

Julianna's Hike - 2014

Twelve year Journey on the Appalachian Trail

Annual Newsletter

After more than 1,000 painful miles through six formidable states we finally made it home. When we began this decades long endeavor in 2003, I never realized how difficult and satisfying reaching Pennsylvania would become. As seen below, the trials and tribulations experienced through our southern campaign has given our achievement greater value. Our sense of accomplishment in 2014 was further buoyed when we crossed the halfway point of the nearly 2,200 mile trail in Pine Grove Furnace, Pa.

During our homecoming week we also decided to share our struggle when we welcomed life long friend Dave Lafferty (Tuba) on Day 4. We had a full crew by Day 7, including the most important person in my life...Denise. This single day will always be remembered as the highlight of our first twelve years on the trail.

Our hike has evolved much since we started in Georgia. Our rituals of suffering and endurance have become rituals of joy and celebration. If you have followed our hike you have witnessed the transformation. The characters involved: Streek, Giggles and Barfy have slowly transformed the hike each year to better match their personalities. I have been reticent to change, but change we must. I have come to realize...

"To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."

In twelve years of hiking we remain far from typical Appalachian Trail hikers. This is ok by me. Although the hike remains a physical challenge, it has truly become a celebration. We celebrate Julianna and we celebrate four friends unwavering love.

Georgia



North Carolina



Tennessee



Virginia



West Virginia



Maryland



Pennsylvania



Appalachian Trail by the numbers

By week's end we had accumulated 1,129 trail miles averaging 13.6 miles a day over 83 days.

We have 1,060 miles until we will reach Katahdin, Maine. At the current pace we will attain our goal of hiking the entire Appalachian Trail in 78 days in the year 2026.

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Since 2003 we have donated more than \$900,000 through this hike.

Center for Grieving Children (grievingchildren.org)

Who we support

For the 12th 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 located at 3300 Henry Avenue, Philadelphia in the East Falls section of the city. Proceeds from this hike have been critical to the Center's impact on the community since 2003. Here is a list of current year successes: 1,323 total number of children served through grief support groups and post-crisis interventions; 158 parents and caregivers served through grief support groups; 252 professionals and caregivers reached through 9 training sessions, including The Center's FIRST training in Spanish!. Additionally, over 335 front-line professionals were trained in ways to better support grieving children from a trauma-informed perspective. Approximately 75% of our families live at or below the poverty line who cannot afford grief support services, except for the free services that The Center provides.



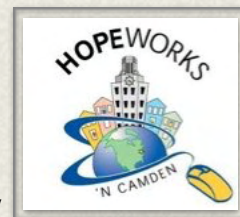
The Breathing Room Foundation (breathingroomfoundation.org)

This is our 10th 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. Each year we are expanding our services to more areas. In 2014, we supported 628 families representing 14% increase from prior year. To put our growth in perspective we helped 200 families in 2010 with steady increases each and every year.



Hopeworks N Camden (hopeworks.org)

This is our 7th year of support. Hopeworks was established by Father Jeff Puttoff, SJ. 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: Understand the trauma these young Camden adults have endured and attempt to enhance their lives by overcoming a life of stress through learning opportunities, which can point the way to a future of hope.



Take A Breather Foundation (takeabreather.net)



Our second year of support. The Take a Breather Foundation makes the dreams of children living with Cystic Fibrosis (CF) come true by providing a respite from the daily realities of their disease. Founded in 2012, by Matt McCloskey who lives with CF, the foundation has been an outgrowth of the Narberth CF Run which has been fulfilling the dreams of children since 1996, when they granted their first wish and sent a child to

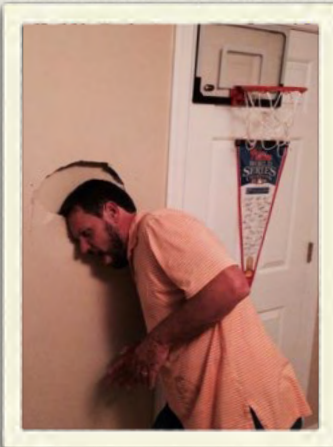
Disney World. Today, their partners in this mission include the care teams from three Cystic Fibrosis Centers: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia, and the Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital in New Brunswick, NJ.

Please go to juliannahike.org to read the entire 2014 hike newsletter or to donate to our cause.

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Let the hike begin

The hiker's celebrate before the hike even begins. Giggles and Barfy make the trek from Utah and Canada a day and half early to get this party started. The day and night of frivolity ends with a game of tackle basketball in our son's room. The results of their joyful spirit are not surprising as the fifty year old children leave a lasting memory for ten year old Joey.



We depart for Maryland at 7 AM on Day 1 of our hike in a mental and literal fog. This year we are so close to home we thankfully don't need to spend a night in a hotel prior to the hike. Instead, our hike driver, Joey Innes, delivers us to our launching point in Maryland this morning. Despite the excitement of reaching Pennsylvania trail in a few days everyone is apprehensive (as we are every year) for our annual week in the woods.

