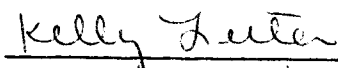
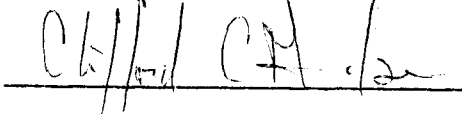


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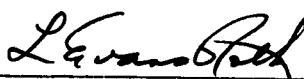
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by John M. Coward entitled "Hiking Tennessee: The Conceptualization, Writing and Production of a Book." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communications.


George Everett, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

HIKING TENNESSEE: THE CONCEPTUALIZATION,
WRITING AND PRODUCTION OF A BOOK

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

John M. Coward

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I am also indebted to my wife Linda, who believed in the hike, walked it with me, and pushed me until the writing was complete.

ABSTRACT

The major part of this thesis is a book manuscript based on a hike across the length of Tennessee during the summers of 1979-80. The narrative describes historical and natural sites in Tennessee as well as people and communities encountered on the trip. The author and his wife, the principal subjects of the story, develop a fuller understanding of rural life in Tennessee and of their relationship to the natural world.

The manuscript, supported by several dozen photographs (both color and black and white), is intended for publication by a commercial book publisher. The book would contain about 168 pages, 6 x 9 inches, with a type area of 42 x 26 picas. The finished 20-chapter book would be about 75 percent text, 25 percent illustrations.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1979 and 1980, my wife and I hiked 600 miles across the length of Tennessee. I took detailed notes, for the purpose of writing a book, about the state as we observed it. My wife and I also documented the hike in photographs. The resulting manuscript, entitled Hiking Tennessee, is an illustrated narrative of our trip. The hiking manuscript and representative photographs are primary parts of this thesis. The thesis also includes an explanation of the project's purpose, a sample layout and a dummy of the book, and a bibliography.

Concept of the Book

Hiking Tennessee is based on a 600-mile hike across Tennessee by me and my wife during the summers of 1979 and 1980. On one level, the narrative is autobiographical: it concerns our relationship to each other and to the state. The manuscript tells of our decision to make the trip, our preparations for it, and our problems and discoveries along the way.

On another level, the book is about the character of Tennessee. The hike was a rural experience and was intentionally routed through farm communities and small towns. The book introduces farmers, working people and small town personalities we met along the route. Hiking Tennessee considers the lives and the values of these people.

Besides people, the character of Tennessee is shaped by the land itself. In what way does the land influence its inhabitants? The book attempts to answer that question and focus attention on

walking as a means of rediscovering the land. The character of the state is also related to history, and our journey took us through a number of historical locations. This material was also included in the manuscript for Hiking Tennessee.

Finally, the manuscript is a travel book. It includes descriptions of places we saw, as well as observations about towns, restaurants, state parks and other attractions we visited. The manuscript also includes an illustrated map of Tennessee on which our route is marked. Black and white photographs complete the illustrations and increase the visual appeal of the manuscript.

The manuscript is written and designed for a popular audience. The book is especially aimed at Tennesseans and others interested in the history and culture of Tennessee. It will interest those Tennesseans interested in the outdoors: hikers, campers, Scouts, boaters and others who vacation in Tennessee parks and recreation areas. Hiking Tennessee should have additional appeal as a regional document, though the primary market is Tennessee.

The finished manuscript, photographs and supporting information will be submitted to commercial publishers for review and possible publication. If publication by commercial houses is not possible or desirable, the thesis will serve as a prospectus for others who might underwrite the publication of the book.

The Hike

The summer 1979 hike was a 57-day walk from east to west across 500 miles of Tennessee. The trip began at Mountain City in extreme

upper East Tennessee on June 11 and ended near Huntingdon on August 27. The summer 1980 hike was a seven-day, 90-mile journey from Huntingdon to Reelfoot Lake and the Mississippi River near Tiptonville in the northwest corner of Tennessee. Total mileage for the entire hike was just under 600.

Our route was largely southwest in the eastern part of Tennessee and roughly west-northwest in the central and western parts of the state. The route zigzagged intentionally to include interesting towns and significant historical areas. We also wanted to visit places we had not previously visited and to include a variety of rural and small town experiences. In addition, the route was planned to take advantage of the hospitality of relatives and friends.

From Mountain City, we walked to Hampton, where we joined the Appalachian Trail. We hiked on the trail for 60 miles to Erwin. From Erwin, we walked to Jonesboro, Greeneville, Bulls Gap, Morristown, White Pine, Dandridge, Seymour (where we took a week off at home to rest, pay bills, and take care of other personal matters), Maryville, Friendsville, Greenback, Vonore, Madisonville, and Athens.

At Athens we made a major turn to the west and walked to Decatur. We crossed the Tennessee River near Dayton, then climbed the Cumberland Plateau and descended into the Sequatchie Valley to Pikeville. Then we climbed the plateau again to Fall Creek Falls State Park and over to Spencer. We left the plateau at McMinnville and continued west to Woodbury, Murfreesboro, Franklin, and to Dickson.

We continued west from Dickson to Waverly, New Johnsonville,

Camden, Bruceton, and finally, Rosser, a few miles east of Huntingdon. The 1979 hike ended there.

In 1980, we began at Rosser on June 23. We walked to Huntingdon, McKenzie, Greenfield, Kenton, Trimble and Obion. We walked from Obion to Hornbeck and on to Reelfoot Lake on June 28. The following day we walked to the Mississippi River to complete the hike from Mountain City to the Mississippi.

We crossed the state walking roads and highways, usually the least traveled we could find. In East Tennessee this was relatively simple because we were familiar with many roads. In Middle and West Tennessee, however, we often guessed and sometimes guessed wrong. In the course of the trip we walked along U.S. highways, state highways, county and farm roads, railroad tracks, several trails, and even a few hundred yards of cross-country trailblazing. We did not walk along any interstate highways.

We often refused rides from people who assumed we were hitchhiking (even though we walked on the wrong side of the road to hitchhike). We did not carry our packs the entire distance; on several occasions friends held them for us or hauled them ahead. Also, the hike was not strictly continuous; we took many days off and several breaks for rest or other reasons. We did walk every step of the way, with the exception of two Tennessee River crossings. One of those was on a ferry and the other was across a narrow and very dangerous bridge at New Johnsonville. We accepted a ride across that bridge.

The timetable for the hike was intentionally loose; that is, we did not set predetermined destinations for each day or each week.

To do so seemed artificial and arbitrary. It robbed the trip of its spontaneous quality and failed to account for variations in terrain, weather, or our own physical conditions. We did operate with an idea of where we wanted to go each day, though we changed plans frequently as circumstances changed.

We walked between 10 and 15 miles a day, with a peak of 20 or so. We took frequent breaks during the day, especially during the hottest part of the afternoon. We spent that time in stores or gas stations, resting, eating, and visiting with the owners and customers.

Linda, who taught art at Webb School in Knoxville, invited three of her photography students to join us for short sections of the hike. Rob Killifer and Steve Collins walked with us on the Appalachian Trail and Greg Cooper went with us from Athens to Fall Creek Falls State Park.

We took a full backpacking load so that we were generally self-sufficient for lodging and meals. Depending on the weight of the food, our packs weighed from 30 to 55 pounds. We camped in fields, behind churches, in parks and other locations, asking the owner's permission whenever and wherever practical. On several occasions, we were invited into homes for the evening. We also spent several nights in motels when we were especially tired or dirty or when the weather was particularly miserable. We cooked many of our meals on a backpacking stove and ate many other meals in restaurants, sampling the local specialties.

There were many high points on the hike--and some low points too. All in all, however, the trip was a very positive experience,

especially given the prevailing notions about the nation's violence and intolerance.

Preparation of the Manuscript

Hiking Tennessee was written for a popular audience and the writing style and organization of the manuscript reflect that orientation. The manuscript was written in first person, an effective and appropriate form for a book of this type. The narrative is organized sequentially, beginning with the idea of the hike and ending with the completion of the trip. The book is organized into three major parts and includes a preface and 20 chapters. The three parts are labeled East, Middle and West Tennessee, divisions which correspond with the three grand divisions of the state. Each of the chapters is organized around a specific event or place on the hike.

The manuscript was written from a daily journal kept during the hike. Interviews were informal and no tape recorder was used.

Photographs for Hiking Tennessee were made with two Canon AE-1 35mm cameras and three Canon lenses. One camera was loaded with color slide film and the other with black and white film. We used Kodak Tri-X exclusively for the black and white work and Kodak Kodachrome 64 and several other slide films for the color photographs. We intentionally traded cameras in order to split the photographic chores. All of the black and white developing and most of the printing were done by Linda. Color processing and printing were done by commercial color labs.

In order to develop a fuller understanding of outdoor literature

in general and of Tennessee in particular, I reviewed several types of books. These books fell into two main categories: books about Tennessee history and regional culture, and hiking and outdoor books. These books are listed in the bibliography. A third category of books, books about book design and production, was also reviewed for the preparation of the appendixes. These books are also listed in the bibliography.

Appendixes

While the Hiking Tennessee manuscript is the major part of the thesis, two appendixes provide additional information related to the project. Appendix A is a representative sample of the black and white photographs taken on the hike. Appendix B describes the design and production information for the proposed book and Plate 1 includes several page layouts in a dummy which meets the specifications of Appendix B.

PREFACE

WHY HIKE?

It was an idea too good to pass up: a hike across the length of Tennessee. But it was not an idea that came naturally. We had stumbled on it by a curious route, almost by accident. In fact, our hike across Tennessee grew out of a vacation idea that was very different: a trip to Europe.

We were looking forward to a summer in England, Ireland, or France--it really didn't matter which. What mattered, instead, was time: I needed a vacation, a clean break from the routine. We were both in our late 20s--hardly worn out--but I was finishing three difficult years as editor of two Tennessee weekly newspapers. I was tired. I was also recuperating from a mild but nagging bout with mononucleosis--a sure sign, my doctor confirmed, I should ease up at work. My wife Linda was finishing her first trying year teaching art and she was looking forward to a long vacation too.

We wanted to go to Europe where we had spent the first year of our marriage, courtesy of the U.S. Navy. So I decided to resign from the newspaper in early June, on the same day Linda finished school. We could vacation until the end of August, when Linda had to report back to work. We would tour the British Isles and the Continent. In the fall, I could return to The University of Tennessee and a postponed master's degree and Linda could return to the classroom refreshed. It seemed, at first, like the perfect summer plan.

But the European vacation soon lost its glitter. First, it

didn't make sense economically. We could afford it but I didn't want to spend so much of our money on transportation. And when we really sat down and measured our dollars against the rising travel and vacation costs in Europe, we could see the money wouldn't last long, not nearly the full summer we had promised ourselves. Finally, our trip to Europe would have been at the height of the tourist season, obviously not the time to take a budget vacation or get away from the crowds. Europe looked less and less attractive. We searched for something easier on our budget and more suited to our tastes.

What about the American West? Suddenly it looked very appealing. We quickly mapped out a cross-country trip to California by way of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Since we had all summer and were saving thousands in air fare to Europe, we could afford to take the long route home: through Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and the Canadian Rockies. This was a trip we could get excited about--and we didn't have to sacrifice our bank account to take it.

The bubble burst a few hours later. It was a good trip for many people but it wasn't for us. The problem was simple: it was an automobile trip. Linda and I each commuted about 70 miles each day; our lives already seemed built around the automobile. The idea of spending our summer behind the wheel was unacceptable. Vacation or no vacation, we'd be right back in the automobile rat race. And then there was the problem of gasoline. Would there be enough of it this summer and, if so, what would it cost? The miser in us was creeping out again, but we couldn't see that much money going for transportation.

But money wasn't the real problem. It was the whole idea of driving, clogging the interstates like millions of other Americans on

summer vacation. We might have a good time but we'd be lost in the crowd, signing our checks over to the oil companies and credit carding our way from Holiday Inn to Holiday Inn. Obviously this was not the vacation of our dreams. Besides, it wouldn't be the independent kind of trip we longed for; we'd be very dependent on man and machine: on our car to get us there, on the oil companies to supply the gasoline, and on the oil-exporting nations to keep the crude flowing. Within hours after cooking up this trip, we decided we had to devise another, one which allowed us at least some measure of self-determination.

Again an idea came quickly: bicycles. Of course! Bikes offered immediate independence from gasoline and freeways. We could take our time, pick out the back roads and small towns, and see the U.S. on our own terms. And since a serious rider could cover a lot of ground, we might make the west after all.

But it wasn't that simple. In the first place, we knew very little about bicycles and even less about long-distance touring. Our own bikes, inexpensive American-made 10-speeds, were inadequate for the rigors of the road so we needed new touring bikes as well as all the related tools, pumps, repair parts, bicycle packs and so on. Clearly this too was going to cost.

There were other, more serious, problems as well. The most significant was the problem of bicycle repair and maintenance. We didn't know enough about it to trust ourselves on the road and, with only a few months before summer, we were quickly running out of time to learn it. Without repair skills, we were machine-dependent again and right back where we started.

But the cycling idea had struck a responsive chord in both of us

and we could not let it die easily. Could we possibly make the bike trip safely with so little time to prepare? I wanted to believe we could, that we could take a crash course in bicycle mechanics and gain experience with long rides every weekend. But deep down, I wasn't sure. We talked about it and let it sink in for a couple of weeks. Finally, we reached a conservative conclusion: we didn't have enough time to prepare properly.

On the other hand, we might not have to abandon bikes completely. I had another idea: if crossing the country was too risky, what about criss-crossing the state? That trip, limited to more familiar territory and within a few hundred miles of home, offered obvious advantages. We could fudge on our maintenance skills, for example, on the assumption that help would generally be closer in Tennessee than in many states. Besides, we had friends and relatives around the state we could call on if necessary.

One of our new worries was Tennessee's sorry secondary road system, a system of narrow, winding roads which were unsafe for bicycles. Linda made it clear: "I'd rather walk them than ride a bike on them. If you were on foot, you could at least jump in the ditch."

Walk?

It hit me. "We could. It would take a lot longer but we've got the time and we've already got the gear. We could walk it. I think we could."

After months of wringing our hands and racking our brains, that was all there was to it. We knew instantly that this was the trip we wanted, the vacation we had to take. We would walk across Tennessee.

It wouldn't be easy but it was unique, independent and personally fulfilling--characteristics we wanted all along. All we had to do now was get ready and start walking.

PART I
EAST TENNESSEE

CHAPTER I

BREAKING IN THE FEET

The natural place to start our hike across Tennessee was in the east, in the mountains. It made sense to start where the state started, in the same mountains that sheltered the Cherokee and later the first white settlers who crossed the Blue Ridge from Virginia and the Carolinas. Our trip would be east to west, like the pioneers; from the peaks of the Southern Appalachians to the bottom lands of the Tennessee River valley, across the rugged Cumberland Plateau to the valley of the lower Tennessee and, finally, if we could really walk that far, to the flat Mississippi River basin. We could see Tennessee in much the way the first white men saw it: on foot, following the sun.

The eastern extreme in Tennessee is Johnson County. On a map, it's the "point" in the state's mountainous upper corner. Johnson County juts so far east, in fact, that in three directions it's bordered by neighboring states: Virginia is directly north, North Carolina is south and east. Tennessee extends to the west and southwest for over 400 miles. No doubt about it: from Johnson County we had plenty of walking room ahead of us.

We wanted to start slowly and easily, to let our bodies and feet build gradually to the task. We had trained for the walk with some running and practice hikes, but it was haphazard training at best. We knew full well we weren't ready to begin walking 25 miles a day. To ease the pain, if it came to that, we decided to use Johnson County as our test county. We could test our supplies and equipment and, more

importantly, we could test ourselves. I could just see one of us blistering up from heel to toe--we'd never walk across Tennessee like that.

Three days was ample time to walk across Johnson County, south from the Virginia line to Mountain City, the county seat, and then southwest toward Hampton where we could join the Appalachian Trail. So we had our starting plan: three easy days in Johnson County.

With summer quickly approaching now, we worked steadily at home every night. We checked and rechecked our gear, counting the ounces on every single item and asking ourselves the single most important question in backpacking: Do we really need this? We discovered that if we asked the question enough, we could save a few ounces--and ultimately a few pounds--because some things, even seemingly essential things, could be substituted for, cut down in quantity or left out altogether. Linda and I remembered all too well laboring under packs filled with equipment and supplies we never used. We vowed this time we wouldn't take a step until we were satisfied that we had what we needed and not one ounce more. So extra cooking pots were out, excessive clothing too--we even bought children's toothbrushes and trimmed the borders off our Tennessee road maps.

Our target day was Friday, June 7, the day Linda's summer vacation began and my final day at the newspaper. We planned to load the car that night and begin the walk the next day; we were anxious to start walking, to see if we could do it even for three days.

But that final week was hectic. We were still caught up in the obligations of our lives--bills had to be paid, errands run, the grass cut, and so on. Getting out of the house was a major chore. Finally,

on June 11, we backed the car out of the driveway and headed for Upper East Tennessee, already three days late, but more excited than ever about walking across Tennessee.

We drove to Elizabethton, east of Johnson City, where an old high school friend of mine, Leland Calhoun, had agreed to drive us to Virginia and then keep our car for three days. But Leland, an experienced pilot, suggested a flight to Virginia. "Why not?" Leland asked. "It's faster. Besides, it's a good day for flying."

Linda and I looked at each other. Then, before I could change my mind or Linda could change it for me, I agreed. Flying sounded like fun though I did not admit to certain reservations I have about small planes. Linda didn't seem too enthusiastic, but she didn't object either. So we would fly. Leland called the airport to have the Cessna gassed up and I studied an aviation chart for a suitable airport.

There were several possible airports in Virginia but the closest was at least a day's walk from the Tennessee border, too far north to fit in our three-day schedule. The airports in North Carolina were even farther away. The only logical airport was a small Johnson County airstrip, a few miles from Mountain City. That was it. We jumped into the car and drove across town to the airport, ready finally to begin our walk across the state with a flight over the mountains and valleys of East Tennessee.

At the airport, Leland directed us as we put our packs on the plane. He wanted the load balanced and he checked to see that the packs would not shift when we started moving. Leland went through his pre-flight routine smoothly until he considered the weight of his passengers and their gear.

"How much do your packs weigh?" he asked. About 35 pounds each, I told him.

"How much do you weigh?" Leland asked. I said 160 pounds, Linda said about 180.

Leland studied a graph in the Cessna's flight manual. He frowned. He looked up thoughtfully for a second and then began to study the graph again. Finally he looked over. "We're OK. No sweat."

But he didn't seem convinced. "You sure?" I asked.

"Yeah," Leland said. But he was still looking at the graph. Then he explained. "See this line? Our weight is here, above the line. Anywhere above the line is OK. We're close, but not too close. I just wanted to double-check." I agreed--I wanted to be sure, too.

Leland completed his routine and we taxied to the end of the runway. He revved the engine and checked the plane's control. All was in order. We rolled slowly at first but the Cessna picked up speed quickly and, suddenly, about the middle of the runway, we were airborne. The flight was smooth--so far.

The smooth ride didn't last long. About 50 feet off the ground we fishtailed sharply. I gripped the handhold in a sweat but Leland corrected and we kept climbing.

Elizabethton and the surrounding hills lay beneath us. From the air, the landscape seemed greener and more fertile than it had from the ground. I was still worried about the Cessna, now bobbing from one air pocket to the next, but we were safely up now, above the lush rolling hills. Leland banked the plane to turn northeast, toward Johnson County.

We were soon over Watauga Dam, a huge Tennessee Valley Authority earthen structure that creates a long reservoir from the waters of the

Watauga River. Not all TVA lakes can be described as beautiful, but Watauga can, surrounded as it is by forested ridges and peaks. Between bounces, I took a few photographs. Leland pointed the plane across the lake to the small airstrip already on the horizon.

I remained wide-eyed, inspired by the network of small farms, tobacco fields, roads and ridges below. It was a great, clear, beautiful June afternoon and the Tennessee landscape was bright and warm in the sun. Linda and I looked at each other, more sure than ever of our reasons for taking a summer to explore Tennessee.

In spite of my elation, I found my fist still firmly wrapped to the handhold beside the window. I let go only to snap my pictures. It seemed so silly--and I kept asking myself what good holding on would do if the plane suddenly fell 10,000 feet. But I didn't let go.

Leland circled the small Johnson County airstrip and set the Cessna down evenly. I was relieved. We taxied to an apron off the center of the runway where a few Cessnas, Pipers and other small planes were tied down. The airport was deserted. We unloaded our gear and posed for some photos beside the plane. Then we said goodbye to Leland and thanked him for the ride. As a farewell present, we gave him some of Linda's oatmeal cookies brought along for the hike.

Leland's Cessna sped down the runway and was airborne again. The plane climbed and the engine's roar grew softer and softer until we could no longer pick out the plane in the sky. Then it hit us: we were alone, no car, no friends, only our feet and our wits to get us back. We hugged each other, sure we could do it but not at all sure what we would face in the next three days. We put on our packs and turned to the road.

Our first decision was a basic one: which way should we go? Linda said right, because the road seemed to lead around the airport to the highway. I said left, because it seemed to lead to the same highway by a shorter route. Since I was a more experienced hiker and map reader, I pushed the point and won.

A quarter of a mile later, I recognized my error. The road was clearly turning away from the highway. Linda smiled her I-told-you-so smile but, mercifully, didn't rub it in. So much for my direction-finding skills.

We walked a few hundred yards, in the right direction this time, when a car approached, slowed down and stopped beside us. A silver-haired lady rolled down the window. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"We're hiking across the state. We just started at the airport," I told her.

"Oh, just like Lamar," she said, an East Tennessee Republican no doubt, referring to Tennessee's governor who walked across the state in a successful campaign in 1978. "Well, good for you!"

We chatted a few minutes and discovered a common background: we had all studied at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville. It was a pleasant roadside encounter, our first of the summer. I hoped all of them would be as friendly.

We walked the highway toward Mountain City in the afternoon sun, now direct and hot. At the first store, still within sight of the airport, we took a bathroom break and sat down to rest our feet. I kidded Linda about resting so soon--we hadn't walked a mile yet--but in truth, my feet were tender too.

