward Julianna out here. In fact, I need it. I appreciate the memories and I miss my little girl. She would now be thirteen years old heading into eighth grade.

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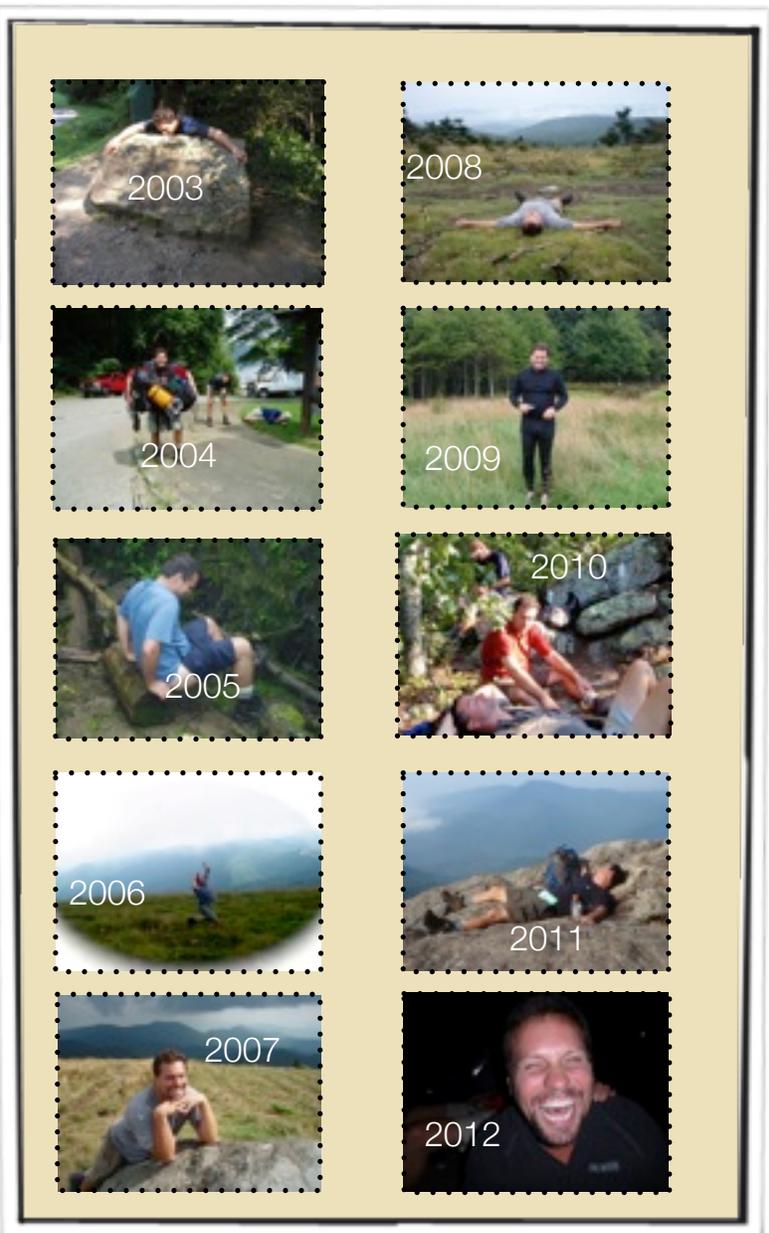
On the walk north I get lost in my thoughts of Julianna. I am in the lead responsible for our path. We run through the usual trail terrain including some overgrown sections I will refer to as the jungle. We finally stop at Ivy Creek. Giggles, who always seems to live life to the fullest, is hunting crayfish. It is now around 11 am. We begin the next section of the trail. I remain in the lead alone in my thoughts, which vary from hope to despair. My head is down on a flat section of nice dirt trail. My three cohorts are in unison behind me. Holy shit!!!! In an instant, I am one half step from running over the largest snake I have ever



seen on the trail. I stop and quickly retreat squealing like the wuss that I am. The huge rattlesnake is just laying across the trail, not moving. We hastily decide we cannot leave this snake in the middle of the trail for the next unsuspecting hiker to step on. Streek and Barfy jump into action. They start prodding this thing. It curls up in an attack position, rattles and lets us know who is in charge. We keep prodding it from afar. Finally, it slithers off the trail back to a coiled position under a dead tree limb. Good enough. Hopefully, no hiker decides to break here on the log it just curled under. We proceed forward scarred from our run in with danger. I am on high alert...every stump is a bear and every stick is a snake now.