As we approach Harrisburg my jitters are compounded when Barfy yells out in alarm, "Holy #\$@!, I forgot my bag." My heart skips a beat. I glare at him with disdain when he responds mischievously, "Just kiddin." I love these guys and I hate these guys. We are heading south towards Gettysburg when the overcast skies open up in a fury. The prospect of hiking in rain adds to our feeling of impending doom. A hard rain continues as we pass Fredericksburg, Md. Fortunately, the downpour abates when we finally arrive at

Crampton Gap, Md at 10:00 AM .

The section of trail we are walking this year is steeped in American history. A civil war battle took place in this location in 1862. The result was a modest Union victory despite the fact they enjoyed overwhelming forces of more than 12,000 men vs the Confederacy's scant 2,100 men strength.

When we exit the car I am reminded it is tough getting old. I am sore before we hiked one step. How are we going to hike seven days in the mountains when a simple three hour drive leaves my joints stiff and hurting? I pop my first of many Advil.

We slowly gather our courage and gear before embarking on our twelfth edition of Julianna's Hike. We meet under the war correspondent memorial arch taking in the local history. We say goodbye to Joe and head to the woods to pray.



Julianna's Hike - 2014

12.3 miles

Day 1

Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey. To those who suffer, God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light"

These three friends have been my ray of light. I let them know it. Everyone acknowledges the sentiment with their own thoughts of the journey and the importance of our brotherhood. Barfy adds his own touch to the sentimental moment by apologizing for putting a hole in my wall in this delayed act of contrition. I accept his sorrow and feel my own as we hike another year for Julianna.

As I lead the reflective troops into the foggy mountains, I run smack into a giant cobweb, which envelopes my face. Crap! We march on in cool mountain air preparing for a four mile ascent. The climb is consistent but modest and not taxing our lungs yet. After the first mile, the climb is the least of our concerns when the slow drizzle becomes an Appalachian deluge. Giggles is the first to fight the onslaught with his new head piece, which I affectionately refer to as "dork gear."

During the rainy ascent I look around at our team in awe. I am amazed at their loyalty and commitment, but I am also astonished at how pathetic they are.

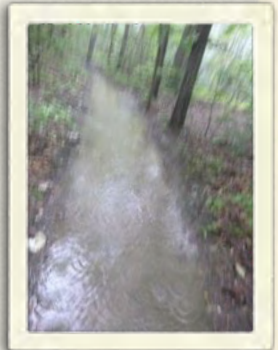


First, there is Giggles singing in the rain with his sporty umbrella hat. Next is Streek, who is getting utterly soaked since he has no rain slicker. I believe Streek in twelve years of hiking has never equipped his pack with rain gear. Lastly, there is Barfy the king of unconventional. This year he lost ten pounds before the hike, which is a sharp contrast to previous years when he typically

gained ten pounds before a hike. Nevertheless, on this first day when we did not need to carry any weight (Joe is picking us up at the end of the day for a night in a hotel), Barfy has nearly a full weighted pack on his back carrying all his food, clothes and sleeping apparatus negating the advantage of his new svelte physique.

As we trudge forward in the downpour, I check Streek, who is drenched. "I will take it, whether it is dry or wet or east or west...because I am the best" he confidently retorts. I move on to Barfy. He tells me, "I am comfortable and I will never embarrass myself to quit." He remains thoughtful and offers a second thought, "It's too wet...maybe we should skip the rest of the hike."

The rain is relentless forming giant pools on the trail we attempt to avoid by going off trail. This is not an ideal way to begin a hike. Most alarming is our boots, which are full of rainwater. I painfully visualize my pruning feet blistering as I feel a pronounced squishing sensation with each step.



Our suffering is put in perspective when we arrive at markers and headstones commemorating the Battle for Fox's Gap on September 14, 1862. At this location a fierce Civil War battle took place, resulting in the killing of 443 men including the Union General Jesse Reno and the Confederate General Samuel Garland. We read that the grief stricken General Garland had recently lost his wife and four year old son due to an influenza outbreak. I think he probably welcomed his fate.



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After seven miles of torture we arrive at Dahlgren Back Pack Campground praying for shelter. Our prayers are answered when we locate a large yellow block building containing bathroom facilities and a two foot overhang to protect us from the storm. Actually, the wind driven rain continued to pelt us. Streek proceeds into the men's room to eat lunch. Unfortunately, a hiking vagrant was living in there. Streek, not one to let decorum get in his way, proceeds to the ladies room. Slowly, my practical but wimpy team follows Streek. As usual I was the most stubborn to join waiting outside in the cold rain. After swallowing my pointless pride, I entered the ladies room and chuckle. Of course there is no place to sit in this tiny space, so there is my hiking team either sitting on the disgusting floor or on the campground toilets eating lunch. Without question this was the most abhorrent place we had ever eaten. On the flip side we were dry. Each of us take off our boots and empty more than a pint of water out of our shoes. Although we tried, our efforts to dry our boots with toilet paper had little effect.



After this break we push back into the rain. We walk roughly 200 yards to Turners Gap on the Old National Pike in Boonesboro, Md. I laugh out loud at the vision in front of us. We are looking at an old charming stone historic inn. In front, the giant marquis reads, Old South Mountain Inn. Food and Drink for All. Each of the hikers offers me a scornful look for not being aware of a restaurant on the trail, which has been serving weary travelers for 275 years. I admit...I am an idiot having done little



preparation prior to this year's hike. I rationalize my error with this thought, "A little suffering can never hurt these perpetual pleasure seekers!"