On the outskirts of Mountain City, we were tired. A couple of

rest breaks helped both our feet and our shoulders, now sore under the weight of the packs. Finally, we made it to town and walked in the front door of The Tomahawk, the county's weekly newspaper. The editor, D. H. McCloud, was a friendly, serious man. He heard our story, asked us a few questions, and then took our photograph in front of the office. We smiled for the picture but I was increasingly worried about finding a place to camp for the night. McCloud suggested a school yard several miles down the highway. That sounded fine to me and we hit the road again, after a stop at Blackburn's Supermarket to buy some macaroni and cheese for supper.

On the way out of Mountain City, I made the summer's most successful financial find. There, folded into the overgrown grass of an old sidewalk, was a \$20 bill. No one was around and the weathered look of the bill suggested it had been there for some time. I tucked it in my pocket, safe for another day. I took it as a sign of good luck.

On this same stretch of road, Linda and I saw a beautiful old log home made of wide, squared-off logs. The house was elegant, too elegant to be called a cabin, and the lawn was beautifully tended, flowers in bloom around the house. In the yard was a woman of about 60, apparently the lady of the house, briskly pushing a lawn mower. She was cutting her already smooth lawn in a Sunday dress, a dress more appropriate to an afternoon tea than a session on the lawn. Her shoes were white pumps, somehow free of grass stains. Some people, it seemed, could do anything with grace. We marveled and walked on.

At the edge of town, where the farms began, we started looking for a friendly farmer with some flat land, suitable for camping. By this time we were both sore and ready to quit for the day; the school,

wherever it was, was too far. Since we were new to the task of asking for campsites, we wanted to start early in case it took a while.

The road out of Mountain City led uphill on the left side of a narrow valley. On the other side of the valley were a white frame farmhouse and several barns and outbuildings. We talked it over. It looked well-established, somehow friendly. That was our spot.

We walked down the gravel road to the house. Linda knocked. A dog barked furiously but no one came to the door.

There were other houses on the road so we walked on, tenderly, hurting with each step. The road led through a stand of trees and came out in fields near several houses. Behind one of them, a man on a tractor was haying, laying down the hay in wide green rows. Rabbits bounced in the uncut hay ahead of him, looking for shelter. He seemed promising. He was nearly finished so we crossed into the field and waited.

In a few minutes, he drove up and shut off the engine. I explained our trip and asked for a campsite. He eyed us carefully, not convinced. I kept talking, explaining. He wiped his forehead. I told him we wouldn't build a fire, wouldn't leave any trash and wouldn't make any noise. All we wanted to do, I pleaded, was eat supper and get some rest.

Something convinced him. He pointed to a steep pasture and said, "Across that fence, up at the top, is a flat spot. I plan to build a house there someday. Try that."

The farmer was Eldridge Arledge. Before we left for the campsite, he filled our water jug for us and asked about our plans. He farmed full-time on 27½ acres. He had tobacco, the money crop, and hay, along with a few cattle. His wife helped out. We saw her weeding the tobacco patch behind the house. The farmhouse was a compact frame building,

more comfortable inside than we had imagined. We were glad to meet Arledge, glad to meet a stranger who trusted us enough to let us stay on his land.

Our first night, on Arledge's hill, was a satisfying one. All was well; the food was good, the sky was clear and our feet, though sore, were unblistered. We slept well.

The next two days we began to adjust to the rigors of road hiking. The mornings were best because we were fresh and the air was cool. We walked steadily, passing farms and green fields and following the long ridges that divide Johnson County. Traffic was light and the walking went well.

But our progress slowed measurably each afternoon. The rest breaks became more frequent. On one break, in the shadow of a church, we pulled off our boots and dried our sweat-soaked socks on the front steps. At another stop, about midway through on the second afternoon, we rested at a bleak little store near Butler, close to the county line. The sun was scorching and there was little shade, so we dumped the packs in what little there was on the grass beneath the Shell gas sign. Inside, we bought Cokes and potato chips and ice cream--a late junk food lunch. We didn't much care at this point; we were too tired to be picky. After eating, Linda rested her head on her pack and closed her eyes. Within a minute, she was sleeping, long even breaths issuing from her lungs. I couldn't believe it. I asked her what she was doing and she mumbled back, "Just for a minute." A minute was OK but I was still anxious about today's campsite, a commercial campground on Watauga Lake, somewhere down the road. But I got as comfortable as I could and closed my eyes. For the next 15, 20, maybe even 30 minutes, we slept, like lazy

dogs, in the shadow of a Shell sign outside the store. I woke up with a start, embarrassed for sleeping in public.

By the end of that day, our second, it was obvious the boots would have to go. Boots were fine for mountain trails but they were too hot and too stiff for road walking. We had extra shoes--running shoes--so we tried them. That helped.

By the time we reached the Watauga campsite, however, I was hobbling, my left foot budding with blisters. I used large pieces of Dr. Scholl's moleskin to protect the blisters and that eased the pain. Linda's feet were sore, but her blisters weren't as advanced as mine. She applied plenty of moleskin too and I prayed for a miracle cure.

The third day was the real test. The morning was better than the afternoon before, but not much. Very early, we could tell it was going to be a long day. By mid-morning we passed through Butler and climbed the ridge that divides Johnson County from Carter County. We posed for a picture by the sign; "May there be many more counties," I said. Going downhill, we crossed Watauga Lake and made our way uphill again. By this time, our feet were burning despite the moleskin and the running shoes. There was nothing to do but to keep walking.

At the junction with U.S. 321 the traffic was heavy and the road, built through the hills, curved back and forth, up and down. The afternoon grew hotter and for the first time we were thoroughly discouraged, beaten. We rested often, drinking water or soft drinks at every small store along the way. Finally, near Hampton and the highway junction with the Appalachian Trail, I called Leland from a little restaurant-store. Come get us, I said, we'll be walking toward Hampton, toward the trail crossing.

But instead of walking, we ordered big cheeseburgers at the restaurant and ate them slowly, too tired to face the road again. Still, I felt obligated to go on, to at least try to reach the trail junction. Reluctantly, we strapped on the packs again. We slowly climbed another hill and headed down the other side, the trail junction--Hallelujah!--only a few hundred yards ahead. Just then, in our car, Leland rolled up. We called it a day. We were 200 yards from our goal but we could walk that later. Who cared now? We had done what we set out to do--despite failing feet and spirits--30 miles in three days. We could walk across Tennessee, if we were willing to suffer when we had to. We were; we knew that now. We'd be back.

CHAPTER II

THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

We were looking forward to the next segment of the hike: 60 miles on the Appalachian Trail. As far as I was concerned, our Tennessee trip wouldn't be complete without hiking at least a portion of the Appalachian Trail, the AT.

My earliest memories of the Tennessee mountains center around the Appalachian Trail near Erwin, my father's home town. On family vacations at my grandmother's (Rowe Coward, known in the family as Mama Rowe), we would drive up Unaka Mountain on a washed-out dirt road to one of Erwin's favorite picnic spots, a high bald meadow known as Beauty Spot. From its highest point, the jagged, green mountains seemed to stretch out forever. It was a view that etched itself in my memory so clearly that even today I know the peculiar shapes of the surrounding peaks. The Appalachian Trail crosses Beauty Spot and on every summer trip up the mountain my father would point out the blazes. It was magic to me then--a trail from Maine to Georgia! What could possibly be greater than that? Later, in high school and college, I had hiked sections of the trail, always with that secret dream all AT hikers must have: hiking the entire trail. That wasn't possible on our Tennessee hike, but it was quite possible to hike from Hampton to Erwin on the trail, a route which would take us through a rugged gorge, over 6,000-foot Roan Mountain and, finally, across Beauty Spot and down to grandmother's.

The Appalachian Trail would be different from our road walking.

On the trail there were no stores to buy extra supplies, no restaurants for a hot meal or an icy drink, no doctors if we sprained an ankle or cut a knee. So we headed to the mountains with everything we needed for the next 10 days, including so much food that I wound up with two extra bags dangling off the back of my overstuffed backpack. Our bathroom scales recorded my pack at 55 pounds and Linda's at 50--well over our Mountain City weights and certainly more than we wanted to haul over a 6,000-foot mountain. With so much of our weight in food, we resolved to eat heartily the first few days out.

This part of the hike was also a social experiment of sorts. Linda and I wanted to share our summer experience so we invited several of Linda's students to walk parts of the trip with us. On the AT, Steve Collins, 12, and Rob Killifer, 13, joined us, full of youthful enthusiasm but with heavy packs of their own.

One Wednesday morning in late June, the four of us loaded our gear in the car and headed for the Appalachian Trail. Linda and I started not on the trail but back on U.S. 321. We had to walk off the short section of the highway we had missed when Leland had picked us up two weeks before.

Then the four of us proceeded into the forest. The first part of the trail promised to be unusually beautiful. The trail follows Laurel Fork, a clear mountain stream, into a steep and rugged gorge, described in the trail guidebook as one of the most scenic areas of that entire AT.

Loaded down under the packs and not yet hardened to the rigors of trail hiking, we were slow that first day. But the weather was clear and we were in no particular hurry anyway. The gorge was beautiful

and we crisscrossed Laurel Fork as we made our way deeper into the gorge. After a couple of easy miles, however, the trail seemed to disappear near the rocky bank of the stream. Rob noticed scuff marks on some rocks above the creek and began searching for the trail there. In a minute or two, he yelled that he had found it. When we reached him, though, signs of a trail were faint to non-existent. And a few feet beyond Rob what trail there was disappeared over the sheer face of a cliff. I peered over the edge, breathing hard and growing angry. We were only two miles from the highway, still fresh from the suburbs, and we were facing a climb down a 50-foot cliff. Or were we? I rested against a small tree and tried to remain rational. We talked it over. We agreed on two things: First, the trail had been clearly marked up until some point near the creek and, second, the trail clearly did not include this cliff. The thing to do then, we concluded, was to back up, find a white trail blaze and come down the path again.

That led us back to the stream. There the trail seemed to head into the water. That wasn't very promising, we thought, but it was more promising than the cliff. I made my way along the water's edge, climbing over the broken rocks and around a short bend. What I saw there was a welcome relief: a white trail blaze. I called to Linda and the boys and we began picking out a path along the rocky bank. As we could now see, the gorge was so narrow and steep here that the trail had been built on a narrow walkway at the water's edge. Sometime before our arrival, however, the flood waters of Laurel Fork had swept most of it away. We continued finally on the broken trail with a new sense of the character of Laurel Fork Gorge.

By the time we arrived at Laurel Fork Falls, we were ready for

a break. The falls were perfect; a 40-foot rush of water beside high green peaks and under clear blue skies. Linda and I pulled off our boots and socks and soaked our feet in the stream. Since we had a good appetite by now, we relaxed in the shade and enjoyed some food.

We needed the rest more than we knew. Leaving the falls, the trail goes up a steep ridge above the stream for maybe 100 yards. Though the distance isn't impressive, the steepness of the climb is and the rocky, uneven footing makes the climb unpleasant, if not downright dangerous. By the time we reached the top of the ridge, we were exhausted again. From this point on, however, the trail follows the bed of an abandoned railroad line which was used to remove logs from the gorge during the early years of the century. That provided a relatively flat and smooth trail for the next several miles.

We camped that night in Dennis Cove, a Forest Service campground just off the trail. On the way in, we discovered two small pleasures of the trail. There were scattered raspberries along the way; most weren't ripe but the ones that were disappeared quickly. A little later, in a field beside the trail, we watched a doe calmly munch a few leaves and ignore our presence. In a minute or so, she wandered back into the undergrowth from which she had come.

Supper that night was filling: on the campstove, Linda cooked a homemade concoction of rice with nuts and dried fruit. We each had a second helping and there was still plenty we couldn't eat. No wonder our packs were heavy!

The next day we wished we had no packs at all. It was an uphill day almost all day and we were too new at uphill hiking to appreciate the pain. From Dennis Cove, we climbed to a small cascade called Coon

Den Falls. It was a good spot to rest, cool and wet. Then we pushed up and up and up White Rocks Mountain, literally the high point of the day. It took us hours to get there because we rested frequently. About 5 p.m., we walked into a clearing beneath the firetower and collapsed in the grass. The cabin atop the tower was locked so we sat on the windy steps and ate a late lunch while admiring the view.

Earlier that day, some northbound hikers had tipped us to a good campsite not far from the tower. We walked off the mountain top and soon came to a small meadow with a good spring, the campsite we'd been told about. The sky was clear too and we were looking forward to some stargazing away from city lights. About 10 p.m., with camp set and the dishes done, we searched the heavens. With the help of Rob's Scout Handbook, we identified more constellations than any of us had ever seen. We gave up only when we got cold; my thermometer registered 56. I checked the temperature of the spring water the next morning--it was 50.

We got an early start from the meadow and soon met northbound hikers who warned us about a tricky reroute just ahead. The reroute wasn't in the trail guide, but the hikers who had traveled it assured us that it was trouble. The new route, we were told, was poorly marked and difficult if not impossible to follow. One hiker put it in more personal terms: "Be careful. I was lost on the mountain for two days."

At the junction of the new trail and the old, we considered the choices. The new trail was five miles longer and hard to follow. The old trail was well described in the trail guide but its white blazes had been painted brown to discourage further hiking. I didn't like either choice but I especially didn't like the additional five miles,

which could throw us a full day off our schedule. Linda and the boys agreed: why try the new route and get lost? We decided to retrace the old route. In retrospect, I'm not sure it was a wise decision.

It started well enough. In the woods, following the old trail was relatively simple and the brown blazes were easy to see. But we soon walked out of the woods and along some farm roads. A light rain began. Still, the route was obvious and we made good time.

Soon we followed the old trail up a dirt road along a ridge. We rounded a hilltop and reached a fork in the road with no blazes in sight. I consulted the guide book but the junction was not mentioned. I studied the map but it was not clear either. The four of us scouted for blazes: not a sign. Once again, the trail was gone, only this time it was raining and we were becoming irritable. The boys huddled beside their packs in the wet grass while Linda and I tried again to figure out where the trail was.

Nothing made sense. We backtracked and again found ourselves at the junction. We located an old cemetery on the map and found it nearby--so we knew where we were. But the trail didn't seem to follow either fork of the road and it didn't seem to lead off on its own. Linda and I decided to scout the right fork again. We followed it several hundred yards but found no sign of a trail. I scouted the left fork but found nothing there.

For 45 minutes, we agonized at the junction. We could backtrack several miles--something we didn't want to do--or we could strike off cross-country and hope to intersect the trail later. That didn't sound very promising. The best bet seemed to be one of the forks of the

road and since we had thoroughly explored the right fork, I decided to try the left again. I plodded through the undergrowth. About 100 yards from the junction, I spotted a brown blaze on a small tree. So this was it; it was this simple. I quickly walked back to the junction and we started again.

Little did we know what we were in for. The left fork soon led us to the top edge of a large, overgrown field. The trail went right down the middle of the field. The trouble was that the summer weeds had completely overtaken the path. It was waist high or higher. We waded in, having no other choice, and within minutes we were soaked by the high grass. We were all miserable but at least we were on the trail, or what there was of it.

Finally we came out of the field onto a road. It led to the junction of the "real" trail--and we were relieved. The worst, we hoped, was over. It was late afternoon by now and we still had several miles to go to the orchard where we wanted to camp that night. It had been a long day, though, and we were physically and psychologically beaten. Still we walked steadily until we reached a short steep hill in the darkening woods. It was more than any of us wanted to tackle and we talked briefly of camping where we stood. In the end, we decided to keep walking, hoping the spring in the orchard would be worth the suffering. Finally, about 7 p.m., we entered the orchard and dumped our packs at the spring. We drank long and well. It had been another tough day--nine miles in 10½ hours, including some path finding and wrong turns. By 8 p.m., we had cleaned up a hearty supper and were ready for bed.

The next day was a celebration of sorts. It was wonderfully

clear, after a night of rain, and we dried out as we walked that morning. There were wild strawberries in the orchard so we took the time to gather a few for breakfast. We were only a few miles from the crossing of U.S. 19E so by noon we were resting in the shade of a small store, gorging on ice cream, candy, chips, and fresh fruit. You'd have thought we'd been out for weeks. But we felt like veterans now: we'd been lost (more or less) twice, rained on, pooped out and dog tired--and we'd survived. We topped off our celebration by splitting a half gallon of cider from the Hump Mountain fruit stand nearby. Hump Mountain was the object of the afternoon's hike and the cider was good.

The climb up the Hump began on a road at the North Carolina state line. For about a mile, we walked the steep grade to the end of the road where we entered the woods and kept climbing. Though Linda and I have climbed the Hump several times and are familiar with the trail, the climb is never easy. We emerged from the scrubby brush on the side of the summit late in the afternoon and turned around for a marvelous view: the hills and ridges of Tennessee as far as the eye could see. We were 5,400 feet in the sky; it was time for a little break. We snapped photos of each other and of the landscape and ate a little snack. The wind was brisk and cool and we bundled up in our jackets to stay warm. It was good to be on top.

The wind continued and Linda was sure that we were in for a thunderstorm--it had happened to us before on the Hump. The sky, Linda pointed out, was growing increasingly cloudy and threatening. We hurried across the summit and down the other side.

Between the Hump and the next peak, Yellow Mountain, is a flat saddle with a small spring. We decided to camp there before the rain

set in. As soon as we dropped our packs to make camp, the storm began, light at first but increasingly intense. We furiously threw up a tarp and huddled under it, escaping the rain, now a downpour, by seconds. Within an hour, the storm passed over and we resumed a more normal camping routine. Supper was especially good: chili and noodles.

The next two days were spectacular. We were now on the high ridge approaching Roan Mountain, one of East Tennessee's major peaks, and the scenery, the whole "feel" of the high country, was impressive. We ate more wild strawberries on Yellow Mountain and passed through Yellow Mountain Gap, route of historic Bright's Trace. It was through this gap that Col. John Sevier led a rag-tag group of settlers from the mountains east to the battle of King's Mountain in 1780. At that battle, Sevier and his Over Mountain Men joined the other colonial soldiers to defeat an army of British sympathizers. Sevier came back a hero and went on to become a successful Indian fighter and the first governor of Tennessee.

We climbed to another bald, Grassy Ridge, to camp. Before dark, we watched a hawk riding the wind above the mountain, flapping his long wings only occasionally, riding the currents with what seemed to be a minimum of effort. As darkness fell, we turned to the west and saw a great orange sky light up the mountains. High on Grassy Ridge, we felt as though we were on top of the world, watching our sun disappear behind our mountains.

Linda and I enjoyed that sunset but we had no idea then how much it would come to mean over the course of the hike. As we walked through the low hills of Middle and West Tennessee, we longed for the cool mountain air. We missed the spectacular mountain landscape. We

wished we could relive the solitude and the majesty of the Appalachian wilderness. For the rest of the hike, the sunset at Grassy Ridge was fixed in our memories.

The wind raged that night, tearing at our tents, threatening to blow them off the mountain. Linda and I huddled together on the ground and hoped the boys would be there when we looked out the next morning. They were--but so was the wind. It was cold now and the wind made it feel that much colder. We skipped breakfast and headed for shelter down the mountain.

We reached the highway at Carver's Gap and took a break in the Forest Service picnic area. There we couldn't help but notice a small gray bird, apparently irritated at our presence. The little bird flapped noisily in the low branches around us but never flew very far from where we sat. Then it dawned on me: this little bird, a junco I decided, had a nest very near. And she was doing her best to draw us away from the place. In a few moments, I located the nest deep beneath a clump of grass. Three or four open mouths crowded the little enclosure. We took turns peering into the nest and made a hasty, respectful retreat. No wonder the little junco was upset; we posed a serious threat to her offspring.

By noon, we had climbed Roan Mountain. There was no view. The mountain was deep in fog and the wind continued unabated. We were hungry and cold so we decided on a hot lunch. We set up the stove in a meadow near some foundation stones from the old Cloudland Hotel. On this day, it was easy to see how the hotel got its name.

The hotel was built in the late 1800s by a former Union Army general. In its heyday, the hotel attracted tourists from all over

the east. Travelers came to the hotel by railroad and horse-drawn carriage. In fact, we had followed the old stage road up from Carver's Gap. Fire destroyed the original Cloudland Hotel; the rebuilt hotel also burned. There is little evidence of either hotel now, just a few square stones from the foundation and a shallow hole about 50 feet long.

We drank hot tea and gobbled down some hot noodles. It didn't seem to help; since we had stopped walking we weren't generating any body heat and we were growing colder, not warmer. We bundled up in all the clothes we had. The thermometer read 56, but with the steady wind, it felt much colder. And this was at noon on July 2!

We hurried off in search of shelter from the wind and warmer temperatures. The trail down the mountain, steep and frequently rutted, brought back plenty of body heat. But I felt sorry for the north-bound hikers who had to climb this side of the Roan. Even though we had gravity on our side, the continuous steep downhill walking put considerable strain on our knees and ankles. By the time we reached Hughes Gap, our legs were aching. We took a long rest before climbing again to Little Rock Knob, a steady climb that took all the energy we had left. Linda was slow and thirsty--we had walked off with all the water. She was on the edge of dehydration. A short rest and some long pulls on the canteen seemed to revive her.

The Little Rock Knob shelter, thank goodness, wasn't much farther. We rejoiced when we got there and prepared for a good rest. To top off a long and weary day, we built our first campfire on the trail and cooked up biscuits for dessert. We ate them hot, with mounds of honey butter.

The Little Rock Knob shelter was the first shelter we used on the trail and it introduced us to the world of the "through-hikers," the long distance veterans hiking the entire 2,000 miles of the AT or major portions of it. We had met a few northbound through-hikers but they weren't a particularly talkative bunch. We learned more about these hearty souls through the registers, or notebooks, left in many of the shelters. The Little Rock shelter contained a book left by Ed Snell, an employee of the Unicorn Book Store in Bar Harbor, Maine. From the register, we learned that a week before, 10 people and a dog had taken shelter here from the rain. As you might expect, there were many entries about the weather, especially about bad weather. One hiker left this entry: "By the gods of entropy and chaos, this weather is damned. Days like this ought to be taken out and shot profusely."