We break for lunch at Simmons Gap. We talk and eat. Barfy gets ready to spit out a hocker but swallows it instead. I tell him that is disgusting. He says, "Hey I have no illusions, I know I am no prize." The day has become hot and steamy. There is no better way to

burn calories than hiking in conditions like this, especially when facing a 1,000' afternoon climb. Before lunch Barfy could barely walk after one break. This afternoon he is invigorated. He is nominated by Giggles as the hike MVP already. His newly found superman powers carry over to his off trail efforts too. He even offers to pump water for the team at our last water source of the day. Very self aware he states, "To be honest, it's about time I make up for many years of doing nothing." Maybe so, but Barfy has been a classic for the last ten years.



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After a painful afternoon, which included a day ending 600' climb, we arrive at High Top Hut. We set up tent, wash up, organize our packs, eat some nasty freeze dried buffalo chicken and tuck into bed by 7 pm, just in time to watch the sun set from within our cozy tent. After 4 days and 56 miles of hiking, there is no celebration tonight.

Day 5

We wake to the sound of a thousand cicadas in the throws of their mating call at High Top Hut in another abnormally cool morning. What are they communicating? Streek imagines a conversation, "Hey Stan, what do you think of the hot number on the oak tree?"

Barfy awakes next to his newest high tech campsite accessory...the pee jar. I know Barfy pretty well and I would say there is a fairly good chance he will accidentally take a swig out of that jar before long. This is the least of Barfy's worry today after looking at the hike elevation chart, which will take us over two difficult mountain peaks at Saddlebrook and Bald Face Mountains. He is justifiably quite concerned.

We prepare to leave camp and pray. **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him"** Hebrews 11:6

It is difficult not to contemplate your faith while hiking in the woods on a spiritual journey. By definition - Faith is believing in someone or something while being Faithful is showing steadfast devotion.

Do I have faith in God...sometimes. Do I have faith in my friends and family?...all the time. For me, it is hard to have unwavering faith in something you cannot see and at the same time can oversee such misery. Alternatively, my faith in my friends, family, Denise and my children is unquestioned.

Consequently, I am faithful to them first and God thereafter. This isn't sanctioned Christian doctrine. "First - Love God with all your heart and soul and Second - Love your neighbor as you love yourself." It is what it is, I am sure God will understand. If not, I think Julianna will put in a good word for me.



Our next move is a major descent from High Top Mountain to US 33. After this we begin the first of our two major climbs in this 11.7 mile day. In this descent we meet another hiker near High Top Summit, who tells us the hike down is a little rocky but not too hard. There is nothing more welcome on the trail than good news on the terrain ahead. On second thought, maybe an ice cold beverage left in a cooler in the middle of the trail would be slightly more welcome.



We descend 1,000 ft in the comfortable tree canopy finally reaching US 33, which is in bright midday sun. After our brief respite, we begin our quest for tonight's goal...Lewis Mountain Campground. We can tell no hiker

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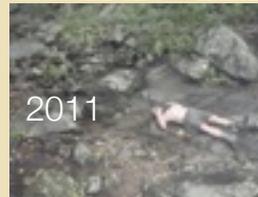
has been through this section of trail as Giggles, currently in the lead, is getting pummeled by cob webs.

On the 800' ascent we are all struggling due to the combination of heat and elevation. At one break Barfy comments, "You know you can really use these hiking poles to push off." After ten years, Barfy finally realized the poles are useful for more than Appalachian Horse Shoes.

Our next goal is the South River Camp Grounds. "Do you think they sell soda there?" My hiking team remains truly pathetic.

The final part of the day is excruciating. The route to Bald Face Mountain is quite rugged. This major up is causing my legs to go numb and I have no breath. I think I have Lymes disease. I tell Streek my thoughts. He says, "Don't worry you're just fat."

Although the end of the day was rotten, we arrive at Loft Mountain by 4 pm. By 4:30 pm, we are showered with beer in hand. All is good. Keeping with our theme of the ten year hike celebration we rented a cabin tonight with two bunk beds. Although our cabin had no electricity or running water, it did have four walls which meant we did not have to waste energy setting up the blasted tent. Day 5 of Julianna's Hike ends with an old fashioned hot dog cook out. Sheer joy usually emanates from simple moments like these. These moments were all made more meaningful because of the united struggle we just endured. Here is ten years of joy.