We cross the Old National Pike passing a beautiful old church, which appears out of place in this remote location. Thankfully, our hike moves forward in a light mist as the morning downpour abates. We now have a 500' climb to the next Appalachian Ridge, which is a proverbial walk in the woods with our current weight and the cooling mist. After another decline, our next objective is the Washington Monument built in 1827 to commemorate our national patriarch.

En route to the monument we pass signs telling the incredible accomplishments and sacrifices of our first President from when he started in 1753 as an officer in French and Indian War until his last year of service in 1797 as our 1st President. He lived a life of service. This country would never be what it is today without George Washington and all the wonderful people that followed in service to our country. Appropriately, we pass a group of Army Cadets in training fatigues on a run to the monument. Barfy thanks them for their service.

We reach the monument and ask a gentleman to take a photo. Barfy says, "Don't screw it up," as he held up the camera. His wife coolly answers, "I think he has this, he is a professional photographer for a living." We were silenced. In the end, he did screw it up...it's both crooked and cut off at the top.



The next few miles provide rolling terrain in a very easy walk. (our theme for the week) Our final goal is I-70, where we will end this day. Joe, who spent the day at Antietam National Park, is dutifully waiting for us. By 5 PM, our first day is complete. We will celebrate tonight in Hagerstown, Md.

Julianna's Hike - 2014

18 miles

Day 2

The rising sun greets us this morning through the open drapes of a Hampton Inn. I know we are pathetic, but the team is happy and together. As Barfy always says, "I signed up to hike this trail, not to be tortured every night." As the sun glimmers, I look out feeling so lucky these three friends are with me today. We are all right around 50 years old and most definitely on the downward slope of life. It is a good time to be reflective and to appreciate the blessings given. I am blessed and I know it. We walk downstairs to eat the free breakfast...adding to our blessings.



We load up our gear and head to a local store to pick up fresh bottled water. Barfy avoids water and buys two sodas for the day. I can almost guarantee he will be asking us mid day if anyone has extra water. After a five minute drive we arrive back at the intersection of I-70 and The Appalachian Trail. We begin the march north wearing wet back packs and boots still drenched from yesterday's downpour. We walk away from the noise of the highway to reflect. We pray for gratitude.

"Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude."

The hike north is on a level 6' wide trail giving us the opportunity to walk side by side. Me and Streek talk and walk. I think to myself what can be more meaningful than walking in the deep woods encased in



massive trees and green foliage with a life long buddy. I am grateful for this moment. The gratitude quickly dissipates when the easy walk changes to a challenging 500' incline into dense woods. I am reminded life is like this hike. Things are great one moment and a challenge the next. Considering we have hiked hundreds if not thousands of mountains, I am better prepared for the next obstacle this trail provides. I realize that constantly challenging yourself allows you to be ready for the unknown challenges ahead. Challenge yourself daily and nothing life throws at you will feel so overwhelming.

Unlike yesterdays wet conditions, the sun is shining today, filtering through giant trees making the sea of life around us dance with wondrous shades of green. The temperature is a comfortable 70 degree or so.

Me and Giggles are now matched up as a pair. We talk about old memories when he starts to sing the words and clap the theme to Pharrel Williams, "Happy." Giggles is blessed with one of those personalities that lives a life of undeniable gratitude not even remotely caring that I think he has absolutely no talent as a singer.

The rocks are now becoming more prevalent on the trail. Giggles quips, "We must be in Rockville, Maryland." He now starts to sing another song out of tune, "Don't go back to Rockville" from REM. Life sure is happy in Giggles' world.

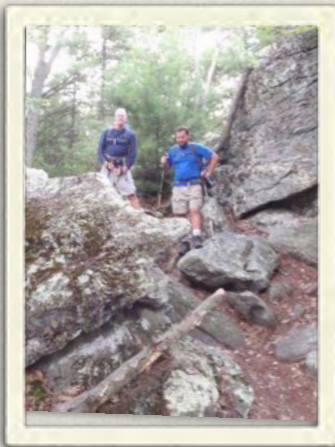


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Although the sun is shining, we have not seen blue sky for over four hours in the dense woods. Consequently, when we exit the trees into an open grassy pasture in Western Maryland our spirits are buoyed. Comments ensue, "Alleluia" and "What a breath of fresh air." The fifteen minute walk through fields of corn and blooming summer flowers is exhilarating. I am reminded once again, when you walk through darkness it makes you appreciate the light.



We re-enter the woods and continue the quest north. We crest Buzzard's Knob (names are so cool) and then descend into Warner Gap, which has a lovely flowing creek that makes this spot an ideal place to rest our weary bodies. After some laughs we march to Ravens Rocks (another cool name) where we traverse huge boulders on a formidable incline. We are all pushing our lungs on this awkward climb over the rocks. "This is Nuts" and "Harrowing" were words to describe this section of trail. After walking only a mile we break again. Our pace has slowed to a crawl. We are struggling this afternoon but are mentally lifted by the knowledge we will have another celebration tonight.