The May weather had provoked particular hiker hostility here. A cold streak in late May had even produced a few snow flurries. Dan Howe, a hiker from Herndon, Virginia, told the story of that experience:

Got here yesterday, planning to leave this morning. Got up and waited for the weather to clear . . . rain. Waited some more for the weather to clear . . . sleet. Waited some more for the weather to clear . . . snow! I think we'll stay the night. 11 people . . . at least we won't have to worry about keeping warm.

Another hiker was less eloquent but his point was clear: "I survived the blizzard of May 25, 1979."

Many of the notes were to specific hikers, friends separated over the miles. There were many references to a through-hiker party planned for July 4 in Damascus, Virginia. From the notes, it was clear that many of the hikers planned a real blowout. Serious hikers, it seemed, worked up sufficient energies on the trail for serious parties.

This became clear also as we neared Erwin. Peggy Halsema left this note in the register in the Cherry Gap shelter, where we spent the next night:

Left Erwin yesterday pm w/ bellies full of strawberry pie. Great night on Beauty Spot with a 6-pack of Sterling beer. I see Virginia looming before my eyes. Gib officially declares his boots not-even-close to broken in after 325 miles! Hey Jack, I hear it gets flatter from here on in.

Having just walked down the steep side of Roan Mountain, I wondered about that "flat" comment and what Peggy thought starting up that endless climb toward the top of Roan.

We were hoping for a July 4 party of our own. Steve had even discovered a solid firecracker at a shelter and had promised to do his best to set it off in honor of the occasion. Some hot biscuits would also be appropriate, I thought. But it was not to be: the weather took care of that. We had, in seven days on the trail, escaped a real drenching. So we were due and on July 4, 1979, we got ours. We climbed Unaka Mountain in a cold fog and walked across Beauty Spot without any hint of a view. We were closing in on the Curly Gap shelter when the rain broke loose. Our boots filled up with water and I wondered aloud if my toes would ever unwrinkle. On top of that, we didn't seem to be making progress very fast; hour after miserable hour, Curley Gap was still ahead. We grew very tired and by late that afternoon, we had to force ourselves to go on. I was particularly unhappy because the soles of my feet had become extremely tender and the pack had irritated my shoulder. The boys were equally glum. All told, we were a bleak crew: wet, weary and thoroughly unpleasant.

Nonetheless, we held out hope for a dry shelter at Curly Gap where we could eat and dry out. On the other hand, the shelter might

be full, leaving us to the wet ground, a prospect we very much hoped to avoid. We slogged on.

In the distance, smoke boiled out from the open front of the shelter. A good sign, I hoped. We discovered there only a single hiker, finishing his supper. We introduced ourselves and then proceeded to take over the shelter and the fire. We strung a clothes line and draped it with dripping clothes. In the morning, everything would smell like smoke, of course, but we didn't care now. Tomorrow we would walk into Erwin, come what would. We were a day ahead of our schedule. Steve unrolled his soggy firecracker and what little dry powder remained sparkled for an instant. Happy July 4!

July 5 was clear--hallelujah! Neither Linda nor I could bear the thought of those wet boots so we walked into Erwin in jogging shoes, warm and dry. To keep them that way, however, we had to cross several swollen streams barefooted, but that was a small price to pay for the luxury of dry feet. We soon came alongside the Nolichucky River and followed it downstream to Chestoa. Here the Appalachian Trail crosses the river on its way south. But we turned north toward Erwin, our trail hike complete. We celebrated along the road by picking some mulberries, ripe and juicy.

We came to a small store soon and couldn't resist another junk food binge: Cokes and ice cream. The boys also extracted a promise to eat that evening's meal at the Erwin Pizza Hut. Linda and I quickly agreed; it was a real luxury to have that choice.

We reached Mama Rowe's by 2 p.m. and immediately spread our wet clothes and equipment all over the back yard to dry. And then, at long last, the luxury Linda and I missed most on the trail: a hot

shower. We grabbed a big bar of soap and a full bottle of shampoo; we lathered and lathered and scrubbed and scrubbed. Linda said it was the best shower she ever had. All I could say was, "Me too!"

Rob and Steve showered next but didn't enjoy their shower much-- Linda and I had used all the hot water. Mama Rowe said she couldn't remember that happening before, not with the washing machine or the dish washer or any other combination of things. Linda and I found it hard to feel guilty. We were clean and off our feet. It was time for that pizza.

In Mama Rowe's guestroom that night, Linda and I talked about the hike. The AT had been an exhilarating experience. For every moment of agony--and there had been many--we were rewarded by natural beauty. From mountain tops, we had seen the green sweep of the ranges around us. We had sipped the sweet waters of mountain springs. We had savored all of it.

After the trail, we were afraid the return to the road would be a letdown. But we remembered our first three days in Johnson County. Those days had been rewarding too. We had discovered new places; people had been friendly. Road hiking was different from trail hiking but we found satisfaction in both.

It took a day to dry our equipment, wash our clothes and run some errands. After that, we started walking the road again.

CHAPTER III

PIONEERS AND PRESIDENTS

We walked into Jonesboro on a hot Sunday afternoon. It was July 8, and the red, white and blue banners from the town's Fourth of July celebration were still hanging on the courthouse and the old frame hotel, the Chester Inn. The town was sleepy. Traffic was light. We walked down a tree-lined street, past the stately brick homes behind black iron fences and immaculate lawns. We were apparently unnoticed and almost alone.

It wasn't always that way. Jonesboro is Tennessee's oldest town, and in the state's pioneer days it was a lively and important place. In 1784, Jonesboro, then spelled Jonesborough, played host to a meeting of pioneers bent on seceding from North Carolina and forming their own state. They called it Frankland, though it later became Franklin in an effort to influence and flatter the famous colonial leader. John Sevier, hero of King's Mountain, attempted to govern the new state but failed to achieve recognition from the federal government. Although Franklin lasted only four years and Sevier faced treason charges in North Carolina, Jonesboro remained an important political and economic center in the early years of a more successful state, Tennessee.

One of Sevier's arch rivals, the man who went on to become one of the most famous American leaders, also had ties with Jonesboro. Andy Jackson began his career in law and politics as a young attorney

in Jonesboro. A sign in front of the Chester Inn points out that Jackson was a guest there.

Jonesboro was also notable for a newspaper published in 1819. Elihu Embree's Manumission Intelligencer was the nation's first anti-slavery newspaper.

In more recent times, Jonesboro, though still county seat of Washington County, became little more than a decaying farm community, many of its historic buildings vacant and in disrepair. More modern shopping and commercial areas nearby were slowly drying up the economic life of the town.

Linda and I grew up in Johnson County only a few miles away and we remembered the Jonesboro of the 1960s. Despite a few fine homes and several good commercial buildings, much of the town was then in decline. As idealistic college students, Linda and I talked of someday restoring an old store and operating an art gallery or a restaurant. It would take a lot of work and, of course, money, but we always saw the potential in Jonesboro for a little Tennessee version of Williamsburg. It was a romantic dream.

Others saw Jonesboro's potential in a more realistic light. Then they set out to make the Jonesboro dream come true. Jimmy Neil Smith, for one, knew that Jonesboro could be saved. Smith, a teacher and amateur Jonesboro historian, worked hard on the restoration, organizing and promoting the preservation of the town. The new Jonesboro--restored, cleaned up and elegant--prospered. So did Smith, giving up teaching to enter the restaurant business in Jonesboro. His Mercedes testified to his business success. Along the way, he also gained a title: mayor.

We learned all this from Mayor Smith himself when, by accident, we met him at his ice cream shop on Main Street. Smith is a serious, bearded man in his mid-thirties. He explained that the historic restoration was part of the town's on-going economic development program.

The planning started in 1969, Smith said, with actual restoration beginning in the mid-1970s. As we glanced around the town, the results were obvious: clean, smooth brick sidewalks, old-fashioned street lamps, decorative street signs, not to mention a number of new businesses.

Though not everyone approved of the restoration plan, the mayor said most of the citizens did. "We're not bringing hordes of tourists in--we never will," Smith conceded. "We're taking the town--which was really just another dying Southern town--and bringing it back to life. It's exciting."

Smith was right: there aren't hordes of tourists in Jonesboro--and that's probably good. The town couldn't handle too many visitors anyway. But enough tourists do come by to support a few antique shops and other stores, including Smith's ice cream shop and his unique restaurant in an old church, The Parson's Table.

Jonesboro now celebrates the Fourth of July with Historic Jonesborough Days, a festival which includes a craft fair, flea market, bluegrass and traditional music and street dances. Thousands turn out for the celebration. Jonesboro is also the home of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS), founded by Smith in 1974. The organization sponsors the National Storytelling Festival every October, bringing storytelling from around the South to Jonesboro to discuss their craft and, of course, tell stories.

A highlight of the festival is the telling of ghost stories at night in a Jonesboro graveyard.

What Linda and I particularly liked about the new Jonesboro was its balance of history and culture against present-day commercial needs. Jonesboro is more than a museum; it remains the center of business activity for the local community. On any given day, the locals in town far exceed the tourists, yet the town's historic district appeals to both groups. Because of its unique position in Tennessee history, Jonesboro had a special opportunity to develop and highlight its past. Thanks to Smith and many others, the new Jonesboro is likely to carry on some of the traditions of historic Jonesborough.

Although we enjoyed the charm of Jonesboro, getting there was not always charming. We left Erwin on a warm July morning, ready to walk again after two days' rest. Mama Rowe, my Aunt Ruth and my Great Aunt Bill had pampered us. After days of trail food, their chicken-broccoli casserole and brown sugar sweet potatoes were especially appreciated. Erwin was also a good opportunity to resupply for the road. I got a haircut too, aware that a neat hiker was likely to find a warmer reception along the way than a ragged one.

For our return to road walking, we traded our hot, stiff hiking boots for softer, cooler running shoes. Our packs would be lighter on the road too, primarily because we had to carry much less food. Our resupply task was made easier by Lynn and Danny Alexander, friends from Seymour, who made a special trip to Erwin to visit us and bring our shoes and other equipment.

Erwin was also the town where we discovered that even hikers can be affected by the oil market. Our small backpacking stove used

Coleman stove fuel, a petroleum product. But none of the stores in Erwin had it. "It's ordered but we can't get it," the clerks told us.

The walk from Erwin to Jonesboro was an eye-opener in other ways. After hiking the trail, it was a shock to face traffic again. We realized very quickly that roads are made for automobiles and that a narrow road can be a very dangerous footpath. The other eye opener on the road was the trash. I had forgotten how many cans, bottles, fast food wrappers and other discards could be found in the roadside ditches. Only a mile or two from Erwin, it was all too obvious that trash on the roadside is a hallmark of the American way of transportation. It's an unfortunate distinction.

A few hours later, we walked into Washington County and crossed the Nolichucky River. There was a small crowd on the bridge, apparently waiting for something to happen on the river. We asked what. Soon we were talking to Neal Sanders, a Kingsport physician and founder of the annual Nolichucky River Canoe Races. It was clear why Sanders had organized the event: he was an enthusiastic canoeing salesman. He urged us to join the fun. "We'll find you a canoe, paddles, life jackets--don't worry about a thing," the doctor said. Linda and I had canoeing experience but the offer was too much for my conscience. We were supposed to be hiking, not having fun in a canoe. Besides, we wanted to save our energy for the road--it was still nine miles to Jonesboro.

Sanders insisted that we at least walk down to the finish line for the afternoon events. So we took a long lunch break by the swift and muddy Nolichucky, watching half a dozen canoes and their furious

paddlers battle for speed and skill. Most of the afternoon races were strictly for fun. There was a backward race, for example, in which the paddlers had to maneuver the canoes upstream, around a buoy, and then downstream. Then there was the "pickup" race in which the canoes did laps around the buoys, picking up an additional passenger on each lap. The paddlers weren't always graceful--they were downright clumsy at times--but they splashed and laughed their way through the races. We had a great time watching.

But the break had gone on too long; we still had miles to walk. We tired as the afternoon grew hotter and our feet became tender again. Still, we were in Jonesboro by suppertime and looking forward to a feast at The Parson's Table: chicken, baked sweet apples, beans, bread and so on. It sounded great except for one thing: we weren't that hungry. We were simply too hot and tired for a full dinner. That's how we ended up at the ice cream shop, where we each ordered a milkshake and then watched with delight as the girl made them with scoops of ice cream and milk, topped with whipped cream, a cherry and even a little Fourth of July American flag. They tasted as good as they looked, too.

That night we were indoors again. Linda's family, up from their Florida home for the summer, were in Johnson City. It only took a dime to get a roof over our heads and a soft bed. I didn't mind the luxury of another night indoors, but I was already feeling guilty for taking it easy. The trip, I thought to myself, was supposed to be rougher than this.

Monday arrived in a steady rain. Linda's mother Janet was anxious to keep us around for a longer visit anyway and with the rain, we were

easy to convince. But another day off seemed to require some kind of mission, something which would justify the day. We had just the project: Paul M. Fink, one of Tennessee's backpacking legends, was in a Johnson City nursing home. We wanted to meet him.

The sign on the door got us started. "It's hell to be old," the sign read. When Linda mentioned this phrase to Fink, he growled back, "That's right, lady. And you don't know the half of it."

Fink was 87 and had been living in the nursing home for several years. As we entered his room he turned from the desk, slowly pulled a magazine away from his face, and raised his eyes to us. Fink's hair was white and his body was round and swollen. He seemed tired, bored. We introduced ourselves and I had the sinking feeling we had come at a bad time. But things quickly got better. Soon he was telling us about hiking Roan Mountain before the Appalachian Trail, almost before automobiles. I asked him why he began backpacking. "Hell, that was the only way to get there," he shot back.

As Linda and Fink talked, I looked around the room. It was lined with books. There were stacks of magazine articles, clippings, and letters everywhere on his desk. Clearly age had slowed Paul Fink, but the slowdown was primarily physical; his mind was still moving.

We talked for an hour. He told us about growth and development of the Appalachian Trail, about his early visits to Gatlinburg and his memories of Andy Huff and others at Gatlinburg's old Mountain View Hotel. Fink knew the Smokies well and was a leader in the movement to preserve the mountains in a national park.

Fink was also a historian and student of folklore. A banker in Jonesboro all his working life, Fink became the town's historical

authority. In 1972, he published a history of Jonesboro, with the subtitle "The first century of Tennessee's first town." With Jimmy Neil Smith and others, he was one of the leaders of the Jonesboro restoration movement. For many years, Fink kept notes on the colorful phrases and unusual sayings used by the mountain people he knew. A collection of the phrases, Bits of Mountain Speech, was published in 1974. Fink also investigated the curious names given to mountains and streams in the Smokies and reported on his findings in another book, That's Why They Call It. His writing, research and leadership in conservation activities made him many friends in Tennessee and the Southern Appalachians, and the walls of the nursing home room held plaques and honors from many organizations.

But Fink was a straight-shooter. He didn't tolerate nonsense and believed he could spot a phony the minute he walked in the room. He didn't care much for some scholars, either. "I've seen a bunch of Ph.D.'s in my time that were the most ignorant people on earth," he told us.

Fortunately, he seemed to like us, and of course we liked him. As we left, he autographed a copy of his Mountain Speech for us as a gift.

We saw Fink again that Christmas, after we had finished most of our hike. He remembered us and asked about our trip. He was in good spirits then, proud of his recent venture into the nursing home kitchen where he supervised the making of pralines, a Fink specialty. When Linda pronounced the word "pray-lean" Fink jerked up his head. He vigorously insisted that the correct and only pronunciation of the word was "praw-line." When he was sure we had it right, he showed

us an article on his praline cooking from the Johnson City paper and proceeded to tell us the "right" way to make pralines.

He lived only a few more months. I found his obituary unexpectedly one morning in the Knoxville newspaper. It was a loss for all of Paul Fink's friends, for Jonesboro, for Tennessee, and for the Southern mountains that he loved so much. This man knew what it was to walk, to climb mountains, to live outside. We knew him only slightly but it was enough: he was a good example.

We resumed our hike Tuesday in Jonesboro. Our destination was another historic site: Davy Crockett's birthplace. The walk took us by the campus of Washington College, an academy founded in 1785 by the Reverend Samuel Doak. Washington College, now a boarding high school, was the first regular school west of the Allegheny mountains.

We also passed Gus Cloyd's store in Telford, an old railroad community virtually bypassed by progress. Gus was a friendly storekeeper, interested in our hike, and we sat on the porch and talked. When he saw our snack of raisins, nuts and cereal, he complained, "I can't eat that stuff. I've only got five teeth."

We camped at Davy Crockett Birthplace State Park that night, enjoying another shower after another hot afternoon. This time there was little chance we'd use all the hot water--there were only two other families among the hundred or so campsites.

The Crockett birthplace may not attract many campers--it's not Disneyland and there's really not much there--but it seemed like a good place to enter the world. Though a popular song in the 1950s claimed Davy was born on a mountaintop, he was really born in a valley beside a mountain river, the Nolichucky. Davy moved away while still

a baby, always moving west, first with his family and later as a pioneer, hunter and adventurer. His journey eventually led him to Texas and martyrdom at the Alamo. We didn't know it then, but we would cross the path of Davy Crockett several more times during our walk across Tennessee.

A man named Joe Johnson advised us the next day. We were looking for a soft drink machine in his hardware store in Chuckey, not far from Greeneville, when we encountered Johnson. He said we should drink water. "Those Cokes aren't good for you anyway," he declared. He also gave us the good news about Skylab, due to crash to earth that day. "It's over the Indian Ocean," he said. "Don't worry." Johnson also had a map which he checked for the shortest route to Greeneville. The railroad was the best way, he said, at least for a couple of miles. Then we could follow the new highway into town.

We decided to give it a try. Johnson wished us well and we began, trying to develop a stride that would somehow allow us to walk from crosstie to crosstie. It didn't work. The way the crossties are spaced, it couldn't work--at least not for averaged-sized people. A few more minutes on the gravel railroad bed and we were eager to return to the highway. Mark this down as a learning experience, I told Linda. Yeah, she said, we've learned never to do this again. And we never did.

The next day, we decided, would be an exploration day in Greeneville. Greeneville isn't quite as old as Jonesboro, but its history and its older homes are as rich. Greeneville's most notable distinction has to do with the seventeenth President of the United States. Andrew Johnson ran away from his apprenticeship under a Raleigh tailor when

he was 14. He settled in Greeneville and proceeded to educate himself and operate a successful tailor shop. By the time he was 21, he was a city alderman. A few years later, he was elected mayor. His political rise was steady after that: state legislator, U.S. Congressman, governor of Tennessee, and, on the brink of the Civil War, U.S. Senator. Like many East Tennesseans, he remained loyal to the Union during the war. His talent and loyalty earned him the vice presidential nomination in 1864 and, following Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson, a self-educated tailor from Greeneville, Tennessee, was President of the United States.

We saw Johnson's small frame tailor shop downtown and toured the impressive brick structure which was his home during his Washington years. That afternoon we walked up to Greeneville's Signal Hill, now topped with Johnson's tomb and a national cemetery. A true patriot even in death, Johnson lies over the town he loved, his body wrapped in an American flag, his head resting on a copy of the Constitution. That's the way he wanted it.

That evening, Linda and I were guests of a friend, Alex Jones, editor of the Greeneville Sun. Alex didn't know we were hiking or even in town until we dropped by the newspaper office, but he immediately invited us to stay at his house.

Later, over cocktails in Alex's comfortable library, we met some of Alex's friends. It was an impressive crowd: a young tobacco buyer whose family owned one of the state's largest tobacco firms, a building contractor and his wife, and a woman who had been a magazine writer in New York for many years. And then there was Alex himself: son of a successful newspaper family, handsome, well-traveled, gifted

in his work, and only in his early 30s. A bachelor, Alex had a carpenter at work repairing his rambling hilltop house, a house, it turned out, with its own history. Alex said this was the Williams home, built after the Civil War. The Williams family supported the South, a fact which made them unpopular in Unionist East Tennessee. When the South surrendered, the Williamses found themselves evicted from their impressive stone home downtown and reduced to this frame home nearby. The old home downtown is now a part of the Greeneville hospital and their hilltop home, now considered a substantial home itself, is being restored by Alex.

After the party broke up, we invited Alex to dinner on one condition--he had to drive. He took us to Augustino's where we ate shrimp and great Italian dishes rich in cheese and tomato sauce. Sitting there, sipping red wine, it was easy to forget that we had sweated and suffered when we walked into town only a day before. But the more we walked, the more we came to see that the pleasures of discovery and the company of new friends more than countered the pain. In four short days, we had followed a trail which covered nearly a century: from the days of Franklin to the state of Tennessee, from frontier heroes like John Sevier and Davy Crockett to Presidents Andy Jackson and Andrew Johnson. Not only could we actually see the past--the buildings and monuments of Jonesboro and Greeneville--but we could see how the past connected to the present through the lives of Jimmy Neil Smith, Paul Fink, and Alex Jones. Deep down, I knew that it was important to know and understand history and I felt better knowing that Tennessee history was being kept alive in East Tennessee.

Our hike, only three weeks old, was richer and more varied already than Linda and I had ever imagined. And it got better.

CHAPTER IV

BULLS GAP

Hours before we got there, we looked across the green fields to the west and saw the long, low ridge called Bays Mountain. The mountain was marked by a pronounced gap, a "V" that clearly meant a passage. Surely the road before us would traverse that gap. And almost as certainly, there would be a town in it.

The town exists, of course, bearing the name of the first white man to settle there, John Bull. Bulls Gap is a small town, grown old. The gap is no longer significant: Interstate 81 crosses the mountain by a new route a few miles to the east. The railroad remains, though railroads hardly matter now: this is the age of the automobile. So Bull's Gap, strategically located for an older age, rests and remembers more prosperous times.

Yet for me, Bulls Gap is not just another Tennessee town. It's my ancestral home. My great-grandfather Coward, also named John, farmed a place just to the west of Bulls Gap. He and his wife and some other family members are buried on the old farm in a small cemetery, literally in the shadow of Bays Mountain and overlooking a small stream which bears the family name: Coward's Branch. The family tree goes further back, of course, but great-grandfather Coward and the Bays Mountain farm are as far as I can go. This is where I trace my history; for reasons I cannot quite explain, I am rooted there.