Day 6

The morning is clear, crisp and perfect for a 16.8 mile hike. We experience more simple joy today too...coffee, chocolate milk and donuts at the camp store. There we meet and say farewell to Mustang, a fellow hiker we met on the trail yesterday. From our first meeting I knew he was a good soul. On the trail you typically meet two kinds of hikers - reflective or crazy. He was reflective and genuinely appreciated our mission and the camaraderie of the four hikers. Upon our farewell, he felt compelled to share what he

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had learned in his life's journey. He said with conviction, "Tell people you love that you love them and laugh a lot." Appreciated advice from a good man on the trail.

We head for the woods when Streek meets up with a camper from Havertown, PA. I am eager to get going while Streek and Barfy are equally eager to delay hiking as long as possible. We wait continuing our pattern of starting our hike as close to noon as possible.

At last we leave camp and offer our daily prayer at the forest edge. **"For I know the plans I have for you; plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plan to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."** Jeremiah 29: 11-13.

After ten long years on this trail and accepting my life without Julianna, I am seeking something greater. My journey remains full of doubt and full of pain, but is still determined. I recognize that even though I am driven by personal fulfillment my greatest moments of peace and clarity are achieved when I am doing for others and in church with God. I remain hopeful I will find what I seek prior to Katahdin, Maine.

The first four miles takes us on a elevator ride...down 200';up 400; down 500' and then up 700' to Hazletop Mountain. The last part of this jaunt was a ball breaker over rocky terrain. After Hazletop the journey was more hospitable offering flat terrain for the next seven miles. As Barfy said, "This trail was tailor made for me".

What also was tailor made for Barfy were the many visitor centers available on the trail. On this pleasing part of the trail, Barfy could think once again. His first thought was not

how to find inner peace but how to find soda pop and burgers. Our first intersection with civilization is Tanners Ridge Road. Barfy decides this would be the quickest route to his happy place.



Consequently, he and his two merry men take off for their peace at the Big Meadow Wayside. After one mile or so they meet a car on the road and determine they are lost. They back track to me and we reconvene the march north. About one mile later, we come across the next intersection. I look at the map and realize the restaurant is over one mile away. I vehemently disagree we pursue this need for comfort, especially considering we are staying in a hotel tonight where we can consume all the soda and burgers we want. I am voted down once again. YOLO is the saying dujour. "You only live once", so off to wimpville we go. The walk to Big Meadow Wayside is straight up a steep hill. Arghhhh. After one mile we arrive. My three buddies sit down and eat in the restaurant while I stay outside next to a dog tied up to a bench. Me and the dog sit together in silent protest. Eventually they come out and offer a treat...to me not the dog. I am stubborn but not stupid so I eagerly consumed half of the black berry milkshake they offered.



We back track to the trail now making this 16.8 mile day closer to 19.0 miles. I am too practical for these guys. I used to have Giggles in my corner, but he turned a few years back and I am convincingly outnumbered now. Clearly, I must change with the times or hike alone.

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On our route north we pass dozens of deer just hanging out, "Like Bob your uncle", according to Streek. Speaking of Streek, his knee is quite worrisome.

The days prior to our hike I had been playing disk golf with my kids Joe and Nate. On the day we arrived for the hike Nate called to tell me he lost one of the disks in the woods behind our house, which I recount to my hiking buddies. This afternoon, while hiking in deep woods, I hear Barfy say, "Didn't Nate lose a disk golf frisbee?...I think I found it. That was one hell of a throw." Very funny.



As I recounted in the beginning, the laughter, joy and camaraderie Streek, Giggles and Barfy have provided has been transforming for me. It is true: a life is worth living as long as there's laughter in it. To the right is some of the many laughs they have given me over the last ten years.



There are five campgrounds in Shenandoah National Park. We will be staying in three of them to celebrate our tenth year on the Appalachian Trail. The final miles of our day provide a steady incline to the highest point in Shenandoah National Park near the Skyland Resort (Don't think Club Med but Howard Johnson's with a view) at 3,837', where we will be staying. This week was so accommodating for conveniences they even have vending machines on



the trail. See Giggles. We arrive for our final night's stay at around 5:30 pm. We have the perfect room, which boasted running water, electricity, views, outdoor furniture to soak in the majesty and a lawn to play Appalachian Horse Shoes. Today is the culmination of our ten year celebration. Cheers to us and Julianna.