At 5 PM, we finally arrive at our destination at Pennmar, Maryland, which at the turn of the century was known as the Coney Island of the Blue Ridge, with a luxury resort hotel, amusement park, roller coaster, etc.. That is long gone. Only an open pavilion and a large grassy field remain. Today, a large festive picnic is taking place on this Sunday afternoon.

As we stand at the edge of the park we meet Nacho, a middle aged Mexican man who sprinted past us on the trail a few miles back. Streek says, "Yo you didn't make me feel good when you sprinted past me on the trail" Nacho apologized. He then asks us about the trail and all the fancy gear we are carrying. "Does it cost anything to hike on the trail?" he says. We let him know you just need to strap on your boots and go. Nacho, who was here today for the picnic, was an immigrant working on local farms. He told us he would like to take his church group on the trail to experience the outdoors. Hmm...he has it figured out. He is a thoughtful man who wanted to help others. I liked this guy immediately and insist I take my picture with him.



Now tonight's celebration begins. Giggles' fraternity brother at Indiana University of Pennsylvania has come to sweep us away from the trail for the night. On the way to Jason's house with cool beverage in hand Barfy relaxes and says, "This is the way all our hiking days should end." Jason and his family treat us to a hearty meal. We gorged on steak and beer while regaling all our trail experiences to his entire family. We were living another trail dream for this night.

At the end of this day on my comfortable bed I read my notes and quotes. I found one I appreciated.



"Without wealth you lose nothing, without health you lose something, without character you lose everything"

Julianna's Hike - 2014

18.1 miles

Day 3

The smell of Eggs, Hash Browns, Bacon and Peach Cobbler greet us this morning. The four hikers line up for a real country breakfast prepared by Jason's wife DeAnn. We ate in reserved silence when DeAnn commented, "You guys look serious." "We just know what is ahead of us," Giggles reflects. Streek confirms this feeling and adds, "I am anxious about this hike and can't wait until we get through it." I am also uptight, but mostly due to our procrastinating at this cozy home. We have an 18.1 miles day ahead of us and need to get a moving.

On the way back to the trail we pass several small towns whose homes had confederate flags in the front windows. We are north of the Mason Dixon Line (Jason lives in Pennsylvania) and the spirit of the old Confederacy pervades here. I was so intrigued by this I learned later that many of the counties in Pennsylvania west of Harrisburg actually supported the south during the civil war.



We arrive back at Penmar. We say goodbye to Jason, our new friend and another trail angel. We stop to pray.

"Live simply, Love generously, Speak truthfully, Breathe deeply, Do your best and leave everything else to the powers above you"

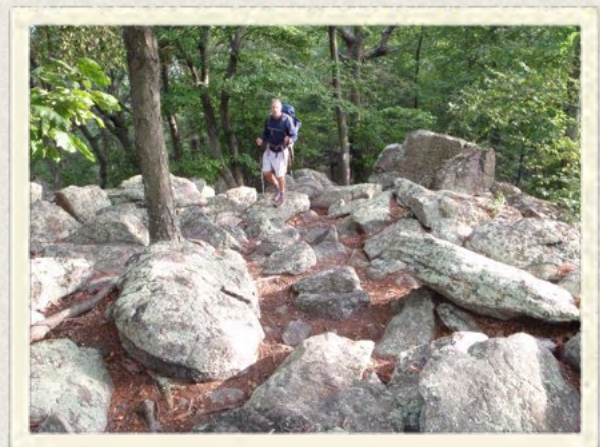
Barfy ends the prayer with "Lady of victory pray for us, and carry us on your wings." At 10:15 AM we depart excited to reach our home state of Pennsylvania on the Appalachian Trail. This has been a long time coming. Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and soon Maryland will be behind us. Pennsylvania here we come. We walk through the rest of Penmar Park enter the woods and begin a huge descent. I am on the lookout for any sign delineating the Pa/Md border, but cannot find one. We all struggle, but Streek appears most fatigued. We hit rocky terrain when Giggles screams. I am thinking he must have been bitten by a snake with the vocal outburst. As

we approach, Giggles is writhing in pain as he rolled his skinny ankle. He looks at me with disgust. I seem to have uncanny ability to bring out contemptible stares from my three hiking friends. Though it wasn't me he was mad at this time, he was mad at himself. "I jinxed myself. I was just thinking how great I felt before this ankle rolled"

After two full days of hiking my body is noticing some discomfort too. My left ankle, left knee, right knee and right middle toe are all areas of focused pain. The thoughts running through my head this morning jump from the pain in my body to the pain in my heart. My thoughts of Julianna are always present during this hike. At times they are loving happy thoughts, but at other times they are sad and remorseful. I can't help but think what life would be like with Julianna here. At this moment I miss her and I am just plain sad. We pass a thru hiker who redirects my sad thoughts to the stink he is carrying. Wow! I don't think he has showered since Maine.



We break after five miles of hiking. I am still waiting for the Pa/Md sign. Frustrated, I finally pull out my map. I look closely realizing we passed the border at Penmar Park. I am truly an idiot. They call it PennMar for a reason.