I have been to the farm only once, but my imagination, inspired by the stories of relatives, has settled there. I imagine Old John

Coward on his farm, behind a team of horses, breaking the earth, making a modest living from the land. He built a house there and, with his wife, raised a family. The children, Lizzie, Ida, Joe and John (my grandfather), left the farm, prospered, and raised families of their own. These children, my father George among them, prospered as well and bore their children. I am one of these: two generations off the farm and still connected, in some very essential way, to the land near Bulls Gap.

Maybe this is one reason I am now walking west, as great-grandfather Coward did, going home to Bulls Gap in Bays Mountain.

No Cowards live in Bulls Gap now. But some second cousins, the Nicholsons, also descendants of great-grandfather Coward, remain. On a blustery Friday in July, Linda and I hiked to their house. Along the way, we took refuge from a mid-day storm under our tarp, hastily draped over a "Road Closed" barrier--the only handy structure in sight. We held the tarp in place with our hands, our pack frames and Linda's hiking stick. For 30 minutes, huddled under this makeshift shelter, we dodged drips from the tarp and tried to stay dry. It was a losing battle. But the storm passed and we walked on, soggy but not soaked and with a new appreciation for the Highway Department's "Road Closed" barricades.

Later, we stopped for lunch at a small dreary store run by a bored young man with bad teeth. While we sipped soft drinks, a woman, apparently his mother, entered the store and began talking. Our trip didn't seem to interest her so we talked about her life, especially her chickens. She was fuming about stray dogs, nasty beasts who chased and killed her chickens. Linda asked who owned the strays. The woman,

her thin voice growing tough, wasn't exactly sure about that. But on one point she was absolutely clear: "I wouldn't own no chicken-eatin' dog!" We quietly finished our food and slipped away, quite sure we didn't want to disturb the woman further.

In Bulls Gap, we visited with the whole Nichols clan: Ethel, Georgie, Ruby, Lynn, Billy and Joe. The women prepared supper for us and we caught up with the family news. One of the first things we noticed was Georgie, busy in the kitchen making her lime pickles. Linda and I believed then as we do now: Georgie's a master pickle-maker. On a Bulls Gap visit several years before, we had eaten a few lime pickles and were immediately taken by their crisp, crunchy texture and the sweet-sour snap of flavor in every slice. Georgie favored us then with a pint to take home and we guarded them like caviar, eating a few only a holidays and special occasions. Whenever we served Georgie's pickles at home, the verdict was unanimous: Georgie's lime pickles were simply delicious. Now, several years after our first encounter with lime pickles, we discovered Georgie still perfecting her near-perfect product. And the pickles were still good. We couldn't take a pint hiking with us but Georgie promised us another jar when we stopped by again.

After supper we sat on the porch, talked and read the newspaper. Across the field behind the house, a horse show was beginning. Linda and I wanted to go; we had seen the trailers on the highway as we walked into town. But the porch was so appealing after a long day of walking. How could we move? In any event, the weather settled the matter. Another storm, dark and serious, was on the horizon, moving fast. I had pitched the tent in the backyard and I quickly restaked it for the approaching

storm. The rain began before I could finish. And then the storm hit. For the next two hours we sat in the living room, listening to the storm. Someone unplugged the television so the lightning wouldn't burn it. The wind swept across the yard and I was sure our tent, hidden behind the smokehouse, was already gone. The horse show was chaos, horses and their riders running for shelter in their trucks and trailers. The lightning cracked again and the lights flickered and died. Ethel and Ruby lit some lamps. We debated the fate of the horses, the electrical substation and our tent. I was worried about the tent and wondering what we would do for shelter if it wasn't there.

The storm grew quieter, finally, and passed. The lights returned. I tip-toed through the wet grass around the smokehouse. The tent was standing, loose but intact. I checked for damage but there appeared to be none. A small pool of water had collected inside the door; otherwise, the tent was dry inside. I used a rag to mop up the puddle and began preparing a bed on the soft wet grass. Before bed, we bathed-- a great luxury after a day of rain, sun and wind. As we fell asleep, the horsemen across the field loaded their animals onto trailers and drove their pick-ups into the night.

We awoke the next day to a great country breakfast, great because of Ethel's biscuits: flaky, light and tender. Then we were off for Morristown on a back road known by its original name: the Old State Road. By early afternoon we were in Russellville, a town I remembered only vaguely from numerous auto trips on 11E, the main thoroughfare before the interstate. But walking into Russellville was a new experience; this time we could really see the town.

What we saw was sad: small, ill-kept houses on tiny, littered

lots, A few grand old farm houses were mixed in, equally weathered and worn. This was not the community I remembered and it was a shock to me: so much poverty. At one house, we faced a young woman in a red dress on the porch of a small block house. She pulled hard on a cigarette, removing it only once to yell at a baby sitting in the open doorway. Then she turned to us again, unsmiling. A few minutes later, we walked to Mama Haun's, a little restaurant adjoining a store. Mama Haun, a heavy German woman with a rich accent, was in her kitchen but the grill was closed. We picked a few things at the store and sat on the concrete out front to eat. A group of Russellville teenagers, complete with motorcycles, cigarettes and a defiant air, entertained each other in the parking lot. They were a brassy bunch, loud and full of spit. They ignored us--and we were glad. As we left Russellville we passed another weathered mansion, its boards the color of mud. The historical marker outside said the house had been the headquarters for a Confederate army force during the winter of 1863-64. The house, and everything else in Russellville, looked that old.

By early evening, under another threatening sky, we were in Morristown. But we were worried: we were downtown with no place to camp. We passed a city park where little leaguers were running and yelling. I looked over the park for a hidden corner where we could pitch a tent. It wasn't there. Soon we approached an old school building where a wrestling match was already drawing a crowd. "Southeastern Championship Wrestling," the posters said. "Gorgeous George Vs. The Mongolian Stomper." I lit up: this could be fun. But first we had to find a campsite. We checked a vacant, overgrown lot nearby but it was too exposed, too risky. We headed into an older neighborhood,

lined with small white houses, some neat, some not. I looked for someone on a porch, someone who might be willing to let us camp in a backyard. But everyone was inside or at the wrestling match--not on the porch in any case. At the next corner, a boy, on his porch high above the road, yelled to us.

"You get rained out?"

"No. We're hiking across Tennessee. We're looking for a place to camp."

"Come on up!"

And that was all it took. The boy, Ronnie Hart, was 12 or 13. His folks weren't home, he said, but it didn't matter--they wouldn't care. Linda and I were cautious. "You sure?" Linda asked. Ronnie assured us that it was all right. So, at Ronnie's continuing insistence, we climbed the hill behind his house and found a place flat enough to sleep.

Ronnie was a thin, bright boy, cocky and tough. He lit up a cigarette and started asking us questions. His imagination seemed to grow with every answer and soon he was telling us hiking stories. He said he met a couple last year, hiking to the Smokies. They camped in his backyard too, he said, in this exact spot. We didn't believe the story but Ronnie insisted it was true and filled in the details, suspiciously similar to things we had told him. We forgot the wrestling match, ate a little supper and waited with Ronnie for his parents to come home. We were both worried about that; it was getting late and we had no idea what kind of welcome we would receive from Ronnie's folks. Finally, an old Ford pick-up rumbled up the street and parked. Ronnie's folks stepped out and we introduced ourselves and told them

our story. Looking at them, I was not encouraged. Mr. Hart was in his 50s, older than I expected, and seemed tired. Mrs. Hart, somewhat younger, held a squirming young girl in her arms, a grandbaby, she explained. After a long moment, Mr. Hart said it was fine if we wanted to stay. Linda and I looked at each other, relieved.

The Harts had been at a tent revival meeting where, Mr. Hart said, the preaching was done by a "big black man." The little granddaughter, about three, was round and spoiled. She pestered the others and eyed us at a distance. Mr. Hart said the baby's mother, his daughter, had "married a dooper." He said she came by the house one day and said, "I don't want this baby. If you want her, you keep her."

The next morning, we said goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Hart. Ronnie wanted to see us off but was still asleep. Following Mr. Hart's directions, we walked through the neighborhood toward the highway and another town.

As we left Morristown, we began to sense the richness of our experience so far. Only two days before, we had breakfast at the stately hilltop home of John and Arnie Jones, Alex's parents. Mrs. Jones, a short woman with a gracious Southern accent, charmed us with stories of Greeneville. She was the daughter of a newspaper family, the wife of a newspaper publisher, the mother of three newspaper sons. Arnie Jones knew how to live well. For us, it was a glimpse of the good life in a Tennessee town, a life of luxury, travel and power. It was a heady experience.

Our experience in Bulls Gap was different. The Nicholises were good farm people who lived well but modestly. They had no power to speak of but, like the Joneses, they had a sense of family, of community.

Bulls Gap was their home and they knew they belonged there. In America today, not every family could say that.

Finally, we had met the Harts, still another family living a different kind of life in Tennessee. The Harts weren't prosperous; materially, they had very little. But they had riches of another kind. Like the others, they had a strong family bond. They cared about each other. And Linda and I believed they were decent, goodhearted people, who, in spite of poverty and its problems, remained kind to each other and to strangers. The Harts, maybe more than any people we had met on our hike, opened their lives to us, revealed themselves without pretension. It was a kindness of a special order.

CHAPTER V

SHELTER

Granny's Dairy Mart in White Pine looked like just another roadside restaurant. After walking from Morristown in the rising heat we entered Granny's more for the air conditioning than the food.

Then we saw the shakers. Hundreds of pairs of salt and pepper shakers lined narrow shelves from floor to ceiling along one wall. There were shakers made of steel, tin, glass, plastic and pottery. They had been molded, bent, cut and shaped into figures of people, plants, birds, bears, bananas--there were too many variations to count. Linda found two tiny men in prison stripes, souvenirs of Alcatraz. The more we looked, the more places we discovered: Niagara Falls, Yellowstone, San Juan, San Francisco--the whole country was here. I saw a series of historical shakers: George and Martha Washington and a pair of Civil War cannon from Gettysburg. But my favorites were yellow and white plastic shakers shaped like fried eggs. Each yoke was a shaker; each egg white served as a base. I wanted a pair to take home--pop art for the breakfast table.

The waitress took our order and told us about the collection. "Granny's been collecting for 33 years," the woman said. "She's got 'em from every state and a few foreign countries too," Granny's friends helped, the waitress said, buying unusual shakers on trips around the country and abroad.

How many pairs does she have, Linda asked. The waitress wasn't sure, but Linda guessed there must be at least 600 pairs on the wall.

We ate hamburgers and ice cream and drank several glasses of iced tea. Before we left, we spent a few more minutes studying the shakers. I found a pair of ceramic tombstones from somewhere out west. Each had an epitaph:

Here lies
PEPPER TATE
1860-1881
Hanged by Mistake.
He was right
We was wrong
But we strung him
And now he's gone.

SALTY O'DAY
Hoss Thief
1861-1880
A rope necktie
An old oak tree
And Salty wasn't
What he used to be.

We were only half a mile from Granny's when we noticed dark clouds to the west. Though the sky was clear over White Pine, the clouds seemed to be moving toward us--fast. I remembered the violence of the storm at Bulls Gap only 48 hours before, and I didn't want to get caught in a thunderstorm like that one. Besides, Linda hates lightning. So we stopped on the highway to consider our options.

I checked the western sky again. The storm was closing. The wind was picking up, too. We had 10 minutes, maybe, to find shelter. We decided to keep walking and hole up in the first store, church or other public building we came to. We started walking again, faster than before. Across a field to the west, the teenagers at the White Pine swimming pool were splashing and screaming, unaware.

Two minutes later, the sun was covered by dark clouds. A light rain started and the wind blew harder. Then the lightning and thunder

began. The splashing at the pool stopped and we could hear the life-guard giving orders over the public address system. I had badly misjudged the time--now we were standing on a stretch of open highway with no place to go.

On the left, 100 yards ahead, was a large wooded lot--possibly a church. We almost ran to it. Fifty yards later we saw that it was just a house, and it didn't look inviting. I cussed; Linda frowned and pulled her parka close around her face. I searched the road ahead. There were many houses but no stores or churches and not a soul in sight. Across the highway, however, I saw a house with a narrow porch protected from the wind. We bolted for it.

The porch was less than ideal. The roof was 30 feet high and the wind blew a steady mist over us. But we propped our packs and our bodies against the brick front of the house and relaxed. We were safe now even if we weren't completely dry.

The worst of the storm passed in 10 minutes. I knocked on the door to tell the occupants we were on their porch and to ask permission to stay. No one was home. A few minutes later, the Bradley family returned and we explained our presence. Fortunately, Mr. and Mrs. Bradley (and their two children) were sympathetic. They invited us inside and we exchanged stories as we waited for the rain to end. The smallest child, a boy, amused me with his adult-sized baseball cap. It came over his ears and nearly swallowed his head. The cap carried a message: "Ramsey Furniture Co., White Pine, Tenn." It was the store where the Bradleys worked. Before we left, Mr. Bradley gave us ballcaps, too.

"Wear them," he said. "It's good advertising for the store."

I did, too, though not as advertising. Instead, I wore the cap as a reminder of the Bradleys and the friendship they showed us that stormy afternoon in White Pine.

We camped that night at a campground on Douglas Lake, TVA's name for the dammed and placid waters of the French Broad River. We felt peculiar now walking into a commercial campground and pitching our tent next to the Winnegabos and Airstreams with their refrigerators and color televisions. I made wisecracks to Linda about the air conditioning, white poodles and other hallmarks of suburban "camping." Clearly we were camping; they were lounging. That evening, the canned laughter from "Three's Company" and other television comedies drifted across the campground. We could hardly hear the crickets.

Naturally, I thought we were superior to the loungers. We were suffering, after all, and I knew this made us better campers and, by extension, better people. We were proving our superiority every day, every time we lifted our packs and walked down the highway.

Or were we? I wanted to believe we were, yet I wasn't really convinced. I had to ask: were we superior, or were we just different? I had to acknowledge, too, that other people couldn't--or wouldn't--do what we were doing and that what was right for us was not necessarily right for others. So maybe we weren't superior. But we were more stubborn, certainly, and more curious.

CHAPTER VI

DANDRIDGE

It took a good morning of walking (and backtracking after a wrong turn) to get to Dandridge, but we didn't want to miss Tennessee's second oldest town. Dandridge in the summer is a green, picturesque place, its atmosphere enhanced by several 19th Century brick and frame buildings and an old graveyard where five Revolutionary War soldiers are buried. Actually we had been to Dandridge several times, but always in a car, rushing through. Now, thanks to the walk, we could really see the town and discover its history for ourselves.

We were a block from the center of Dandridge when an elderly woman approached us on the street.

"Are you lost?" she asked. Before we could answer, she took a guess: "I'll bet you're looking for the Appalachian Trail."

Linda told her we weren't.

"Then why are you here?" the woman asked. Though the question was blunt, we could tell by her tone of voice that she was concerned. Linda explained that we were hiking across Tennessee as a way of learning more about the state and its people. The woman smiled, obviously pleased. We knew we had found a friend.

"Are you interested in history?" the woman asked.

"Sure," I answered, "that's why we're here."

"Then let me show you Dandridge," the woman said. She introduced herself as Ellen Vincent and immediately began telling us about a large frame structure on a nearby corner. The building was constructed in

1820, Mrs. Vincent said, and is known as the Shepard Inn. There are slave quarters in the rear, she said, as she led us down an alley.

Then she directed us to a log and stone cabin on the edge of a meadow, rich with shrubs and bright with summer flowers. "This was Bert's cabin," Mrs. Vincent explained. "We used it as a guest house." Bert, she told us, was Bert Vincent, her late husband.

Bert had been a newspaperman, best known for his popular "Strolling" column in the Knoxville News-Sentinel. I remembered Bert's columns, and I knew he had traveled all over East Tennessee in search of stories about rural and small-town life. I realized then why Mrs. Vincent had taken to us so quickly. Mrs. Vincent realized it, too: "You know you're strolling--just like Bert."

For the next two hours or so, we listened to and were charmed by Mrs. Vincent at her home across the meadow from the cabin. We had come to Dandridge to learn its history and we had met--quite by accident--a woman who knew it by heart. It was, after all, her history too. Her maiden name was Hynds and the house we were in now--her house--was called the old Hynds House. It was built, she said, in 1845, the same year as the Jefferson County Courthouse across the street. Her family had owned the house since 1868.

Mrs. Vincent served us iced tea in her kitchen and told us more about her life, her house and her town. It was delightful listening. She spoke quickly, in a soft, dignified Southern accent. It was immediately clear that she loved to talk and tell stories. Though her hair was gray, her voice was as lively and as gracious as a girl's and her eyes were still bright, still blue. We guessed she was in her late

60s or early 70s. Whatever her age, she was overflowing with energy and ideas. We listened well.

When I finished my tea, she hopped up to refill the glass and insisted, over my protests, that the tea needed extra ice and sugar. As I held the glass, she stirred the sugar in with a long spoon.

Mrs. Vincent urged us to visit the county museum at the courthouse. (One item we must see, she said, was Davy Crockett's marriage license, issued August 12, 1806.) But the Hynds House itself was a museum.

Antique furnishings and a hand-carved stairway decorated the large front rooms. Mrs. Vincent had made the house a memorial to Bert. His awards, photographs and mementos lined the walls.

As we toured the house, Mrs. Vincent asked us to sign her guest register. While I did, she turned to Linda and said, "Surely one of you is an artist." Linda, who majored in art in college and finished a master's degree in pottery, was surprised. Yes, Linda replied, she was an artist. But she wondered: how did Mrs. Vincent know? Maybe it was a lucky guess.

A few minutes later, we began talking about Bert and newspapers when Mrs. Vincent asked, "Which of you is the writer?" I told her I was. Across the room, Linda eyed me with amazement. The woman was psychic, her eyes said. I wondered, too. But Linda and I discussed it later and agreed: psychic or not, Ellen Hynds Vincent was a remarkable woman.

Mrs. Vincent told us that the Hynds House served as a Confederate hospital for a time during the Civil War. Later, Confederate forces under the command of Gen. James Longstreet surprised Union troops at

Dandridge and drove the Yankees toward Knoxville. Following the battle, Mrs. Vincent said, the victorious officers were invited to the Hynds House for a celebration. A Union general had been a guest in the house the evening before and had left a bottle of brandy. The Confederates, she said, cheerfully toasted the Union general with his own brandy.

Mrs. Vincent also told us how Dandridge came to be. Jefferson County was organized in 1792 when George Washington was president, and the new county decided to create a town for its county seat and name it after the First Lady, Martha Dandridge Washington.

A committee of five men was selected to find a site for the new town. They searched the banks of the French Broad River and near the present site of Dandridge, they saw a log meeting house. This building was a church, Mrs. Vincent said, still open today as Hopewell Presbyterian.

Near the church, the men discovered a spring branch and a still house. They refreshed themselves with the liquor. It was good whiskey. "It must be the water," one of the men said. They followed the branch to its source, a large, steady spring, and sampled the spring waters. It was excellent water. So the committee made up its mind then and there: this would be Dandridge.

Mrs. Vincent ended her story with a quote from one of Bert's newspaper columns. In 1942 Bert researched the founding of Dandridge, and he pointed out the contrast between the pioneer church and the liquor operation nearby. Bert wrote, "Folks mixed their religion and liquor in those days, and didn't go to hell any faster than they do today."

"Do you know where that spring is?" Mrs. Vincent asked. We had

no idea. So she led us to the back porch and pointed us toward the green meadow. Only 20 yards away, a clear stream flowed from the ground. It was lined with large, cut stones and surrounded by flowers and shrubs. It was the Dandridge spring, still cool and sweet nearly 200 years after the committee of five found it. Dandridge was built around this spring. But Mrs. Vincent owned it; the spring was in her back yard.

But Mrs. Vincent said there was a threat to the spring once, a threat that would have destroyed not only the spring but also much of old Dandridge. It could have been flooded beneath the waters of Douglas Lake. That would have happened too, Mrs. Vincent said, except that the citizens of Dandridge weren't about to let their town go under. They wrote letters to TVA, they badgered Congress, they called on President Franklin Roosevelt to save their town and their spring. It worked. In 1942, Roosevelt ordered TVA to build a dike to prevent the flooding of old Dandridge. As a part of the project, TVA installed a pump to carry the now trapped spring waters over the dike and into the lake. The pump is still running and Dandridge has been saved, along with the spring which was, and still is, its center.

The afternoon was nearly gone and Mrs. Vincent had other business to attend to. So did we. We lifted our packs and said goodbye. We left the Hynds House elated and inspired. Mrs. Vincent had shown us first-hand the richness of history and the value of tradition. It was a good lesson, and we walked away vowing to return. We wanted to be charmed again, to tour the house again, to hear again her vivid telling of Dandridge history.

We were surprised and saddened to see the clipping a few weeks

later. Mrs. Vincent was dead. The obituary said the cause of death was unknown. She had been ill and hospitalized a few days before she died. She was 80.

We had hiked for a month--over 300 miles--since our visit with Mrs. Vincent, but we had never felt far away. Our afternoon with her remained fresh. She had been so energetic, so full of life. To us, she wasn't 80; she wasn't even old. Ellen Hynds Vincent was as bright and as vigorous and as curious as a little girl.

Her death was a loss to Dandridge and East Tennessee. Yet on reflection, we knew somehow she wasn't really gone. Her presence would live on in the places she knew and loved: the Hynds House, the Jefferson County Courthouse, and in Dandridge and beyond. Like the spring which flowed from her back yard, Ellen Hynds Vincent's spirit would go on and on.

CHAPTER VII

WALKING HOME

To me, East Tennessee is a special place. It's my family home, the place where I was born, and where I lived most of my early years. On a map, I can point to almost any town and tell you what it looks like and what goes on there. East Tennessee is, in a word, home.

It is Linda's home too. Though she was born in Indiana, she came of age in Tennessee and had developed her own attachment to the state. The hike, in fact, was largely her idea. So she too was committed to Tennessee.

But in the three weeks Linda and I had been hiking, we saw our attitudes toward East Tennessee changing. We found that our simple affection for the place was true and well intentioned, but it wasn't very deep.