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Day 7

We wake to the sweet sound of ESPN. Streek gets up first. "Hey there is a Starbucks here right? Perfect I can finally get my Chai Tea Latte after all." This is truly embarrassing to write down. After his latte we depart this beautiful location.

We stop and pray. **"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self control. Against such things there are no laws"** Galatians 5: 22 - 23.

Thank you Julianna for your guiding spirit in this ten year effort of love. Thank you for allowing me to have three devoted friends to assist me in doing good in your honor.

Our journey today is peaceful over well groomed trail. We begin to talk and reflect. Giggles says the usual, "What a week!"; Streek says, "This week has gone too fast", and Barfy says, "I feel great, in fact this may be the first week ever I actually gained weight on a hike".

The views are now stunning. We find a high mountain spring overlooking a picturesque mountain setting, which may be our most remarkable sight this week. Today we are also facing a cool westerly breeze, which adds to our final days exhilaration. It is



bittersweet feeling to know in 9.5 miles we will end our first decade on the trail. Our two friends Joe and Dan are set to pick us up making our final push even more meaningful...mainly because they were bringing beer. Our happy expectations are not met by the trail, which throws up more obstacles including loose rocks on every downslope. Barfy finds time to rock climb in the last push. Typical Barfy: Energy to hike is zero while energy to screw around is unlimited.



At 1 pm, we hear the familiar "hooty-hoot" call coming from below. We take our final steps of our ten year battle into Thornton's Gap met eagerly by our buddies. This is a good moment, a good day, a good week and an unbelievable decade. Thank you for getting us here Julianna and thanks to all of you who have followed and supported our journey.



JULIANNA'S HIKE / 2012 - ten years on the trail

The Shining Light - Julianna



Below are some of the wonderful people we have met on our ten year journey.



In ten years of hiking the Appalachian Trail, we have raised and donated more than \$644,000 through Julianna's Hike Fund.

Below is the entire list of organizations funded at some point in the last decade with our primary annual beneficiaries described in detail below.

**Variety - The Children's Charity
St. Patrick's
Institute for Safe Families
St. Bartholomew Outreach
Need in Deed
Gesu School
Mothers Home
Habitat for Humanity of Chester County
Caron Treatment Center**

**St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Outreach
Say Yes to Education
St. Mary's Family Respite Center
Women's Christian Alliance
Sisters of St. Joseph
Peter's Place
Intergenerational Center at Temple
Philadelphia Corporation for Aging
Center for Grieving Children**

[CENTER FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN \(WWW.GRIEVINGCHILDREN.ORG\)](http://WWW.GRIEVINGCHILDREN.ORG)

For the 10th year, The Center for Grieving Children is the main beneficiary of our hike. The Center is a place where children can go to find peace, comfort and support when everything around them seems lost. I currently serve as chairperson of the Board of Directors. The Center for Grieving Children is now located at 3300 Henry Avenue, Philadelphia in the East Falls section of the city. We have a new home and a new Executive Director, Darcy Walker Krause, who brings energy and passion everyday to our mission.



[THE BREATHING ROOM FOUNDATION \(WWW.BREATHINGROOMFOUNDATION.ORG\)](http://WWW.BREATHINGROOMFOUNDATION.ORG)

This is our 8th year supporting this foundation, which provides comfort to families suffering with cancer. BRF recognizes that a cancer diagnosis affects every aspect of a family's life; emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial. We strive to provide a family with whatever it is that will allow them a bit of "breathing room" from their daily struggle against cancer. The comfort this organization provides suffering families is truly inspiring and so appreciated by all the recipients. I currently serve as President of the Board of Directors for TBRF. We are very active preparing and delivering meals to families. If you have an interest in getting involved in this part of TBRF, please let me know.



[HOPEWORKS N CAMDEN \(WWW.HOPEWORKS.ORG\)](http://WWW.HOPEWORKS.ORG)

This is our fifth year of support. Hopeworks was established by Father Jeff Puttoff, SJ eleven years ago. They focus on youth ages 17 to 25, who have dropped out of school. They take teens, who live in Camden and teach them web development skills. At the same time they require kids to take basic course work to obtain a high school degree. Their goal is simple: Enhance the lives of inner-city Camden youth by expanding the learning opportunities and point the way to a future of hope. The heart of the program is technology training, which gives these kids a skill they can use throughout their lives. If you want to view their work go to [www.juliannahike.org](http://WWW.JULIANNAHIKE.ORG).