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After all this fun, the real challenge begins. Today is an 18 mile marathon. Giggles reminds me I promised last year we would have no hiking days in excess of 14 miles for the remainder of the hike. I lied...in fact we have another 18 mile hiking day tomorrow too. Our next stopping point is Old Forge Park where we enjoyed a simple energy bar lunch on picnic tables in a quiet setting. Streek and Barfy enjoy the afternoon sun. By the time we depart it is 1:48 PM with 11.7 miles of hiking remaining.



We need to hoof it if we want to reach Caledonia State Park before dark. This will be a wonderful camp site ripe for another celebration night. There is a pool, a shower, a snack bar and most importantly, our friends, Jim Leslie (Les) and Dave Lafferty (Laff). Les is dropping off Laff, who willingly wanted to hike with us for the remainder of the week. He must be mentally challenged.

The first three miles of the afternoon hike offer a 1100 ft elevation over horribly rocky terrain. We are back in the Appalachian grind. We alternate between hiking on flat soft dirt terrain to hiking on mountain boulders. By the time we reach PA 233, Barfy has had enough, "I need a pop." We are pressed for time as it is almost 5 PM. We have 5 miles left in our day, but that doesn't concern Barfy. What concerns Barfy is his need for sugared carbonation. At the intersection of 233 and the Appalachian Trail, there was a gated facility in the middle of know where. I asked him, "What are you going to find in there?" He had no response, but just walked away vanishing into the strange building. Giggles looks at me summing it up, "He is incredible." We wait 20 minutes before Barfy returns with three sodas. Although misguided the man is determined. I was saving the next quote for a meaningful hike revelation but it does fit here.

"Nothing can resist a human will that will stake even it's own existence on his purpose."



I am convinced Barfy could find a soda anytime or anywhere.

After the unnecessary break, we need to push hard to reach our destination before the coming darkness. We walk with renewed vigor over rocky Appalachian trail. The thought of a pool and snack bar help maintain our motivation. By 7 PM, we find the trail leading to Caledonia State Park, located in a pretty setting bisected by a wide flowing creek. It is all good, except for a few facts. The pool is closed. The snack bar is closed, and our friends are nowhere to be found. A little disappointed we call Les and Laff. The boobs are running behind schedule but should be here within 20 minutes. Barfy overhearing our conversation asks the most important question in his world. "Do they have beer?"

I repeat the question, and hear silence on the other end of the phone. I tell Laff, this is not a good way to start your hiking career with four seasoned hikers. Forty minutes later... we are eating pizza and drinking beer. Ok...maybe the new guy has potential.

We find a camp site with a picnic table and begin the process of setting our tents for the first time in a year. We spend the rest of the night talking in the darkness with Barfy's portable boom box providing celebratory background music. At one point, the ever competitive Barfy asks Laff, how much he had trained. Laff responds, "Not Much." Barfy says, "Good I don't want you showing me up." The five of us giggled and laughed in this memorable evening celebration. Barfy was particularly entertaining offering a compelling rendition of Ozzy Osbourne's "Crazy Train." Now this is the hike he envisioned when he offered the idea of hiking the Appalachian trail thirteen years ago.



Bringing a fifth wheel (Laff) is awesome, but does add complications. With the addition, we now have one too many guys for our four man tent. Laff had brought a one man tent for himself, which I dutifully stole from the rookie.

Julianna's Hike - 2014

10 miles

Day 4

We finally wake up in the wilderness. I unzip my tent and proceed to reconnect with my four brothers. I let Barfy know I had a great night sleep despite your remarkable snoring all night. He responds, "You didn't hear me snore, that was Laff, I didn't sleep all night because it sounded like the autobahn in our tent." I ask the new guy how he slept. He said it was nice (oblivious to the ruckus he created), but I wouldn't call it sleeping. It was more like a series of 15 minute naps throughout the night.



We pack our belongings and eat a harried breakfast. At breakfast Laff complains that Giggles is being mean to him. I tell him, "What do you expect pledge? your pathetic." He confirms my assertion when he pulls out a tube of sunscreen and starts applying lotion. I look at him incredulously. "You are aware we hike in the woods right?" Rookie!

We stop to say a prayer.

"Everything will fall into place eventually. Until then learn what you can, laugh often, live for the moments and know it's all worthwhile."

We also give thanks to our friend, who made the effort to join us on this journey. Streek, Giggles, Barfy and Jules have hiked as a team together for 79 days from Georgia through Maryland. On our 80th day on the Appalachian Trail and our first day of hiking in Pennsylvania we have a new addition.

We march off in Julianna's honor leaving the quiet Caledonia State Park behind us. The park once housed Caledonia Ironworks owned by Thaddeus Stevens, an outspoken abolitionist. During the civil war, the confederates made it a point to burn this place to the ground on their way to



Gettysburg. Giggles, "The goofy mentor," immediately takes Laff under his wings as we walk through a rhododendron thicket describing the Appalachian Trail experience as they walk together. This is "a blaze," describing how we follow the white 2" x 4" rectangles painted on trees, post and rocks to keep on the correct trail. I can't help but laugh. Giggles is a really good guy. Me, Barfy and Streek, would say nothing. Our collective thought would be..."He will figure it out, and if he doesn't he is a moron."