The walk was changing that. The very act of walking helped: it forced us to take the land slowly, to consider and reconsider our relationship to it. As we walked, we learned. And we discovered that our love for the place and its people was no longer simple or abstract. It was, we found, very real and increasingly complex. Already, we knew we'd be different people--with a different attitude toward Tennessee--when we finished our journey.

Yet we hadn't come to this realization easily. It took walking and contemplation. It also took a friend, a poet named Jeff Daniel Marion.

Danny lived near Dandridge and after we left Mrs. Vincent we

walked to his farm. It was another hot afternoon but we cooled off with iced tea in the shade of his carport and, later, filled up with spaghetti and blackberry cobbler. (Danny picked the blackberries himself and Lana, his wife, made the cobbler. The pie alone was worth the walk.) But Danny's contribution to the hike was more spiritual than physical. His poems made a difference. They helped us understand the meaning of home.

Danny and I had known each other since 1975 and we found we had a lot in common. We shared an interest in history, nature, and photography. Our literary interests were remarkably similar: I published a small poetry magazine called Puddingstone; Danny published a small poetry magazine called The Small Farm.

We also shared an interest in East Tennessee. But Danny was ahead of me. He had been exploring East Tennessee in his poetry for several years. When I read his poems, I learned what Tennessee meant to him and what it might mean to me. I was struck by the depth of his commitment, the honesty of his feelings, and the magic of his words. I had long believed in the power of poetry to clarify a feeling, to explain the unexplainable. Yet I had never read poems which spoke so directly, so immediately, about the land and man's relationship to it. So I read and re-read Danny's poems and learned something of the value of home.

Now that we were well into the hike, Linda and I sat with Danny and Lana and talked about the trip. Talking, especially to them, helped us realize the significance of what we'd been through. I don't think they said anything astonishing--nor did we--but a couple of hours of

easy conversation among friends was enough to put some perspective on our experience.

I didn't say anything to Danny then but the final lines of his poem "Boundaries" came to me again and again that summer:

Yoked in these lines
I mean to work this land.
What comes up won't be wasted
& what's between the rows
is welcome, too.
Maybe occasionally a green heron
will visit my pond.
I'm always at home here
still believing
the reward of this labor
is vision
honed to the blue sharpness
of ridges.

During the long, hot afternoons on the road, I had plenty of time to ponder the meaning of those lines. I concentrated first on the words: land, home, reward, labor, vision, and ridges. As I walked, I began to see how the words worked together and how the words made phrases and sentences which formed powerful images: "Yoked in these lines" and "reward of this labor" and "the blue sharpness/of ridges." After walking, I had a new sense of labor and its rewards. After the Appalachian Trail and the hills of East Tennessee, I found new meaning in the sharpness of ridges. But most importantly, I saw in Danny's poem a careful and deliberate acceptance of home. Danny had come to terms with his native territory and now, through his writing, he was embracing it. It was such a simple thing: we were all searching for a special place, our physical and spiritual home. Danny was doing it through his writing. We were doing it our own way, walking.

We left Danny and Lana the next morning, rested but anxious to move on. We were, I figured, only two days away from our house

in Seymour. Though the trip was going well, we were looking forward to a long, air-conditioned rest and a chance to catch up on our "real" lives.

One of the first places we passed that morning was a public swimming pool near the Jefferson County High School. Though we were still fresh and barely a mile from Danny's, we had a difficult time walking by that pool. What would be harm, I thought, of spending the day cool and relaxed instead of sweaty and tired? We deserved a break, and besides, who cared? Who was stopping us?

But we walked on. Maybe I was too moralistic or too serious but I just couldn't justify a day--or even an hour--at the pool. We had to walk in the morning, while it was cool. We wanted to get home and we had to keep walking. So we walked. (Later, in the baked, flat cotton country of West Tennessee, I longed for that pool and wondered if, by some magic, a swim that day would have helped us bear the heat.)

We spent the day walking on Dumplin Valley Road, a rural thoroughfare which led all the way to Sevier County, our home county. We took a long mid-day rest at a Massey-Ferguson dealer in a community called Piedmont. Later we made it to Dumplin, a farming community near the Sevier County line. We rested again, eating and drinking soft drinks at the Dumplin Store. We had done most of our work for that day; a commercial campground near Interstate 40 was our goal that night and it was only a few miles away.

A mile or so down the road, I saw a small sign for Hodges Mill. I had heard of the mill and I knew it was a water-powered operation. We decided to explore.

A short distance away we found the mill, a large, white wooden

building. There was no dam and no pond. Instead, a large, rusty pipe brought the millstream to the water wheel. But the mill was locked and there was no one around. We wondered if the mill was still in business.

Just then a car pulled up. A middle-aged man stuck his head out the window and greeted us. He asked the usual questions: who we were, what we were doing, and where we were going. I gathered he was checking us out. When he asked about the mill, I told him we had hoped to meet the miller and tour the building. "But no one's home," I said. "If they run it at all, it must be part time."

We didn't know it but we had passed the test. The man introduced himself as Hal Hodge. "I'm the miller," he explained. "Give me a minute to change clothes and I'll open the mill," he said.

Inside, the mill had a rich, dusty smell. A light powder of flour and cornmeal covered the bare wooden walls and furnishings. The afternoon light seeped in and the mill gave off a soft, golden glow.

But this was clearly a working place. The room was crowded with gears and pulleys and bins and sacks of corn and wheat. Narrow black belts, some with attached metal scoops, ran up and down through holes in the ceiling. Hal began explaining how the mill worked, pointing out what this gear did, how that belt operated. I tried to follow but the more equipment Hal explained, the more confused I became. Linda was bewildered too. But it didn't much matter; we liked the mill even if we didn't understand it.

"How'd you like to see it run?" Hall asked. We weren't about to turn him down. "I've got some corn to grind anyway," he said, "so follow me."

We watched as Hal prepared to grind. He opened a gate, and water from the leaky pipe flooded over the water wheel. The wheel began rolling, picked up speed and dumped its water below. Shafts began to turn. Gears began to spin. The mill was suddenly alive with noise and motion. At Hal's command, pulleys and belts began working and soon the sweet smell of cornmeal was stronger than ever. Finally we saw a yellow stream of ground corn emerging from a chute. Hal checked the meal and nodded his approval. Another bin collected grits. Still another was filling with feed corn for cattle. All the while, the water pushed the wheel around, the gears meshed and unmeshed, the belts snapped and spun. I still didn't know how the mill worked but it did--with water and wood and steel and, I thought, a little magic too.

Hal told us the mill was started by his father, Lute, years ago. But today the mill was a hobby more than a business. Hal worked for the state, checking the accuracy of tobacco scales and the like. He said he kept the mill going because he enjoyed it. Nobody else in the family did. Hal said his brother had a farm in Ohio, too far away to help with the mill. Hal said his own children didn't want to fool with it either. Even his wife thought the mill was more trouble than it was worth, Hal said.

If the mill was to remain in working order, Hal was going to have to do it. We were glad he chose to. He was carrying on a tradition: grinding grain like his father in a mill powered by water. I knew I was romanticizing the business; it must be demanding and tedious work at times. But it seemed to have its rewards too: the simple rewards of self-sufficiency and utility. Standing in the mill, watching

Hal working and the water-driven machinery clicking all around me, I wondered if I had missed my calling.

Before we left, Hal filled a 2-pound bag with new grits and gave it to us. We made it home to Seymour the next day and after a good night's rest, Linda fixed those grits for breakfast. They were the best we ever had.

CHAPTER VIII

RETURN TO THE ROAD

The return to the "real" world didn't turn out the way we thought it would.

First, there was our homecoming on a scorching Wednesday. We began the day climbing a high ridge overlooking the French Broad River. It was already hot. That afternoon we walked through a small community called Boyds Creek, where a white raiding party under the command of John Sevier defeated a band of Cherokees in 1779. The day was hotter still. Finally, after several more hours of afternoon sun, we turned off the highway into Shenandoah Estates, the subdivision where we lived. We were sweat-soaked and weary. But we were home--heroes returned from battle. We looked forward to a few easy days before heading west again.

I thought the neighbors would take note. I secretly hoped a couple of kids on bicycles would pull alongside as we walked, asking questions about our exploits and being amazed at our answers. Nothing of the sort happened. No one even noticed. The residents of Shenandoah Estates had their own lives to live and their own problems to solve. Our hike was of no consequence to them. In the suburbs, that's the way it is: live and let live.

Maybe that's how it should be. But the contrast between the hospitality we found on the road and the indifference we found in the subdivision was startling. Strangers in the country were friendlier than neighbors in the suburbs--or so it seemed.

It was a troubling discovery, though not entirely surprising. We had lived in the subdivision a year and we had made several acquaintances but no true friends. Everybody went his or her own way all week, and on weekends, they went their own way again. There was little sense of community and virtually no feeling for the land. Seymour was, after all, a bedroom community for Knoxville and most of the Shenandoah residents worked in the city. Despite its name and rural location, Shenandoah Estates might as well have been in Knoxville.

Then there was the disappointment of life at home. From the perspective of the road, it meant great luxury: our own soft bed at night, air conditioning, warm showers whenever we wanted, and a cool sip of wine as we listened to Oscar Peterson on the stereo. Home life was easy and restful. But almost immediately, Linda and I felt ill at ease. We didn't sleep as well as we thought we would. We weren't really happy either, even with all the physical comforts. And we didn't know what the trouble was--not yet, anyway.

After a couple of days at home, we began to make a little sense out of our feelings. At home, we had to face obligations again, obligations we had escaped on the hike. They were ordinary things--paying the bills, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn--but now they seemed petty, even silly. They weren't at all like the problems we faced while walking, essential problems of weather and food and shelter. We noticed a stark difference between life on the road and life at home, and we found that we preferred walking. It surprised us both. Life on foot was a harder existence, but it meant so much more.

Then we knew what the trouble was. We had to get out of the house, to go walking again. Soon.

It sounded easy: pick up the packs and go. But we'd had trouble getting out of the house before, and we had trouble now. We entertained some friends. We went to a party. We celebrated Linda's birthday--her 28th--with an evening out. We discovered one, then two, leaks in the water pipes under the house. Then there was the rain, three days of continuous rain that bottled us up in the house. (We were dry, though, and not about to complain.)

Finally, a week after we walked into Shenandoah Estates, we walked out again. It was a quiet cloudy morning and no one seemed to notice.

The first day away from home was not the best. We were sluggish and a little soft from a week of relative inactivity. We were mentally down too: the rain and the problems of home were still with us. It would take a while to get our bodies--as well as our minds--into shape for the walk again.

Things looked better a few miles later. We passed Eusebia Presbyterian Church and spent a few minutes wandering through its cemetery, established in the late 18th Century. Linda photographed a gravestone carved to resemble a tree trunk with all its branches trimmed. I found several more stone trees in the field and noticed they all marked the graves of people who died young. Apparently, the stone trees were a way of remembering that.

In another part of the cemetery we discovered the grave of a Revolutionary War veteran named Andrew Bogle. A small flag decorated his grave, and in recent years, the Daughters of the American Revolution had installed a second headstone. The original was crumbling, barely legible.

A month later, and 300 miles to the west, we would meet a descendant

of Andrew Bogle. It would be for us a fortunate and completely accidental meeting, just like our discovery of Andrew Bogle's grave a few miles from Seymour.

Later that day, we crossed the Little River. On one bank was a huge wooden building, newly finished in unpainted paneling. It was an extraordinary house. But even a casual observer could tell this house was once a mill. We knew it was Cave Mill, because Hal Hodge, the miller from Dumplin, had told us about it. When Cave Mill ceased operation, Hal bought some of their equipment, including some Cave Mill flour bags. He had given one to us. But Cave Mill was long gone as a mill--no millrace, no water wheel, no equipment remained. Still, the house preserved at least the shape of the old mill and a memory of what once was.

We camped that night behind the Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church, a few miles from Maryville. On the road nearby, we passed a historical marker for an old schoolhouse. It was the schoolhouse where an adventurous 18-year-old named Sam Houston once was the teacher. He stayed only a year--the War of 1812 was more attractive than the classroom--but the old log schoolhouse still stands as a memorial to the Tennessean who, like Davy Crockett, went on to become a legendary Texan.

We walked into Maryville the next day. At the city limits, we saw a sign we couldn't ignore: "Welcome to Maryville. Home of Lamar Alexander." Alexander had been elected governor largely on the public relations strength of a walk across the state. He started that trip in Maryville. Wherever we went now, people remembered the governor. "What are you running for?" they asked. "Does Lamar know you're after his job?" We didn't know the governor and he didn't know about us.

But we were in the governor's hometown and the people were friendly. Maybe Alexander's walk had helped.

Our destination that night was Friendsville, an old Quaker settlement that at one time boasted a Quaker school. We had friends there, Mike and Ann Hughes and their son Jonathon.

But our progress was slow. We took a long lunch break in a restaurant during a rain shower. Late in the afternoon, it rained again--a real downpour this time. We read old magazines in a coin laundry for two hours while we waited. By the time we started walking again, it was 5 p.m. We were still 10 miles from Friendsville.

We walked hard now, up and down the hills. When we could stand it no longer we took a break, but we were soon walking again. Only an hour or two of daylight remained.

We were five or six miles from Friendsville when Mike, Ann and Jonathon found us. Mike said he had been worried. We loaded our packs into their van and told them we'd push on to town.

Without packs, the walking was easier. An hour and a half later, we were on the outskirts of town. It was after 9 p.m. and completely dark. I was afraid a careless or surprised driver would hit us. Fortunately, traffic was light. But it was a mile--one long, dark mile--to Mike and Ann's house from town. Happily, Mike returned just then in the van. We gave in quickly: a ride to their house would beat a walk on a black, unfamiliar road every time. And we weren't cheating, since we could do the extra mile in the morning. At the Hughes house, we settled in with a beer and a bath. Ann put supper on the table, and we ate and enjoyed.

After supper we talked. Mike and Ann are California natives

who'd come to Tennessee as VISTA workers assigned to Sneedville, an isolated community north of Morristown. They liked Tennessee so much they decided to stay. Both are craftsmen. Mike makes wonderful wooden toys, and Ann is a wizard in fabric. She designs and constructs colorful soft sculpture pillows, backpacks, teapot covers, even shower curtains. She does it full time, filling orders and traveling to craft shows all over the East.

Mike, who also works for a nearby newspaper, interviewed us for his paper and told us of his bicycle adventures. Once, as a part of a fund drive, he cycled coast to coast. The group had prearranged places to stay, he said, and a support van to carry supplies and spare parts. That was the good part. The bad part, Mike said, was the predetermined mileage they were expected to ride every day. Mike said some days he nearly fell asleep while pedaling. Another long day, Mike said, he arrived at the motel where the group was staying, dismounted and entered the office. He was so tired he couldn't even talk. He wanted to ask about his room but his head was too muddled. He simply couldn't function. Fortunately, the motel clerk directed him to his room anyway.

Linda and I appreciated the story because we knew fatigue. But we had to admit that we'd never experienced that kind of utter exhaustion. We hoped we never would.

We sipped our beer and talked until after midnight. It was good to have friends. And in spite of another long day walking, we were glad to be on the road again.

CHAPTER IX

BONES

We left in the morning, refreshed. Ann drove us back to Friendsville and Mike and Jonathon walked with us that first mile, from Friendsville back to their house. It was a clear, cool morning and Friendsville was much more pleasant in the daylight.

But when Linda and I left the Hughes house, we left as a party of three. Now we had a dog. We didn't want a dog; in fact, we threw rocks to get rid of this one. But like it or not, this dog--a brown-spotted Chihuahua-like creature--was tagging along. Mike and Ann offered us the dog in jest as we left their house. Ann said it was a stray that had been around their place for a couple of days.

But this was no joke: here was a dog we didn't want--a tiny, peculiar dog at that. For the first mile, I kept hoping he'd get bored walking and find a new home as quickly as he found us. A couple of miles later, I quit hoping. Clearly the little mutt was determined to go with us. So, with considerable disdain, we started looking after the dog. Soon we hit upon a name for the animal: Bones.

Bones seemed to like us, though I have no idea why. We either ignored him, scolded him, or tried to give him away. But none of that bothered Bones.

Neither did cars: Bones paid absolutely no attention to them. So when we turned onto a busy state highway a few miles out of Friendsville, Bones was a sitting duck. He'd walk silently along the shoulder in front of us until a car approached. Then, for no apparent reason,

he'd wander into the path of the approaching car. At first, we tried to sweet talk him out of the road. That didn't work. Then, we yelled and stomped our feet. Still no good. Finally, with yet another car bearing down upon the dog, we covered our eyes.

The collisions never came, thanks to the drivers. They stopped and went around the stubborn animal. But Bones was so unpredictable in his movements that even careful drivers had trouble avoiding him. Once, a pickup loaded with teenagers stopped suddenly. In the back of the truck, bodies crashed forward. Fortunately, no one was injured. Bones, meanwhile, stared blankly at the truck and then turned to us, wondering what all the fuss was about.

After several near misses and all the trauma we could stand, it was time to take decisive action. With a short length of cord and a choker knot, I took control over the dog. I didn't like tying up a free hand with a leash, but at least we wouldn't be witness to a flattened, bloody Bones dying on the highway.

About noon, in a community called Glendale, we came upon an old country store. It was a one-man operation stocked mostly with canned goods. Inside, the storekeeper was talking to a young man in knee-high rubber boots. I figured the motorcycle out front was his. We bought soft drinks and retreated to the front porch to eat lunch. Bones rested in the shade.

In a few minutes, the motorcycle rider emerged. He said hello and we told him about our trip. He was a friendly sort but I was suspicious; the rubber boots and the motorcycle were puzzling. But the more we talked, the more Linda and I understood. The boots were

explainable: he was a dairyman. The boots kept the manure out of his shoes. The motorcycle was simply a cheap method of transportation from Lenoir City, where he lived, to the farm.

He introduced himself as Jeff Disney. He was in his early 20s. Jeff said he had a small dairy herd on some family land just this side of Greenback.

"If you make it that far, stop in. You can camp on the place," Jeff said.

We had hoped to make Greenback for the night and his offer was the only one we had. He gave us directions and drove away on the bike. We hitched up Bones and followed.

A few hours later, we caught up with Jeff. He was nearly finished milking. We found a flat spot on the edge of his pasture and pitched the tent. While Jeff finished his chores, I fired up the stove and Linda prepped a pot of instant potatoes and chili. Bones snacked on dog food. During supper, Jeff walked out to our camp and invited us back to the milkhouse for a sample of fresh milk. He even suggested we use the milking stall to bathe. "It's got hot and cold water and a spray hose," he said. "You're welcome to it."

Jeff had said the magic words. Fresh whole milk was a treat we dared not miss, and a warm soothing shower was simply the best damn thing a weary hiker can hope for. We finished eating and met Jeff, now joined by his wife Susan, at the milkhouse. Jeff opened the large stainless steel storage vat and dipped out four cups of milk. It was cold and delicious, sweet and creamy. I wondered aloud why anybody ever bothered to drink "store" milk. Linda recalled the fresh milk

she used to drink at her great-uncle's farm in Indiana. This milk is as good as that, she said. No, she added, this milk is better: we're drinking it now. I agreed and we each asked Jeff for another cup.

The shower was good too. Jeff had treated the milking stall with insecticide--a standard dairy practice--and closed it up. But he assured us the spray was harmless, to us--not the flies. "Flies will be dropping everywhere," he said. "But if you don't mind that, you can get clean. Just spray it down good before you leave." he said.

Milking rooms and milking equipment, Jeff said, have to be kept spotless. He showed us an extensive list of procedures he followed to keep the building clean and protect his milk.

After he and Susan left, we entered the milking stall, took off our clothes and stepped into the concrete pit where Jeff stands when he milks. The air still smelled of insecticide and, just as Jeff said, flies were dying by the dozen around us--even falling on us as they dropped. Still, it was worth it: the warm water washed away the grime and sweat of the day's walk--and the flies too. We scrubbed each other as if we were in a custom bath and then took pains to rinse the stall clean. That night, a curious group of cows gathered around the tent. We slept well.

The next day was Sunday and it was a glorious morning, thanks to Jeff and Susan. We were just stirring in the tent when Jeff invited us back to the milkhouse for breakfast. When we arrived, Susan began cooking eggs and bacon in an electric skillet. It was wonderful food and we washed it down with several more glasses of cold milk. As we

walked from the farm that morning, I said a prayer for Jeff and Susan and all the goodhearted people in the world.

As the Greenback churches filled with people, we walked through town toward the Little Tennessee River. This was Tellico country: the area affected by TVA's controversial Tellico Dam. This was the dam that made the snail darter a household word, the place where developers squared off against environmentalists over the proper use of a 33-mile river valley.

It didn't take us long to find out how controversial and complicated the Tellico project had become. We were still a mile or so from the river when we stopped at a house to ask for water. A farmer, a man in his late 50s, was happy to oblige. In the shade near the house was his day's work: dozens of half-bushel baskets overflowing with green peppers. The man said he was taking them to a Knoxville market at 6 the next morning. But the conversation soon turned to Tellico:

"They took eight acres and my house," he said. His tone was bitter. "And I didn't get nothing for it--at least not what I should've got."

I mentioned that the fate of the dam remained uncertain.

"That's another thing," he replied, getting angry again. "That David Freeman (then TVA board chairman) doesn't want to complete the dam. I say they've got to finish what they start. At least then I'd have lakefront property that might be worth something."

I had to agree with that. But I wondered privately how TVA had managed to offend almost everybody who gave a second thought to Tellico.

A historical marker we saw later that day reminded us of another group opposed to Tellico. The marker commemorated the seven towns of the Overhill Cherokee which were located along the Little Tennessee. One of these villages was Tenase, a Cherokee name which, spelled differently, became the name of the state. Another Overhill town was Chote, a Cherokee capital and spiritual home. In preparation for the lake, TVA had been excavating Cherokee artifacts and remains from a number of Overhill towns. TVA's idea was to preserve as much of the Overhill Cherokee culture as they could.

The Cherokees didn't see it that way. To them, the Tellico Dam would flood their ancient homeland. The excavation was still another humiliation at the hands of the white man. The remains of their forefathers were being taken from the earth and stored in boxes for study by archaeologists. Some of the Indians were very angry. They knew TVA would never treat white remains the way they were treating Cherokee remains. (The Cherokees would eventually go to court to stop the dam. The lawsuit didn't work, but the Cherokees did win at least one point: TVA agreed to rebury the Cherokee remains they had excavated from Tellico.)

As we crossed the Little T on the new bridge built to span the lake, we were within sight of Fort Loudoun, once a British outpost against the French, and Toskegee, an Overhill town. It seemed a shame to see it all disappear under the lake. At the end of the bridge we entered Vonore, a town which was supposed to benefit from industry attracted to the lake. A TVA sign there had a certain irony. It read: "TVA Tellico Project. Building a better environment." How many

farmers who lost their land would agree with that, I wondered? How many Cherokees?

It was late afternoon by the time we got to Vonore and we looked for a campsite. The first business in town caught our fancy. The Ft. Loudon Motel had a large, grassy side lot complete with a picnic table. Even better, they had a pool. The owner readily agreed to let us camp but charged us \$3 to swim. For a swim, that was fair enough. We paid. We tied Bones to the table, popped the tent up and slipped quickly into our swimsuits. The water felt so cool. Later, after a cold supper of chicken salad, cottage cheese and peaches, we were back in the pool again. The mosquitoes were plentiful so we were forced to stay neck-deep in the water. We didn't complain.

Leaving Vonore the next morning, we found a way of staying at least a little cooler. It was simple and effective and we did it frequently the rest of the trip. We soaked our shirts in cold water and wore them wet. We were always hot when we did it and it was always a bracing--if not shocking--experience. My chest and back shivered at the touch of the cold shirt and goose pimples broke out on my arms. Then, as my upper body adjusted to the cold, water trickled over and into my shorts, creating all sorts of new sensations.

I liked to watch Linda's face in the few moments after she put the shirt on. Her eyes snapped shut, her mouth sprang open, and a painfull "E-e-e-e-e" came rushing out. But it was worth the pain. For 15, 20, or maybe 30 minutes afterward, the sun's rays seemed a little blunter, the heat a little diminished. Unfortunately, evaporation

soon dried our bodies as well as our shirts and we started slowly roasting again.

There was one other problem with the wet shirt technique. Female anatomy being what it is, Linda required an appropriate place to remove her shirt, wet it, and put it back on again. It was a matter of Linda's modesty, of course, and of public decency--she didn't want to get arrested for standing around in her bra. I didn't have that trouble; I could wet down at every faucet we passed. Linda was restricted to water hoses, where she could drench herself in an outdoor shower, or to gas stations, where she could use the sink in the bathroom to soak her shirt in privacy. At a greasy Texaco station in Vonore, that's what she did.

Heading for the next town on our route--Madisonville--we walked from Vonore down an old country road. The route dipped and rose through fields of corn and tobacco and hot pastures where the cattle were huddled under the field's single tree. There was only scattered traffic so we could relax and let our minds wander. We even let Bones off the leash, and he was much happier. He would usually run ahead of us to the nearest shade he could find. Then he'd plop down for a short rest until we were a few paces beyond him. Finally he'd hurry past us to begin the cycle again. Occasionally, we had to coax him from some mischief--dead animals in the road, for example. At other times, usually when a farm dog approached in a noisy huff, Bones needed to encouragement to stay right at our heels.

By mid-afternoon, we had followed the road to Madisonville. I had relatives in town so we found a pay phone and called them. There

was no answer. After several more fruitless calls, we decided to give up temporarily and explore Madisonville. We started with the Monroe County Courthouse. On the lawn I noticed a peculiar detail on the stone monument to those who died in World War II. The names of the dead were carved into the face of the marble, but I noticed a short second list below the main list. Only a few names made up this second list. It was headed by a single word: "Colored."

I knew immediately what the sign was saying and what it meant. That is, I knew it intellectually. But it still took a few moments before I could really believe what was so clearly carved in stone. The truth, of course, was quite simple: the veteran's group that erected the monument had segregated Monroe County's black soldiers. These men, whatever their service, whatever their contribution to the war, whatever their deeds in battle, had died defending their country. They made the ultimate sacrifice. Yet even in death, these black men were still accorded separate treatment. They still weren't quite good enough. The longer I looked at the stone, the more I realized that these black men had given their lives to defend freedoms they never really knew. It made me angry.

Across the courthouse lawn, I saw another stone monument. I assumed it was the marker for those who died in World War I. I assumed, too, that it would have the black dead in a separate list. I walked over to see, and I was right on both counts. The monuments raised a question in my mind: what would the hike be like if Linda and I were black? Or what if I were black and Linda white?

Those questions frightened me for I felt certain, deep down,

that the hike would then be an unpleasant, if not ugly and hateful, experience. And, fairly or unfairly, the Madisonville monument only reinforced those feelings.

If the courthouse monuments did not represent the best in Madisonville, then the town's most famous native son certainly did. Sen. Estes Kefauver, a moderate Democrat in a region usually considered conservative Republican, gained national attention in the early 1950s with his televised Senate hearings on organized crime. Kefauver used his new popularity to campaign for the presidency in 1952. Kefauver was a good campaigner with a folksy manner that appealed to the public, but he lost the nomination to Adlai Stevenson. In 1956 Kefauver tried and again lost to Stevenson. Instead, Kefauver settled for the vice-presidential nomination that year.

Kefauver died suddenly in 1963, but his memory was alive and well in Madisonville. We were a block from the courthouse admiring a white, clapboard house when an elderly gentleman volunteered, "That's where Estes Kefauver's folks lived."

I asked if Estes had grown up in the house.

The man thought for a moment and said, "I'm just not sure. I know his folks lived there, but I don't know if Estes did or not."

"What kind of man was he?" I asked.

"Oh, he was a great fellow. Why he'd come back and walk down the street and call everybody by their first name--just like he'd never left," the man said. Then he happened to remember something else: "Estes is buried out the highway in a family graveyard. And you know what happens to family graveyards."

I wasn't sure so I guessed: "Nobody takes care of them?"

"That's right," he said. "I went out there one time and I could hardly find the grave."

"Yes sir," he concluded, "the presidency was stolen from Estes."

I noticed a trace of pain in his statement. We said goodbye to the man but as we walked away, I thought about his apparent dedication to his friend, the Senator. Over 20 years had passed since Estes last ran for the presidency, but in his hometown at least one man was still smarting from the loss. Now that, I thought, is loyalty.

We camped that night at the home of my aunt and uncle, Caroline and Carlos Owen. That turned out to be convenient because the next day Carlos was going to Athens--our destination, too. He volunteered to haul our packs to my grandparents' house, leaving us only cameras, canteens, and lunch to carry. Walking without the packs would be blessed relief.

We walked another farm road from Madisonville to Athens. The day was cloudy but hot. We took a mid-morning break at a small store and gas station and met a boy, 12 or 13, who worked at the store. The boy, Timmy Watson, made friends with Bones and told us about his life. When Timmy wasn't working, he made necklaces and other trinkets from buttons. He had a huge plastic tub of them; he explained that his uncle worked in a garment factory. When he finished stocking a Pepsi machine out front, he demonstrated how he strung the buttons together on thread to create various patterns. We were impressed. Button-stringing was by no means a fine art, but it seemed like a productive

use of Timmy's time, at least for this stage of his life. But what really won us over was Timmy's generosity.

"I'm almost done with this one," he said, referring to a two-foot strand of pink buttons on red thread. "Wait one minute till I finish and you can have it." We objected but Timmy insisted: "I just make them to give them away."

So Linda tried on the pink button necklace and smiled. I could tell she really liked it and appreciated the thought. Timmy was pleased too.

The rest of the day we passed by green, fertile fields. The corn was tall and the fencerows thick with blooming honeysuckle, white and yellow. We even found a few remaining blackberries, hot in the sun but still sweet. Late in the afternoon, we rested under an oak near a farmhouse. Two old coon dogs approached us, howling at Bones with their mournful songs. They were the ugliest dogs I'd ever seen. One was pale, a color suggesting dried white mud. The other was spotted brown. Both of them seemed particularly dim-witted. When we called to them, they stopped howling and stared at us with their heads cocked to one side. They looked ridiculous. We rolled in the grass with laughter.

Later, we passed several green pastures filled with dairy cattle. This was Mayfield Dairy Farms, a family-owned business that supplies much of East Tennessee with milk, cottage cheese, and our favorite ice cream. In Athens, an hour later, we walked by the Mayfield processing plant. By this time, we were longing for Mayfield's ice cream.

But Grandmother Mason, Maw-maw to everybody, knew we were coming. She had a great garden supper waiting: green beans, boiled potatoes, creamed corn, tomatoes, rolls and honey. We ate firsts, seconds, and thirds too. Maw-maw and Paw-paw sure knew how to turn out a garden. Bones didn't get vegetables but he ate his fill of dog food.

We didn't know it then, but we had reached a milestone on our hike. From Athens, we were turning directly west, away from familiar territory, away from family and friends. From here on, we were on our own.

It was the last day of July. We had at least 400 miles left to walk and only a month to walk it in. August promised to be an eventful month.

PART II
MIDDLE TENNESSEE

CHAPTER X

NEW TERRITORY

This was new territory. I had never been to Decatur. Or to Dayton. Or to Pikeville. I had never seen the Sequatchie Valley or Fall Creek Falls. I had never walked up the Cumberland Plateau or, for that matter, walked down it. But then, that was one of the reasons for walking: we wanted to see and to explore as much of Tennessee as we could. In Decatur, as in all the other new towns, there was much to see, to do, to learn.

At first glance, it didn't look that way. In fact, Decatur was the smallest county seat I'd ever seen--practically every business in town faced the courthouse square. But that was OK with us. We took a few minutes to walk around town, looking at old houses, barns, apple trees and summer gardens. On this particular Thursday night in August, Decatur was a peaceful place.

There were four of us now: Linda, me, Bones, and Greg Cooper, another one of Linda's students from Knoxville. Greg had joined us in Athens for a week. In that week, we hoped to make Fall Creek Falls State Park where we could take a day off and Greg could call his folks for a ride home. Then Linda and I would head west again.

Maw-maw got us started for Decatur with a big breakfast. We thanked her and Paw-paw, said goodbye, and started walking. Greg took to Bones immediately, and Bones to Greg. That helped because the poor dog needed more sympathy than he was getting from us; most of

the time I was at odds with the little mutt. He continuously pulled at his leash. When I was on the other end, there was no love lost between us. I tried to like him but it wasn't easy. Linda was more sympathetic, but even she soon tired of hanging on while Bones choked himself trying to get to the next shade tree. With Greg in our group, at least we could split the leash duties three ways.

Out of Athens, the walking went well. We took a bathroom break in mid-afternoon at a run-down tavern in a place called Union Grove. We usually didn't frequent taverns--no sense looking for trouble--but this was the only business in Union Grove likely to have a bathroom. So while Greg waited outside, Linda and I walked in and looked around. The room was large but nearly empty. I nodded hello to a table of five men and a woman, the only customers in the place. They were drinking beer and talking. They seemed friendly.

I found the bathroom and Linda followed me. Finally Greg came in for the bathroom too. The woman, who was the bartender, offered us a beer. We declined. The men were Union Grove working men and farmers and the talk was loose. One man, about 55, wore overalls and bragged to the others, "I haven't done a day's work in five years." His claim brought howls of protest from the others.

While we sat at the bar absorbing the air conditioning, one of the men walked across the room and put some coins in the jukebox. The record that filled the room was Ernest Tubb's "Waltz Across Texas." I'd heard the song on the radio, but it never sounded like this. Now, in this nearly empty beer hall with five Tennessee workmen talking and laughing nearby, I closed my eyes and suddenly, for reasons I didn't

understand, I knew something about country music I had never known before. All at once, Ernest Tubb sounded important and genuine, his voice resonating with a powerful, unmistakable force, the force of hard lives grown close to the land. I now knew, or thought I knew, what the appeal of country and western music was and why Nashville, which is not in the west and is no longer even "country," could foster this music, the best of which is authentic and memorable and true. When it's good, when it's music like "Waltz Across Texas," country music works because it speaks to plain folks in plain language and because its message homes in on the heart. I knew this now because I could feel it. It felt right.

I opened my eyes. Ernest Tubb was still singing, the steel guitar was still twanging. The room looked a little bleaker than I remembered and the men seemed a little more ordinary. But my reverie had changed things. Now I saw why these men gathered on an early afternoon in August to drink a few beers and brag about loafing. There was possibility here. There was escape. There was companionship. There was still hope. So they drank, they talked, they dreamed of Nashville or Texas or some other faraway place and they lived beyond themselves a little. Finally, late at night, they went home. In the morning, everything was the same. But for an afternoon, they had tried--and that made all the difference.

That night, we camped near Decatur in a small forest wedged between a church and a TVA transmission tower. A neighborhood boy let us get water from his spigot and, after we asked his permission, we returned in swim suits for a cold shower under the water hose.

About 9:30, when it was completely dark, Linda and I heard some thrashing in the woods. It wasn't Greg; he had heard it too. Just then, three neighborhood kids, two boys and a girl, called out. They'd come to see if we were real, if what they'd heard was true. We confirmed the hike to them and answered a few questions. Greg, only a one-day veteran but a veteran nonetheless, seemed to enjoy his semi-celebrity status. Then, from the dark, one of the boys said they'd brought something for us.

"I thought you might be hungry," he said. In the flashlight beam, I saw Popsicles and bottles of Pepsi.

I wasn't really hungry, least of all for Pepsi and Popsicles, but who could say no to their thoughtfulness. We ate, drank, told them more about the hike, and finally said goodnight. Before we fell asleep, another group of youngsters from the neighborhood paid a visit too. There was no food this time--thank goodness. It was just another confirmation visit. Thank goodness, too, it was the last. But the kids were curious and they cared. I liked that, liked it very much.

Before noon the next morning we were on the ferry, crossing the Tennessee River. We had looked forward to this; after all, this was one part of the state we didn't have to walk. We had to wait though; the ferry was on the other side of the river. While we waited, we couldn't help noticing the high ridge which formed the western horizon.

"Guess where the Cumberland Plateau is," I said to Linda. She smiled a knowing smile, thinking what I was thinking: we'll die on the hill.

The ferry ride itself was smooth and uneventful. I snapped a

few pictures and talked to the pilot. The best news was the fare: free for pedestrians. After a month walking the roads--roads built for automobiles--a free boat ride for walkers was surprisingly satisfying.

There were quarries on the Dayton side of the river, huge limestone quarries as well as huge trucks. The trucks roared up and down the highway and we did our best to stay on the very edge of the shoulder. By early afternoon, when we were good and hungry, we entered Old Washington, a rather depressed little village of old houses and a single store. We stopped for a lunch break.

The store was Revis Grocery and the young owner, Marty Revis, made sandwiches. Linda thought they looked good and suggested we split a ham and cheese. Little did we know what we'd ordered: when Marty Revis fixes a sandwich, he packs the meat and cheese to it. Linda showed up outside with a thick slab of ham and an even thicker slab of cheese.

"How much did that cost?" I asked. It looked like the ham alone might be worth a couple of dollars.

"Ninety cents," Linda said.

"What a treat!" I replied. When you like food as much as we do, even a sandwich can be sublime. And that's especially true after a few miles on foot.

As we sat out front and ate, I noticed a steady stream of customers in and out of the store. Many of them left with bags full of sandwiches. Then it dawned on me: all these sandwiches were going to the quarries. That's why they were such hearty sandwiches. Linda and

I quickly formulated a new rule of the road: always eat at the little store closest to the quarry. Chances are, the sandwiches will be great.

But we were back on the road soon, as we wanted to be in Dayton by dark. We walked for two hours in the steady afternoon heat. In front of a farmhouse, an odd gray-and-black speckled dog charged out to investigate Bones. A man wearing overalls and a straw cowboy hat was mowing the grass. He called the dog and, when it didn't respond, pulled a wrench from his pocket and took aim. The wrench did the trick--the dog backed off with a wimper. The man shut off the mower and apologized for the dog.

"Come on up and rest in the shade," he said. "It's too hot to be walking."

The man was Spencer Jones. He was over 60, balding, and wonderfully friendly. He pulled up some lawn chairs and we began swapping stories. For starters, we told him about Bones and he told us about his dog, an Australian Cowdog. Spencer said our trip reminded him of his hobby: driving wagons in wagon trains. He'd just come back from a ride in the mountains of North Carolina. The ride ended, he said, with a Fourth of July parade in Bryson City.

We talked a few minutes before we met Mrs. Jones, who left and then returned with a tray of ice, glasses and Cokes. As we poured the drinks, Mrs. Jones said, "I've got some apple cake in the oven. It'll be ready in a few minutes. Would you like some?"

Linda, Greg and I perked up. Had we ever turned down food? Were we going to turn down apple cake fresh from the oven? Certainly not!

I remember that cake well: warm, moist, and sweet. The company was good too: we talked about horses, farming and growing old. The time passed quickly and before long we had to go. But I knew we wouldn't forget the Joneses--strangers who made us feel at home.

We made it to Dayton in time to swim in Chickamauga Lake, a TVA embayment of the Tennessee River. Bones wasn't much for swimming but when he had to, he could. Greg carried the dog a good 50 feet out and Bones paddled right in. We got permission to camp at a boatdock nearby and used their hose to rinse the lake water off. For supper, we walked out to the Dayton "strip." Linda and I had good local barbecue while Greg ate alone at the Pizza Hut.

The next day, Saturday, we walked downtown to explore Dayton. As small Tennessee towns go, Dayton is one of the most famous. It was in Dayton in 1925 that a young biology teacher named John Scopes was tried--and convicted--for teaching evolution in violation of Tennessee law. This was the famous "Monkey Trial," the trial that pitted fundamental Christian doctrine against the theories of Darwin, the trial that pitted politician and orator William Jennings Bryan against the famous trial lawyer Clarence Darrow. The issue itself had never died; in the late 1970s, the "creationists" were on the attack once again.

The Rhea County Courthouse, where the Monkey Trial took place, is in the center of Dayton. The Robinson Drug Store, where Scopes and some friends decided to challenge the Tennessee law, is just down the street. We entered and saw the very table, a small, round, old-fashioned ice cream table, where Scopes and the others sat 54 years before.

Reporters from all over the world came to town for the story. Chicago radio station WGN set up the country's first remote news network to broadcast the story. One of the nation's most famous journalists, H. L. Mencken, was in town too. For eight hot summer days, the world focused on Dayton and the town thrived on the exposure.

Dayton was considerably quieter when we were there, but they still talk about the trial. On the courthouse lawn, Linda struck up a conversation with a group of old-timers.

She used the dog to get started: "See this dog? This is a coon dog. He's a good one, too."

The men looked at Bones. I don't know what they thought, but I didn't think they'd seen too many foot-high Chihuahua "coon" dogs.

"This dog trees coons?" one of the men asked with a straight face.

Linda was surprised to get such a serious response. "Sure," she said, "all the time."

"He looks like a squirrel dog to me," another fellow said.

Linda, unable to lie any longer, gave in, "I was just kidding. This dog doesn't hunt anything."

By this time, though, the men liked the idea of Bones as a squirrel dog. "I still say he'd make a squirrel dog," said one man.

The ice thus broken, we talked about the trial. Some of the men remembered. The weather was really hot, they assured us, and there were people all over town. One of the men remembered getting up early and waiting in line to get a seat in the courtroom. Another fellow admitted that he wasn't anywhere around Dayton in 1925.

This man, however, wanted to talk. So we let him. The stories--stories of coal mining and strikes and women and booze--came rolling out. The other men must have heard it all before and they soon departed. That left only Linda and Greg and me. Soon Greg too became restless and wandered off to play with Bones. But Linda and I were hooked.

Edd Hensley was his name. He said he was 76 and went by the nickname of Trap. He was thin and gray and appeared frail. He said he had black lung too, and pulled a benefit card from his wallet.

But Trap pronounced himself fit and later, to prove it, he sat on the sidewalk, threw his right leg over his head and locked his foot behind his neck. "I've always been limber," he said with a smile.

But stories were the best part of Trap Hensley's act. He talked about his years in the mines of West Virginia and Kentucky. The work was hard, he said, but there were good times too. Trap said once he and another fellow got some hooch and a couple of girls and drove around the mountains looking for a party. Later, according to Trap, they picked up a third girl and decided to pair her off with an old Englishman called Pop. "The old man was happy," Trap said, remembering the scene.

Trap's details were fuzzy after that--and my recollection of the story is too--but the party eventually wound up at the sheriff's office in the middle of the night. Trap said he was afraid his girl was underage but a deputy told him not to worry; the girl had been arrested several times before. Trap got off with a \$42 fine. But Pop wasn't used to midnight raids, police officers, and fines. He was steaming, Trap said. "Pop never had anything to do with me again," said Trap.

There were more stories too, more about women, money, ambition, even his family, all told enthusiastically and in great detail. Trap was a natural storyteller, and we found ourselves caught up in the suspense of his tales. But they may have been tall tales. After I listened a while, I got the feeling that Trap was not above stretching the truth, especially if it made a better story. Trap's stories went down easier with a grain of salt.

But it was late afternoon now and the Cumberland Plateau still loomed above us. If we were going to climb it, we had to get started. Before we left, Trap presented Linda with an old pocket knife. He said he'd used it for years as he sat on the benches around the courthouse and whittled the time away. For months afterward, Linda carried Trap's knife everywhere she went. It was her way of remembering Trap, Dayton, and all the other people and places of the hike.

CHAPTER XI

THE PLATEAU

The elevation of Dayton is 703 feet above sea level. The road crossing the Cumberland Plateau above Dayton tops out at 1800 feet. I looked the figures up a couple of years after the hike and, for the first time, subtracted the difference. I thought I'd be surprised; 1100 vertical feet is a substantial climb in anybody's book. But the numbers didn't impress me. What did, and what I vividly remember about the climb up the plateau, is the way it looked, the way it towered above us in the afternoon heat over Dayton.