This morning we will have a gentle 1,000 ft climb over three miles. This was not the tormenting hike we sought for our pledge, but it had to do. When we crested our first mountain of the day I looked back and noticed Laff had a serious but unconcerned expression on his face. We pushed the pace, but to no avail. Laff remained strong. Barfy, looks over at me and says. "Hmm...maybe I am not that tough." As we learned later, Laff is a good actor. He told me, "I thought I was going to collapse after one of these steep mountains, but didn't want to give you the satisfaction to realize my pain." That is not cool by the way...I need material for this newsletter.

We break at Quarry Gap Shelter. While getting himself into his typical prone position in this decorative shelter complete with hanging flower baskets, Barfy squeals as a big juicy spider saunters over to his face. He gets up slightly embarrassed. "I act tough around Nicol, not around you guys," he admits. After the brief break, we pass an elderly gentleman collecting mushrooms on the trail. He is carrying several huge mushrooms, which he describes as an Appalachian delicacy. We have passed hundred of these monster shrooms along the trail often using them as target practice for our swinging hiking poles as we pass. I imagine we may think twice the next time we want to play samurai.



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Our 1,000 ft climb is behind us. We now have four miles of generally flat hiking. Although this is an easy hike, we are starting to see kinks in Laff's armor. He admits that his shoulders are hurting. The opening gives us what we are seeking. "Quit your belly aching pledge," we offer unsympathetically.

Next, we arrive at a pivotal point in our journey. We have officially completed 50% of this 2,189 mile trail. This is truly a moment to remember. It took us nearly twelve years, but we did it. Congratulations to Barfy, Streek and Giggles. Also, thank you to Laff, who added some value to our hike by becoming the official hike photographer of the four of us



We hike in quiet formation. In the past we usually pair up, but with five people there ends up being an odd man out. I am not sure if I should take this personally, but that man out appears to be me. This is my time for more reflection. Most of the detailed memories of Julianna's life have faded. The feeling of loss and love have not faded. Thankfully, this journey has given me time to process much of these feelings. Although we celebrate her love and our friendship during this hike as I walk over rocks on the trail in the deep forest landscape I can't say I have found any answers to guide me in the future. I am reminded of what a mentor told me a few years back. *"Don't think too much about where your life is leading, your destiny will end up finding you."* I have tried, but I can't say I have always followed this advice. At times I know I have over thought every aspect of my life since that horrific day in October, 2001 and what it has meant to my life and my families life. I know many wonderful things have emerged from this tragedy, but I certainly have not found the peace or answers I seek. I think I should go back to the simple advice I had given my son Nate playing football against bigger and faster players. If you learn how to work hard and keep making little strides every day, every day...things will work out for you. That is the plan.

The day is sunny, crisp and comfortable. A good day to be hiking, finding some peace in nature and calling your dental office. It must be about 2:30 (tooth hurty) as Streek needs to deal with a patient in pain. The three of us move ahead. To my surprise the new skinny Barfy is a force on Day 4, when he normally would be tiring and complaining. He has been leading the procession most of the day. It is nice to see him turn his greatest quality, determination, into something not based on consuming beer or soda. His focus does have a downside. We pass through one of the prettiest pine forest groves I have ever seen. It was a great moment to enjoy nature and the beauty it possesses, but not for Barfy. As he told us later, "I just wanted to get to the shelter and take a nap."



Although our terrain was easy, our 4th day on the trail was no walk in the park. We had an 18.1 mile day (with full packs) after finishing an 18 mile day yesterday. Even if we were walking around a track in gym shorts and a tank top, 36 miles in two days would have made us incredibly sore. As I write this I think I understand Barfy's true motivation...the new guy. He did not want to be a more incompetent hiker than Laff. I say, whatever works go with it. Barfy propelled us to Birch Run Shelter in record time.

We collected wood for a fire and set our tents by a babbling brook within minutes of arriving at camp. Barfy, true to his word, was napping as soon as he blew up his mattress. The rest of us enjoyed freeze dried Lasagna and gummy worms for dinner. We were so tired we went to bed at 7 PM well before dark.

As I lay in my solo tent I thought about a few things. 1) Hiking in PA is pretty easy so far 2) Sleeping next to a running stream is awesome 3) I really like being in this tent away from the snore sandwich of Barfy and Laff 4) The new guy is much more noisy than Barfy 5) The new guy needs a trail name and 6) I am glad I am here with these guys and Julianna.



Julianna's Hike - 2014

10 miles

Day 5

The mountain stream is gurgling just outside the tent when I open my eyes to see the inviting morning light shining welcomingly into my temporary home. A light rain is cascading off the tent while hundreds of cheerful birds chirp away in the surrounding forest. The scene is heavenly until the peace is interrupted by twin motors in the adjacent tent. Who brought the Indianapolis 500 to the Appalachians? Barfy is a prolific snorer, but Laff makes him sound like a little baby cooing.

Eventually the storm inside and outside the tent pass. After twelve hours on our air inflated mattresses we unzip to the outside world. The combination of the running water, cool mountain air and our exhaustive state made this night's sleep epic.

Breakfast is comprised of all fruit...Cherries, Oranges and Lemons. The package of Mike and Ike's is consumed heartily. Finally, Giggles required more sustenance. "Hey pledge get me some oatmeal," he implores to the new guy. Laff is not intimidated by the bullying and hands back the Mike & Ike's.