I remember having doubts too. I wasn't worried about making it to the top, but I was worried about the pain it might take to get there. Weeks had passed since the Appalachian Trail and I felt unsure about our climbing ability now. Besides, we had foolishly waited until the hottest part of the day to start the ascent. And unlike the Appalachian Trail, State Route 30 had no shade.

We started with a steady pace; resting all day in Dayton had helped us gather strength. We weren't encouraged, though, by catcalls (we called them war whoops) from truckloads of Mexicans coming off the mountain for a Saturday night on the town. We had noticed the Mexicans in Dayton and someone told us they came in every year to work the tomato fields on the plateau. In any case, the sight of three backpackers and a semi-nomadic Chihuahua seemed to excite the Mexicans. After three or four more war whoops, we didn't pay much attention to it any more.

We paid more attention to our bodies. The climbing was steady and the heat quickly wore us down. The top of the plateau still soared hundreds of feet above us.

The way we were going, I doubted that we could make the top by nightfall. It would take too much effort. The map, however, offered a compromise. A town called Cumberland Springs was apparently on the side of the mountain. The location sounded ideal. We decided we would camp there.

There wasn't much to Cumberland Springs. In fact, if we hadn't seen a sign for the Cumberland Springs Bible Camp, we'd have walked through "town" without realizing it. But there was a house across from the entrance to the camp and people in the yard. We introduced ourselves and met Ed Shaver, the man who owned the place. He agreed to let us camp. Mr. Shaver, a short, wiry man in his 50s, directed us to a wooded area behind his house. It made a perfect campsite.

After a cold supper from our packs, we took a hose shower beside the Shavers' pumphouse. I noticed immediately that the water had a distinct mineral smell. That didn't affect our shower, though, and in a few minutes we got used to the odor. But as I was drying, I happened to take a small drink. The taste rolled across my tongue, into my sinuses and, from what I remember, out my ears. It wasn't water at all. It was liquid iron, sulfur, and who knows what other chemical. You could mine the stuff. I wheezed and tried to get a full chest of fresh air into my lungs.

Linda was standing nearby, laughing. I urged her to sample the "water" but she was too smart for that. I wasn't laughing; I was

trying to figure out why the founders of Cumberland Springs had named their "town" after their chemical wells.

Mr. Shaver was in the yard nearby so I couldn't resist.

"I tasted your water," I said, "and it certainly has a strong mineral taste." I was trying to be polite.

"I didn't know you were going to drink that water," he said.

"It comes straight out of the well. We don't drink that," he explained.

"I've got two filter systems on the household water. Let me show you."

In the pumphouse, Mr. Shaver pointed out his two-part filtering system. He said he started with one filter but added the second to improve the taste of the water. "Without the filters," he agreed, "it's a little bitter."

Mr. Shaver, I decided, had a gift for understatement. I asked him about the name, Cumberland Springs.

"The spring is across the road," he said. "People used to drink it for their health. Some still do. They haul it away in bottles."

Maybe so, I thought, but there are a lot of crazy people in the world.

Before we headed back to the old road I asked Mr. Shaver about the Trail of Tears, the forced march the Cherokees made when they were removed in 1838 to what is now Oklahoma. A road sign at the base of the mountain indicated that the Cherokees passed nearby when they climbed the plateau. Mr. Shaver agreed.

"They followed the old road up the mountain. As far as I know, that's the old road you're camped on," he said.

Once again, we had crossed paths with the Cherokee. Down the road, we would cross their path again.

We tackled the rest of the climb the next morning. It was cool and by mid-morning we were over the top. Up there, the land rolled out before us in low, sweeping hills. Beside the highway, Mexicans stooped over the fields and collected sack after sack of green tomatoes.

The plan for the day was simple: cross the plateau to the Sequatchie Valley. We would camp in the valley near Pikeville. That meant walking downhill and we were looking forward to that.

Midway across the plateau, we crossed into a new county, Bledsoe. We also took note of our progress: we had entered the Central Time Zone. Slowly but surely, the miles were adding up. We would make the Mississippi yet.

A few miles to the west, the land fell sharply away. The Sequatchie Valley, flat and lush and green, lay below. A sign beside the road pointed to the obvious: "Sequatchie Valley: A view to remember." Through a gray haze, we could see acres of pastures and fields near the base of the mountain. Beyond the farms, toward the center of the valley, the number of houses increased. That was probably Pikeville. Beyond that I could see no farther but I knew what was there: the west wall of the valley. We would climb it tomorrow.

Walking downhill proved to be more work than we wanted. In other words, it hurt. The road down the mountain curved back and forth, always bending around another slope. We felt fine at first, but soon the constant downhill pull hit us in the knees, ankles and feet. Greg seemed especially miserable. Bones didn't help much either. For

some reason, he kept pulling hard on the leash. I started down the hill with him and soon ran out of patience. Linda took over, telling me she'd cure him of the pull. Every time Bones tugged, Linda yanked the leash and yelled, "Heel!" So down the mountain we walked: Greg moaning and groaning, Linda and Bones playing tug-of-war, and me, finding new leg pains every minute.

Finally, the land grew flatter and the road ran straight again. Linda let Bones off the rope and for a few quiet moments, the afternoon seemed brighter. Then, with a car speeding toward us, Bones parked himself in the middle of the highway. Linda turned away--the accident was all but inevitable. The driver slammed the brakes, the car skidded from one lane to the other, and the dog just sat there, unharmed. Linda and I started breathing again, madder than ever at Bones. We resolved then and there to get rid of him at the first opportunity.

We crossed the slow Sequatchie River and entered Pikeville by supertime. We camped on the west side of town, just where the road started up the plateau again. I wasn't worried about the next climb; we had climbed the plateau once, so we could do it again. In fact, we planned to be at Fall Creek Falls tomorrow.

But Monday started badly. While brushing my teeth, I noticed a large fly buzzing my head. Then two. Then five or six. Then, realizing the difference between flies and hornets, I broke into a run. It was too late. The area between my thumb and forefinger on my right hand was soon red and puffy, and it hurt like hell. But I was lucky--only one hornet got me. Linda pulled out some antiseptic and relieved the pain. Then, looking back at where I had been standing,

I saw how really lucky--and utterly stupid--I was. A hornet's nest the size and shape of a large country ham hung only inches from where I had been casually brushing my teeth. It was near the ground, under a table I'd been using as a washstand. I'd even seen the nest; I thought it was a piece of weathered board. I was so dumb. But I was also a quick learner, and to this day I can spot a hornet's nest from a long distance.

The climb was another 1,000 feet, but we were fresh and the morning was cool. The walking went rather painlessly. By mid-afternoon we were closing in on Fall Creek, looking for a shortcut several people had told us about. The shortcut turned out to be elusive.

Following a crude map a store clerk had drawn for us, we turned off Route 30 onto a farm road. Then, when the map didn't match the land in front of us, we asked a woman who was hoeing in her garden. Her directions were completely different from the map, but we followed them faithfully and ended up on a dirt driveway. A weathered farmhouse and a couple of old trucks sat at the end of the drive. We didn't know where we were.

Fortunately, two men in overalls knew exactly where they were and where the park was. "See that line of trees across the pasture?" one of the men asked. "There's a dirt road there that leads into the park. You'll come in on a horse trail. Just follow that to the stables."

Their directions sounded fine but I wasn't really convinced. "How far is the park?" I asked.

"Oh just a little ways. You're almost there."

Reassurance was great, but I wasn't taking "just a little ways" at face value. We'd done that too many times before only to find out that "just a little ways" and "you're almost there" and other variations of that theme were 3, 5, 8, even 12 or 15 miles. What the people really meant was, "It's just a little ways in a car," because that was the way they related to distance. They weren't deliberately misleading us; they were, in fact, telling the truth as they understood it. Eight miles is "just a little ways" in a car. It takes maybe 10 minutes. But walking eight miles with a backpack could take 2½ hours, depending on your energy, weight of the pack, and the terrain.

Later, we learned: don't ask, "How far is it?" Ask instead, "How many miles is it?" We found those answers unpredictable too, but they were better, more accurate answers than the open-ended "just a little ways" variety.

The farmers directed us across their pasture to the new road. We followed their directions and were surprised when we intersected the horse trail 15 minutes later--just as they said. A boarded-up old cabin with a hand pump in front marked the park boundary, and we took a long break there in the shade. We pumped up some cool well water that tasted of iron, but not unpleasantly, and broke out some chocolate candy. It was time to celebrate.

Or so we thought. We soon learned, however, that instead of celebrating we should have been walking: Fall Creek Falls is a big state park and we were on the boundary. To paraphrase Robert Frost, we had miles to go before we slept.

First the horse trail: it was shady and cool but the fine, hoof-chopped dirt was too soft for good footing. We were reduced to a shuffle, more or less like walking in knee-deep water. Finally, after what seemed to be three or four miles, we emerged at the stables, weary but happy at last to be "somewhere." The horsemen said the campground was "pretty far" and advised us to take a "shortcut." (Not again, I thought.)

The day's second shortcut followed an old logging road. Very old, in fact, and very overgrown. After walking on roads, we were unprepared for the blackberry briars which snagged our legs and the weeds and underbrush which peppered us with ticks and chiggers. Soon, traces of blood appeared on Greg's thighs and red welts were growing on Linda. Every few minutes, we'd stop for a "tick check." We almost always found one or two.

We slogged another mile or so. The bushwhacking was taking a toll on our nerves as well as our bodies. We hiked in anxious silence. It was after 6 p.m. and we were hungry, irritable, ready to drop.

A swim brought us back. The horsemen had said there was a swimming hole on the way and when we found it, we waded in--clothes and all. It helped. It dissolved the dirt and sweat, and it soothed the chigger itching. But it didn't get us any closer to the campground.

We climbed another hill. To a road. To a group of cabins. To another road. To the golf course, complete with fat men in pastel pants riding in golf carts. I was raging by now, breathing fire. "We

should hijack a damn golf cart and make those bastards walk," I said. I think I was joking. Linda didn't laugh.

But perseverance pays off. The campground was "just a little ways" from the golf course. We set up the tent in the dark and cleaned up at the bathhouse. We'd been planning a feast at whatever restaurant the park offered, so we walked to the park's "Village Green" to eat. There was no restaurant and the snack bar near the pool was closed. The park store was closed, too.

We settled for tuna and peanut butter back at camp. Across the dark table I said to Linda, "Welcome to Fall Creek."

CHAPTER XII

SPENCER

Greg woke up sick. At least we thought he did. When we finally crawled out of the tent, still aching, he was already at the camp store. For breakfast, he bought a grape soda and candy. (That alone would have made Linda and me sick, but Greg had been drinking grape sodas all week.) We found him resting on a bench near the store. He'd been vomiting for half an hour by then.

He spent the rest of the day in camp, suffering and vomiting. We tried to cheer him, but it was no use. His stomach growled and he rolled with pain. Nothing helped. He didn't want food; he couldn't even keep water down.

Greg was still in pain that afternoon. There was no doctor at the park but we summoned the assistant superintendent, who asked Greg several questions. The official agreed that the illness didn't sound serious, but he told us to call him again if we wanted a doctor. Meanwhile, Greg lay in the shade, groaning.

It wasn't fair. Greg had walked hard for five days, always with the park as his goal. He planned to spend that sixth day loafing beside the pool. We had promised him that and he deserved it. Now, for reasons none of us could control, he couldn't have it.

But Greg could go home. The park was the end of his hike. His mother picked him up at 6 p.m. and by 9, he was in his own soft bed.

We needed the rest too. Between Greg's pains, we had only enough

energy to catnap and read. (I recharged with Jack Kerouac's bohemian novel On the Road.) We finally found enough strength, after Greg went home, to gather our grimy clothes and carry them to the park laundry.

The next day was a rest day too. We had planned to walk but the will simply wasn't there. We decided, instead, to play tourist. We swam at the pool, ate at the snack bar, and walked, somewhat reluctantly, to Fall Creek Falls. The high, horseshoe-shaped falls was an impressive sight, well worth the walk from the campground.

Another day or two in the park would have been terrific. We wanted to stay. But some quick calculations with the map and a calendar made it clear that we had no choice, not if we wanted to see the Mississippi River. It was August 9. Reelfoot Lake and the river were still 250 miles away. Linda had to be back at work in early September. If we averaged 15 miles a day for the next two weeks, we'd be close. We just had to keep walking, every day.

We left the park late in the morning for Spencer, the next town west on Route 30. The weather was clear and, for August, not too hot. We were rested and looking forward to a satisfying day of walking.

What happened wasn't our fault. It wasn't Spencer's fault either. Looking back, it's easy to see how naive we were and how decisions we made contributed to our troubles. It's also easy to see how a combination of happenstance and bad luck worked against us. On any other day, things might have been very different in Spencer. We can't say. We were only in town one day.

The day started with a huge breakfast at the Fall Creek Falls

Inn. Their breakfast buffet included bacon, eggs, toast and jelly, biscuits, gravy, grits, coffee, juice and some other morsels I've forgotten. It was a wonderful way to start the day.

There was one hitch, however. The walk from the campground to the inn was two miles. Adding in the return trip, that meant we had walked four miles before we started our day's hike. As it turned out, we would pay dearly for our four-mile breakfast.

Getting out of the park was a vigorous walk too. The road dipped into a valley and then ascended a steep hill to the main park entrance. A sign there gave the elevation as 1918 feet.

We made it to Route 30, still strong, still unaware of what lay ahead. Our road map showed Spencer about 10 miles away. We had plenty of time to make town before dark.

What the road map didn't show was the topography. Route 30 descended steadily into a gorge. One edge of the road cut deep into the mountain rock; the other edge hung precariously over the steep, wooded slopes. There were no houses in the gorge and no practical places to build them. There was, in fact, no sign of civilization at all on this stretch of road. It should have told us something.

Four or five miles later, at the bottom of the gorge, we crossed Cane Creek, a clear, inviting stream. The chance to soak our feet in the water was too good to pass up. We kicked off our shoes and relaxed. Bones, still shy of water, curled up in the grass. It was late afternoon, but it didn't matter now. Spencer was just five miles ahead. Most of the day's work had been done.

I had, for no particular reason, assumed that Spencer was at

the bottom of the plateau. Our road maps didn't indicate one way or the other, and I had been foolish enough not to ask. I had just reasoned, stupidly, that Route 30 would lead us down the plateau into the valley, the valley where Spencer was built. I didn't know--and wasn't careful enough to find out--where Spencer was actually located.

Just past Cane Creek, we saw a farm--civilization again. Spencer is dead ahead, I told Linda; this is the outskirts of town. But the road climbed sharply away from the farm, up what appeared to be a high ridge. Just over the ridge, I assured Linda, and we're home free. We kept climbing and my "outskirts of town" theory quickly fell apart. So did my "high ridge" theory. This was a mountain, an unexpected and unwelcome mountain that we had no inclination to climb--except that we were alone again in the dark, sloping forest.

Attitude was our problem now. I had been so smug that I had fooled myself and misled Linda. Now, with our bodies faltering and Spencer still distant, we were psychologically unprepared to continue. Mentally and physically, this was the worst day ever.

The light dimmed. I walked harder and urged Linda to follow. I was afraid we wouldn't make Spencer before nightfall. In the dark, we'd be easy targets for cars on the mountain curves. I didn't like the prospect of camping on the mountainside either; the land was steep and there was no water. We walked on, still climbing. At every curve, I told myself, "Spencer must be around the next curve." It never was.

But one curve opened uphill to a stretch of straight road. At the top of the road, there was a clearing and, at last, a house.

Spencer. "We made it!" I yelled to Linda. I climbed the last hill on adrenalin.

The elevation of Spencer was 1820 feet. No wonder we were tired--four miles to eat breakfast, a 900-foot descent after lunch and an 800-foot climb before supper. We walked into Spencer completely beaten: the mountain had broken us. We had nothing left.

Then the trauma of Spencer began. It began at the top of that hill on the very edge of town. It began when I heard a man moaning in pain. I listened to what he said: "They're not going to get me! They're not going to get me!"

I walked closer to the man. He was rolling in the grass a few feet from the highway, rolling and yelling in front of a small house. There was no one else in sight.

He was probably drunk. I guessed too that it wasn't the first time. I crossed to the other side of the highway and signaled for Linda to do the same.

I didn't think much about it at the time but the drunk beside the road was a sign. So was the house nearby surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence and a fierce German shepherd. So was a lady rocking on her porch who, when I waved, only stared, grim-faced. I waved a second time, deliberately and with a smile. Again, the stone stare. All these were signs that we had best be careful in Spencer--or on our way out of town. Yet we were tired and our guard was down. We missed all the signs.

We didn't miss a waitress at a drive-in restaurant. She brought reality home with a vengeance. I was already removing my backpack in

the parking lot when she came to the order window and asked, "You plan to eat?"

"Yes," I said. "We'll come around inside."

"Don't come in here with that garb on!" she snapped. It was a sharp, combative order, and it hit us like a sledge hammer.

We didn't know how to respond. We didn't even know what the woman meant. Was it our backpacks? Our clothes? Hats? What? In the dark parking lot, we removed our packs, tied Bones, and tried to think straight. We decided our backpacks had, for some reason, upset the woman. But we were hungry and thirsty. We entered meekly, determined to avoid the wrath of the waitress.

Considering how it started, our encounter with the woman was a success. The hamburger steak was good and she brought me glass after glass of iced tea. She even agreed, after some hesitation, to let us pay with a traveler's check.

Toward the end of the meal, she came over to our table. She didn't apologize; she explained. It had been a bad day, she said, and besides, there are a lot of rough characters passing through here. A person can't be too careful.

We agreed. But it occurred to us that on this, our 40th day on the road, she was the "roughest character" we had met so far. I kept my thoughts to myself.

Then the woman admitted something which floored me: "I saw you two coming down the mountain just after lunch. I wondered what you were up to," she said.

Her remark made me angry. It showed so little thought and so

little regard for us. If she had passed us, then she knew we weren't hitchhiking, weren't bumming. And if she had bothered to think about it, she could have reasonably assumed that we had walked all day, down the mountain and back up it. Otherwise, we'd have made it to the restaurant hours earlier.

And she was talking to us about a bad day!

Maybe I was being unfair. I know I was desperately tired and increasingly muddle-headed. And I know her rebuke had already biased me against her. But I also knew that other people in other communities had encountered us on the road and offered us rides. Some of them had offered us a bed for the night. Some of them offered us food or water. Some of them just wanted to talk. But almost everybody had been friendly, or at least polite.

Then we came to Spencer.

The waitress wasn't the only unfriendly person in Spencer. We soon met another: the Van Buren County Sheriff. The sheriff and some of his deputies were standing in front of the jail when we approached. It was dark but there was enough light for them to see us and for us to see that they were watching every move we made. But we were looking for the law intentionally. After the drunk, the growling shepherd, the stone woman, and the waitress, we were finally getting the message. The waitress had put it to us straight: "You better be careful."

We had a good plan. The sheriff would protect us if, indeed, we needed protection. And the sheriff, who was a politician and knew everybody in town, could find a safe place for us to camp. All we had to do was ask.

"Sheriff, we need your help," I began optimistically. "We're hiking across the state and we walked in from Fall Creek Falls today. We're beat and we need a place to camp for the night."

"Anyplace is OK with us: schoolyard, churchyard, somebody's backyard, anyplace where we're safe and won't cause any trouble."

The sheriff was listening but he wasn't smiling. "We don't let people camp in the schoolyard," he said. His tone was firm.

I figured he was just suspicious, as a sheriff might be. So I explained a little more, to show him we were on the level. "My name is John Coward. This is my wife Linda. We're from Knoxville (a town he'd know) and we started in the mountains of East Tennessee. We're walking to the Mississippi River. We had it rough today. Route 30 is a killer between here and the park."

The sheriff folded his arms. He scratched his left forearm with his right hand. Obviously, I hadn't convinced him.

"My advice," he said when he finished scratching, "is to keep on going. There are plenty of farms at the foot of the mountain. I'd say somebody there will let you camp."

We were astonished by his suggestion. Linda responded quickly, "But it's dark. We can't walk down a mountain. A car will hit us."

The sheriff said nothing but his look was clear: "That's your problem, lady."

"There must be someplace in town to camp. We just want to sleep in a safe place," Linda said.

"Like I said, there are farms at the foot of the mountain."

I couldn't believe the man's attitude. We'd come for his help and we got an invitation out of town.

Linda didn't give up. "Where's the Methodist Church? We'll ask the minister there. Maybe he'll let us camp." We were part-time Methodists and figured we could find a friend through the church.

She sheriff consulted his deputies. "There's no Methodist Church in Spencer. The closest one is up the Sparta highway several miles. You'd be better off heading down the mountain."

We still weren't getting through.

I tried one final ploy. A man we met as we walked into Spencer had suggested we camp in a "field" near the jail. I told the sheriff this, hoping that he'd let us camp nearby, where he could keep an eye on us.

The man, said the sheriff, was "probably one of those hoodlums around here."

"No he wasn't," Linda said, her impatience growing. "He was a farmer in a pickup truck."

"Well, you don't see any field around here, do you?" the sheriff said.

By this time I didn't care. We were arguing with a brick wall. Besides, I had another plan.

We left the jail and headed out of town. I quickly told Linda my proposal: somewhere before we left Spencer, we'd find someone who'd let us camp. The sheriff would be none the wiser and we wouldn't have to walk in the dark.

There was only one problem. Spencer ended abruptly just to the west of the jail. There was a single store and then the dark, sloping

mountainside. There was nothing to do but return to town and try again. This time we wouldn't try the sheriff.

We had seen the glow of field lights as we walked into Spencer. That meant a softball game, and a softball game would attract people. Surely someone at the ballfield would take us in.

To get to the ballfield, we had to walk past the jail. There was no way to avoid the anxious eyes of the sheriff. He was watching too: by the time we made it to the ballfield, he was waiting in the cruiser nearby.

Near the gate to the field, I saw a man in a police uniform different from the deputy's uniforms. He was a Spencer policeman, and he didn't work for the sheriff. It was worth another try.

I approached the officer, introduced myself and quickly explained our story. The policeman didn't say anything but he seemed sympathetic. I showed him my business card from the newspaper. I told him we were getting desperate and that the sheriff had refused to help.