We gather our gear, which is now wet and spread across the camp site. I am writing notes about the day when Barfy comes over to me and asks for my pen. I hand him the pen, which he immediately takes apart and places the end of the inner ink cartridge into his ear. The ear wax in the cartridge was too much. I tell him to keep the pen in disgust. I would rather not have notes than write with that thing. You will notice less fact based writing going forward.

We pray before departure. *"I have never met a person whose greatest need was anything other than real unconditional love. You can find it in a simple act of kindness toward someone who needs help. There is no mistaking love. You feel it in your heart. It is the common fiber of life, the*

flame that heats our soul, energizes our spirit and supplies passion to our lives. It is our connection to God and to each other"

Yes, I will do my best to love Barfy. He also will love me today. We have a remarkably easy 10 mile day including only two minor inclines of several hundred feet.

Consequently the hiking pace was blistering today.



I ask Giggles, How was the sleeping between Barfy and Laff? Giggles didn't seem to mind. "You know Jules," he said, "It doesn't matter. I am just honored to be hiking with you." The honor is all mine.

We take this leisurely walk with a singular purpose. We must identify a trail name for Laff. Several high quality names are thrown out. Turtle: His familiar high school nick name, which many people still call him. No; Rookie: Referring to his big league status. No; Surf: This is the name Barfy has been lobbying to acquire for the last five years so giving it to Laff seemed entirely appropriate. Possible; Adonis, Hercules and Rock Star: These were all names offered by Laff himself. Definitely not: Finally, Tuba: The largest instrument in the brass family that belts out loud unpleasant sounds while being larger than it needs to be. (See Laff's belly) Bingo. Tuba is born to the trail and welcomed heartily by everyone, except Laff. Barfy quips, "Don't fight it Tuba just accept it."



Julianna's Hike - 2014

I walk on in wonder of my blessings. I think about my surroundings and realize how precious this moment is. I will pass by these trees and walk over these rocks and never see them again. Every thing in my path and everything along this journey is a gift to be appreciated.

At 1:50 PM, we reach our goal at the Pine Grove Furnace and the Ironmaster Mansion. Like much of the Appalachian Trail, Pine Grove Furnace is a step back in time. The furnace actually made bullets and cannon balls for General Washington's

Army during the revolution. The entire town, including company store and housing, were created by profits from this furnace. In fact, it made so much money for the owners they constructed this beautiful mansion we are staying in tonight in 1829. Unfortunately, the town is not only old but dry. It may seem the hike members have a preoccupation with beer, but we are living by a hiker code. *In wine there is wisdom, in beer there is strength and in water there is bacteria.* The closest consumable liquid (see beer) is twenty minutes away by car. As you would expect, this is a small obstacle for those seeking strength. Streek and Barfy are built for this challenge and camp out in front of the small country store at the Furnace. Streek's

charm and Barfy's persistence are a formidable combination. They convince a young couple to drive them the distance. The good samaritans were off work for the day and came to this place to scout locations for a day trip for the youth they helped. The two actually were working with addicted youth at the facility Barfy barged into the day before for soda. (It actually was a drug

treatment facility). I did find it ironic that counselors dealing with addicts take hikers to get beer.



Nonetheless, we were not complaining. It was a festive afternoon in a beautiful location...quite suitable for another celebration. A nice walk on the trail ended with a nice night in a mansion. We celebrated the halfway point on the Appalachian Trail with pizza and ice cream on the covered porch of this incredible building. Later, we even toured the building and inspected the trap door where runaway slaves hid during their trip on the underground railroad.



Julianna's Hike - 2014

15.5 miles

Day 6

"Fear Less, hope more, eat less, chew more, whine less, breathe more, talk less, say more, love more and all good things will be yours"

If we all lived by this proverb, life would be a much better place. We wake on the bunkbeds at the Iron Master Mansion. I walk out to the covered patio in front and take a seat in the morning sun. Humming birds are dancing between the hanging plants flying a perfect figure 8 formation around two porch posts and stopping on occasion to suck the nectar from a flower. This was beauty in its purest form. All good things are mine right now.



After my morning breakfast, my hiking buddies join me on the porch. Instead of enjoying nature they begin mending their blisters. Barfy's feet look like ground beef. I have to admit he has endured more pain than anyone on this hike. He is one tough man...although he does remain a buffoon. At 9:15 AM we depart Pine Grove. We walk past the 200 year old furnace in Pine Grove State Park and end on a long flat tree lined trail heading back to wooded mountains. As we usually do, we end up meeting some interesting people. This latest fella took our group photo, which he believed earned him the right to hike with us. For the next several miles he did not shut up. We are generally welcoming to all, but this guy offered nothing but judgements and arguments. Barfy, never one to shy from a pointless debate, kept egging him on. Thankfully,



he liked to talk more than hike and peeled off when the hike became more strenuous.

We walk on through Pennsylvania woods tackling this major incline. At the top of the hill, we face a soothing cool breeze. Tuba looks over at me to let me know he really appreciates the cool air. The simple things have meaning. I think Tuba is getting this trail thing.



Although we have a long 15.5 mile hike today, I have one thought on my mind...my son Jack. Our final night on the trail will be special. Jack and friends Dan Castaldi and Les are due to meet us at mile 13.4 on Whiskey Spring Road for the final 2.1 miles. I am very excited to see Jack. Each and every day I give thanks to have him in my life. The joy he has given me is incalculable and having him be a part of Julianna's Hike for the first time will be a lasting happy memory.

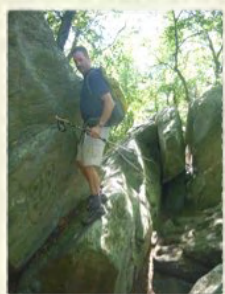


Julianna's Hike - 2014

The terrain is now back to hospitable. The pace is brisk as we eagerly seek our intermediate goal at Whiskey Spring Road. Barfy stops in the middle of this latest campaign to make a business call, which I dutifully admonish for doing. "Hey I can't make living hiking," he quips. A truer statement was never made. On our next leg we hear from the noticeably quiet Tuba, who we have learned generates most of his noise while sleeping. "My left foot is killing me," he informs the other hikers. We collectively bust his chops for being a wimp. We hear little from Tuba for the remainder of the trip during waking hours.



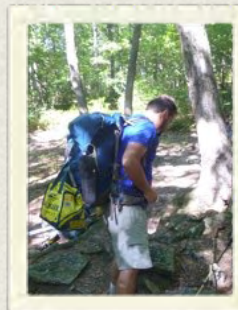
We break for lunch on a train track. We are grateful we did not take Streek's advice of eating on the flat terrain of the tracks when a huge freight train passes just as we finish our meal. We subsequently walk over State Route 94 in Mount Holly Springs. We walk past an auto repair business, which makes me keenly aware our hiking experience will be different in the more populated northern half of the trail.



We head back to the woods to find a major rocky incline. Our exhausted bodies feel the awkward conditions as the rock formations begin dampening our vulnerable spirits. We finally reach the top of this 600' painful incline and begin the descent to Whiskey

Spring Road. At 3:40 PM we reach the road to find Dan, Les and my boy Jack there to greet us. Seeing Jack, my closest connection to Jules, is overwhelming to me. A picnic commences on the trail. We have an early dinner comprised of hoagies, pizza and Land Shark. This was surreal... celebrating with all these people I love

in this setting. After thirty minutes of laughing and consuming we depart for our final nights resting spot at Alec Kennedy Shelter. Everyone carries the remainder of the picnic with Barfy



taking the most precious cargo. He ties the bag cooler of beer to his backpack. The next 2.1 miles prove to be a challenge. The heavy food in our bellies and beer in our backpacks make the undulating and rocky terrain a serious challenge. I look back at this rag tag group and notice the struggle with Dan wearing his work blue jeans looking most uncomfortable. The 2.1 miles went on forever. In fact we never found the shelter location and ended up settling on the edge of a creek to make camp. We gathered wood, set up our tents and start the next celebration. This was another memorable evening complete with an Appalachian Horse Shoe tournament. The one major downside of the night was our sleeping arrangements. Two of the hikers did not have sleeping pads, Jack did not sleep at all, Danny slept on the ground, Streek froze in his single tent while Tuba, Barfy and Giggles attempted to share their pads with Les by turning the pads sideways. The result: The worse nights sleep any of us can remember.



Julianna's Hike - 2014

11.9 miles

Day 7



Since we didn't actually sleep last night, we didn't need to wake up. Everyone is out of the tent at first light. It is so blasted cold this morning Dan lights a fire to warm the eight hikers. Despite my lack of rest or maybe because of it, I am at peace today with my friends and Jack. I truly don't want this hike to end.

We depart this camp for Boiling Springs, Pa and a rendezvous with seven additional hikers. On the four mile hike, I match up with Tuba. He let's me know how grateful he is to be a part of the hike the last few days. He especially appreciates our morning spirituality, which carries over to his thoughts as he walks in solitude on the trail.

At 10 AM, we meet up with the second wave of new hikers in Boiling Springs. Denise, Joey and Nate join with Bernadette, Colin, Luke Price and Ricky "Wrong Way" Hop.



It is special to be hiking with 14 people so meaningful to my life. Most importantly, I cannot begin to express how thankful I am to have Denise here. Today, I cannot think about her and Julianna together without feeling an impenetrable bond. Together we honor Julianna.

I have to say these seven new hikers are very fortunate. The eight miles we cover from Boiling Springs to Route 11 in Carlisle are the flattest most pristine dirt trail we have ever walked. In fact, the younger kid's on the trail, who we were concerned about hiking this distance, could have walked this 8 miles backward.



Channeling my inner Giggles, I attempt to teach Jack the ways of the trail. "It is the responsibility of every hiker to be self sufficient and contribute to the group," I inform him. You need to roll up the tent, pack your gear, retrieve water, etc. I am no Giggles in my delivery as my only response from Jack was, "Are you busting my chops?" The eight of us gather for our morning prayer. I stumble as I am overwhelmed by all the love present. *"The most important things to do in this world are to get something to eat, something to drink, and get somebody to love you."* I am blessed, I have all that covered.



We finish our 2014 hike in celebration of Julianna.