"What did the sheriff say to you?" the policeman asked.

I told him.

He thought a moment and then said quietly, "Let me talk to the sheriff. I think we can work something out. Just wait here."

We waited. But our arrival at the ballpark had not gone unnoticed. A group of curious boys was already gathered. One of them, who had overheard my pleas, volunteered his farm. "You can camp at our place. Down by our pond."

I was relieved to hear his offer; relieved to hear kindness

and sympathy in his voice. My tension eased a little.

"You'll have to ask your folks," I told him.

"I will," the boy said, "but they won't mind. I know they won't."

I told the boy to stand by. His offer sounded good and we might need it when the legal conference broke up.

Several minutes passed. Then the policeman, the sheriff, a deputy and another man approached. They had an offer of their own.

"This is Charles Sullivan," the policeman said, referring to the other man. "He's a good fellow and he's agreed to put you up for the night."

I looked at Linda. She was thinking what I was: accept. I did.

The sheriff must have suddenly felt for us. Like the waitress, he didn't apologize, he explained: "I'm just looking out for your safety. I couldn't be responsible for you if you were camping. But Sullivan will look after you."

Charles Sullivan was a bearded man in his late 20s or early 30s. He directed us to his pickup. We piled our packs in back and got in the cab. A few minutes later, sitting on a couch in his trailer, we tried to put the events of the day into place. We couldn't do it. Nothing in our 40 days of walking--almost halfway across the state--had prepared us for hostility and suspicion. Indeed, until now the experience had been so positive, so encouraging that we had come to expect openness and courtesy at every stop. We had come to expect it as a right, as the reward of our walking.

But the "real" world doesn't reward people for walking. Or for foolish idealism. If we had thought it through, we'd have realized that. We'd have realized, too, that we were due for a fall, and we could have prepared for it.

What happened in Spencer was entirely psychological. No one had laid a hand on us. No one threatened us. But danger signals flashed everywhere, starting at the edge of town and ending with the sheriff. One after another, the signals increased in intensity. Their message was always the same: "Beware! This is a hostile place. We don't like strangers."

By the time we met Charles Sullivan, we were racked with fear.

The comfort of the trailer and Sullivan's calm, quiet manner brought us out of our nightmare. We told him our experience in town and with the sheriff. Sullivan understood. He confirmed the message too: in Spencer, beware.

Sullivan went to bed because he had to drive a TVA van to McMinnville the next morning at 5. He would drop us off in Spencer on his way. Linda and I headed for the shower.

When we were clean, we sat on the bed and tried once more to sort out the day. We were exhausted but still too tense to sleep. Talking helped.

Suddenly, I heard a sharp cracking noise. The trailer went dark. Linda and I were instantly stiff with fear.

I could only think one thing: they've come to get us. They've cut the electricity.

It was a preposterous idea. Who was after us? And why?

Yet after the last few hours in Spencer, who could be certain of anything? Besides, both Linda and I were irrational by now. Terrified.

I pulled back the curtain, half expecting to see a ring of white robes and torches surrounding the trailer. Instead, I saw only the quiet moonlit darkness of Sullivan's front lawn. But the trailer was still dark and we were both convinced something was wrong.

I felt my way across the room. The back door was locked. Out the back window, only trees in the moonlight. I walked silently into the kitchen with my hand on the wall. I found a light switch and flipped it. It worked.

I was relieved, but I still didn't understand the cracking noise and the loss of power in the bedroom. The kitchen light was bright enough for me to find the fusebox and check it. Sure enough: that was all it was.

We shut our eyes and lay close beside each other that night. But we never slept. The fear swelled in us, as real as the mountains and as dark as the forest. In time, we would understand it and conquer it. In time, we would see that Spencer was simply a temporary aberration, the kind of experience that made the good times of the hike even better. We knew the hike would be good again. But that night we couldn't grasp the fear, couldn't control it. We had to live through it. We tossed and turned till dawn.

At 5, as promised, Sullivan dropped us off in Spencer. My head was spinning--Linda's was too--but we knew what to do: get out of town. By 9 a.m. we were off the mountain, miles from Spencer. By nightfall we

were in McMinnville, 20 miles away. We spent the night in a motel with the door locked.

CHAPTER XIII

RURAL LIFE

We needed two full days to recover.

The physical recovery took that long. The walk into Spencer the day before had taxed us and we didn't get much rest at Charles Sullivan's trailer. Then we walked 20 miles--our longest day's walk so far--to McMinnville. We needed a good night's sleep followed by a day of loafing just to get over the fatigue.

But the psychological recovery took longer. We left Spencer charged with doubt and suspicion. At every store, with every person we met, we held back, cautious and defensive. Could people be trusted? Would they trust us? One thing was certain: we weren't going to get caught off-guard again.

We needed time and a new place to start rebuilding. In McMinnville, we could begin again.

McMinnville seemed worlds away from Spencer. The enclosed darkness of the plateau had opened to McMinnville's low hills and ridges, wide with light. There were green, rolling farms here, and old, white houses, and a whole city of new subdivisions and shopping centers and kids in the park playing. The atmosphere seemed warm and generous, typical of most of the Tennessee towns we'd walked through. In McMinnville, we began to feel good about the hike again. It would just take time.

Our experience in Spencer had prompted another change, too. We no longer had a dog.

Giving Bones away was harder than I thought it would be. But Linda and I knew that Bones was not cut out for the road. We'd be better off without him and he'd be better off without us.

On the morning we left Spencer, we stopped for breakfast at a little roadside grocery. The storekeeper's wife saw Bones and mentioned that he looked a lot like their Chihuahua, a female named Tiny. The woman brought Tiny out and we compared: both had two tan spots on their backs and very similar markings on their heads.

Then, to my surprise, Linda offered her the dog.

"Oh no," the woman said. "No, we can't take another dog."

"Well, I just thought you might want Bones," Linda said. "He is a lot like Tiny."

The woman thought about it a moment more and said, "It would be nice to have two that look so much alike." She paused. "Maybe we will take him."

So Bones found a new home--and a better one. I never thought I'd miss him, but when we had to leave him there and walk away, I was sad. Bones had endured some long days with us. And to be fair, he had done well under difficult circumstances.

I picked Bones up one last time, rubbed his head and said goodbye. He yelped wildly as we left, sure he'd been deserted. But we knew he had a good home. Besides, the name of his new community fit: Bone Cave, Tennessee.

Just before we entered McMinnville we passed another sign marking the Trail of Tears. The Cherokee, too, had crossed the plateau headed for the Mississippi. We rested a minute and tried to imagine

the pain of their journey. By comparison, our troubles were insignificant. The Cherokee walked under military guard. They were forced off their homeland and marched 800 miles across Tennessee and Arkansas to land nobody wanted in Oklahoma. There was no way we could know that suffering; it was simply too great.

We spent our free day in McMinnville watching television, eating fried chicken, and drinking beer--all things we had been avoiding on the hike. We walked around town too, finding wonderful old homes on tree-shaded streets. But the highlight of the day was the custom car show at the motel. Though we had given up cars for the summer, we spent over an hour admiring chrome-covered 1932 Fords, 1926 Dodges, customized purple pickups and a show-stopping red, white and blue Model T hot-rod. We took photographs and enjoyed the diversion.

The next day was Sunday and we were ready to walk again. Our plan was to follow U.S. 70 northwest to Woodbury and Murfreesboro and then cut south of Nashville on State Route 96 to Franklin. From there, we'd continue west and pick up 70 again at Dickson. All we had to do was keep walking.

Out of McMinnville, we passed through acres of shrubs, trees and flowers. Warren County is a garden spot and the green, regular rows of the country's nurseries made the walking pleasant. We camped that night behind a Methodist Church--we found one--in a community called Centertown. It was a good campsite. There was a store nearby, and water too. And we learned a little about the pace of country life from a neighbor who came over to visit with us. When we asked him

about Centertown, he said he didn't know too many people in the town.

"I've only lived here 12 years," he explained.

The next day we hoped to get to Woodbury. The morning was fair and we made good progress. We took a break at a great old store called Bino's Market run by Bino (who else?) and his wife. They were in their early 20s, surprisingly young it seemed to me, and had a baby girl running through the store. We drank soft drinks, sat in the shade of Bino's porch and rested. Later, at the top of a long hill over Woodbury, we paused at a small park. A stone monument near the entrance commemorated Uncle Dave Macon, a Tennessee native who starred on the early Grand Ole Opry. This was Uncle Dave's country. We were a day's walk from Readyville, where Uncle Dave once lived, and another day from Murfreesboro where he was buried.

Woodbury was quiet on the Monday we were there. We walked around the courthouse square and stopped at a grocery for food and supplies. We wrote some cards on a bench in front of the store, mailed them and headed out the highway, looking for a campsite. On the way, we crossed the Stones River, a small, murky stream. Somewhere along the river bottom, I was sure we could find a good tentsite.

Eventually we did, but it was not what I had in mind. The site we found had plenty of soft grass, neatly mowed. It was safe too, protected in fact by a high fence. There was only one problem with our riverside campsite: it smelled. But that's what we got for camping at the Woodbury Treatment Facility--the sewer plant.

Actually, the smell wasn't a problem. We camped at the edge of the plant site and the wind, thank goodness, carried the smell away.

A sewer technician approved our stay and showed us an outside water spigot. (We were glad, too. I could just see us opening the wrong valve and drowning in a flood of sewage. What a horrible way to die!) There was a hose there and at dusk we stripped behind a huge concrete tank and washed with mint soap. Back in the tent, we were clean and relaxed. For one night at least, the Woodbury sewer plant was a good home.

We walked to Readyville the next day, through sweet pastures edged with white board fences. This part of Middle Tennessee was horse country. Colts played in the fields and mares chopped at the grass. The red barns and white-columned houses signaled money and a lifestyle of old-fashioned Southern elegance. One house in particular caught our attention. It was a long, two-story gray stable, now converted into a remarkable and opulent home. A store clerk down the road told us it was valued at half a million dollars. We didn't doubt it.

Readyville itself turned out to be something less than thriving. It was a small farm community built along the Stones River. But Readyville had a water-powered mill built in 1812 that we were anxious to see. We made it there by lunch, only to find the mill closed. We looked around anyway, took a few pictures and prepared to leave. Then, in the parking lot, we happened to meet a young man named Terry Talley. He invited us across the highway to the mill dam where the locals had established a swimming hole in the Stones.

It was a great idea. The afternoon sun was hot, but for once, we didn't mind. We stayed cool and wet in the Stones. There was even a cable swing over the river, and I played Tarzan while Linda took my picture. At the river, our troubles seemed very far away.

We talked to Terry and his wife Linda while they watched their little girl splash in the river. Terry was a metalsmith. He had been a helicopter pilot in Vietnam but since the war he had settled into a quiet country life. He said they had tried the "back-to-nature trip," but found it wasn't right for them.

But this area was home, Terry said. The Talley family had been there so long that a nearby hill was known as Talley's Hill. Terry said he and Linda lived about 10 miles away in a house he built. "We made a list of all the things we wanted in a house," Terry said, "and this place has them all." The Talleys were obviously enjoying country life.

We stayed at the river for hours; we were too comfortable to leave. But the road always called us back.

Before we turned to the highway again, we stopped by the mill for a last look. To our surprise, the mill was open. We took a quick tour, courtesy of Wayne Epperly, a Nashville real estate man who owned the place. The mill was in good repair, but after Hal Hodges' Dumplin Mill, the Readyville Mill didn't impress. No one milled much anymore and the interior was obviously too clean and shiny to be a real work place. Another feature of the mill was its water-powered turbine located under the building. The turbine was more efficient than the old overshot waterwheel but the public preferred the overshot wheel--it was obviously more romantic. Epperly would have preferred an overshot wheel, too, because it would have increased the tourist potential--and the value--of the property. Epperly wanted to sell. I wanted to buy of course; the romance of the mill was strong. But the price was

even stronger: "In the neighborhood of \$150,000," Epperly said. That was a neighborhood we could only visit. My career as a miller would have to wait until more prosperous times.

Yet I knew someone could take over the Readyville Mill and bring it back to life. What a wonderful thing it would be, I thought, if somebody could actually run the mill again. It could be a working mill, grinding wheat and corn for local farmers. It could be a tourist attraction, too. There was room for a store, a restaurant, craft shops and more. It seemed like a great idea. The idea was so good, in fact, that it had been tried twice already. And each time the business went bust. That was how Epperly got the mill; his son had been an investor in the last attempt to make it go.

Times had changed. Water-powered mills used to be in nearly every community in Middle and East Tennessee. Now only a few remained, and fewer still could function. Here was one that did, and yet it too was idle.

Apparently, you couldn't open the Readyville Mill as a tourist attraction. The location, for one thing, was too far off the tourist routes to draw a crowd. Besides, in an age of video space games and gut-twisting disaster movies and Disneyland's plastic piranha, who could get a charge out of Readyville Mill? In New England, maybe, a brightly painted mill might excite a few nostalgic tourists. But in the South, for some reason, no one cared, or seemed to. What did this say about us? About our sense of tradition? I couldn't help but think that somewhere along the line we had broken with our past so severely that we'd lost it.

There was a more subtle loss too. The old mills were usually local operations, built and run by local people. When the mills closed, the farming communities lost their local focus. The farmers traveled outside their communities and had their milling done by strangers, by corporations. And one step at a time, the small family farm in Tennessee gave way to the corporate farm, to agribusiness. What started as a minor shift became a national trend. The deserted mills were a monument to this change.

But the sun was low; it was time to move on. We left U.S. 70 at Readyville and followed a farm road toward Murfreesboro. Somewhere ahead, we'd find a campsite.

We were used to dead animals on the road; we'd seen hundreds--snakes, opossums, squirrels, skunks, rabbits, groundhogs--even a doe in East Tennessee. We had walked quickly past the stinking hulk of a cow when we followed the railroad near Greeneville. But a mile or so out of Readyville we saw what could only be the body of a bobcat. Linda saw it first, but couldn't believe it. Neither could I. Maybe it was a large house cat. But a closer look revealed a huge head and thick, powerful shoulders. No house cat was ever built like that. I hoped we could see a live bobcat--but not too close.

Just before dark, we camped in a wide field near the Stones River. The field was owned by Al Garvin and we met him, his wife, and the two Garvin children. They helped us get water from the pumphouse and gave us tomatoes to eat with our spaghetti and cheese. We cooked in the dark, the moon rising on the low horizon and the stars blinking through the haze. As we ate, the sky seemed to grow larger over

our heads. The field opened in all directions to the glowing darkness. It was the first time since the magnificent sunset on Grassy Ridge high in the mountains that we felt the overwhelming presence of the sky. We watched the stars and remembered the miles we had walked since the Appalachian Trail. So much had happened since then. It seemed so long ago.

CHAPTER XIV

FRANKLIN

We started the next day with a landmark. On our way into Murfreesboro, we passed within a mile or so of a monument marking the exact geographic center of Tennessee. We were halfway across the state if we were going to Memphis, the western-most corner of Tennessee. Reelfoot Lake was closer than Memphis, and we felt good knowing that put us past the halfway point.

But the question remained: could we make Reelfoot by the end of August? We were in Murfreesboro on August 15, we had roughly 200 miles to go. It would be close, very close. But I thought we could make it and I knew we were determined to try.

Murfreesboro was an "Old South" town, crowded with tall oaks and antebellum-style homes in wood and brick. We stopped by Middle Tennessee State University too for a visit to the bookstore and a quick look around. But the real discovery in Murfreesboro was a little downtown restaurant called the City Cafe. We knew when we walked in we had found a gem. The room had dark paneling like an old drug store. It was crowded with businessmen, housewives, students, shoppers, and a few unclassifiable others. A squad of waitresses hustled around the room clearing tables and clattering dishes. And the food was definitely Old South. We had plate lunches of chicken--Linda's was fried and mine was boiled and served with a scrumptious dressing--along with boiled potatoes and green beans. The homemade rolls were even better; in fact,

the highlight of the meal. Dessert was yellow cake with chocolate sauce, another treat.

We left a good tip, but before we left I noticed a black man cooking in the kitchen. He was the secret of the City Cafe and he could well be proud of his work. We had walked over 350 miles, hoping for food like his. We walked away satisfied and complete. A rich meal after a day's walk was a pleasure like no other.

We stayed in a motel that night, too full to walk. Besides, we were in the middle of Murfreesboro at dusk with no place to camp. Also, I had some writing to catch up on and needed a place to work. Instead of a wide horizon and a bright sky, we had to make do with the four bland walls of the Imperial Motel. But at least we could shower and run the air conditioner all night.

From Murfreesboro we walked out State Highway 96 toward Franklin. We got a late start and made it only as far as Almadillo, a farm community near the Williamson County line. We asked a man who was mowing his yard if we could camp on his land. He seemed wary and said he didn't have a suitable campsite. He directed us, instead, to his neighbor across the highway. The neighbor was a working man with a run-down farm house set on cinder blocks. His breath smelled of whiskey and his dog barked at us. But the man was friendly and opened his field to us without a second thought. We were home again.

The Almadillo campsite was a good one, but it had two peculiarities. First, there was the "peeping Sue," or the woman we called "the Curtain Lady." Now there is absolutely nothing special about two people erecting a dome tent or cooking supper on a backpacker's stove, but the Curtain Lady certainly found it fascinating. From the moment we

dropped our packs and started setting camp, the curtains in the house across the highway parted. A pair of eyes peered forth. We didn't really care; we weren't going to do anything private anyway. (We could make a latrine in the woods after dark.) So we figured the Curtain Lady would soon get bored and disappear.

But an hour later, she was still there, unblinking. It finally unnerved us. We weren't doing anything except our usual camping chores--preparing our bed, cleaning the dishes, and so on--but we were doing them all under the scrutiny of the Curtain Lady. I wondered what was going on in her mind. Did she think we were young hoboes? Acid-headed hippies? What? I wished she would simply come over and ask. Then her curiosity would be satisfied and we would be left in peace. Finally, just as the light was failing, the curtains closed. It was too dark to see anyway.

The other peculiar feature of Almaville was the Bill Rice Ranch. Just down the road we could see the elaborate gate, complete with a statue of a golden horse, rearing gloriously. A sign indicated that the ranch was a Christian youth camp. That was OK with us, but their method of getting the young Christian cowboys out of the sack wasn't. We were resting easy in the early light when we heard the amplified voice of a cowboy singer float across the field:

"OK, everybody, let's sing," the voice began. And then a sort of organ grinder music started and the cowboy returned singing, "Once there was a little bear, a little bear who had no hair," or some equally silly words.

We rolled over in the dim light of the tent, groggy with sleep. This is the way rough-and-tumble cowboys wake up? They must be small

cowboys, we decided, or else the Bill Rice Ranch was treating them like morons. In any case, we got started a little earlier that day, thanks to Bill Rice and the cowboys. And all day, we hummed the "bear with no hair" ditty as we walked.

Route 96 was supposed to be another little-traveled state road, suitable for hikers. It looked that way on the map. But the map didn't show all the truckers who used 96 as a shortcut between Interstate 24 at Murfreesboro and Interstate 65 at Franklin. The map didn't show the narrow shoulders of 96 either. All morning we walked in fear of the big rigs and always with an eye on the shoulder. A couple of extra feet could make a big difference. Late in the morning, we climbed a particularly narrow stretch of road up a wooded ridge. Suddenly, a truck appeared, over the crest of the hill, rolling fast. Linda, in front, saw it first and took two quick steps toward the ditch. I followed her lead and leaned into a black and white safety post as the truck rushed on. A storm of dust and grit swirled in our faces. I said a silent "thank you" to God and prayed out loud for the end of Highway 96.

It didn't end soon enough for Linda. Within sight of a tiny crossroads called Triune, Linda developed a new problem: severe pains in her shins. It was probably shin splints, but whatever it was, it nearly crippled her. She hobbled badly, the pain stabbing her shins with every step. I wanted to help, but what could I do? I couldn't stop the pain. Triune was only a quarter mile away so I urged Linda to keep walking. She could rest there. She was nearly in tears but I walked ahead and let her suffer alone. In 15 minutes, she joined me at a little Triune market. The clerk there was a young woman with

a black eye--from softball, she said. And from softball, she happened to have a bottle of Absorbine Jr., supposed to relieve muscle pain. Linda applied the liniment to her shins. It seemed to help. So did our long rest in the air conditioned market. When we finally left Triune, Linda was sore but not in pain. We were both glad. She would never make it to Franklin, much less Reelfoot, if her shins were shot.

Another long afternoon of walking and resting got us to Franklin. It was almost dark by the time we crossed the Harpeth River and entered the old city. But even by streetlight, Franklin had character. We walked past mansion after imposing mansion, street after stately street. For a small town, Franklin had its share of elegant, restored homes. We were surprised--and amazed. Nowhere in Tennessee had we seen a city like Franklin, a town which obviously celebrated and preserved its past. It reminded us of Colonial Williamsburg, except that Franklin was more Civil War than colonial. Also, Franklin had all the warts of a living city; it was hardly an elaborate museum piece like Williamsburg. Yet we had to admire the citizens of Franklin. They had saved much of their town from decay and the tacky commercialism that infests so many American cities.

But the first order of business in Franklin was food. We were hungry, and we knew exactly where to eat: Dotson's. The catfish at Dotson's was locally famous, so we unloaded our packs at the door and found a table. The Friday night crowd filled the small dining room. Dishes rattled, babies cried, men told stories and laughed--Dotson's was jumping. We ordered the fish and watched the crowd while we waited. I caught snatches of conversation from a nearby table; it was a regular soap opera of who's sick and who's married to whom and so forth. But

the catfish was light and tender--better than the gossip. We ate and enjoyed. We celebrated, too. I had calculated that Franklin was the official 400-mile mark on our hike. We finished the meal with rich, sticky pecan pie--the best dessert yet.

The next order of business was a place to camp. It was after 9 p.m. now--completely dark--and we were in the center of an unfamiliar city. Also, we knew we were too tired to walk very far. We started looking near Dotson's. Could we camp, say, behind the restaurant? We looked; it wasn't suitable--too smelly and exposed. Maybe we could camp beside the Harpeth River? No; it looked swampy and buggy. What about the Episcopal Church up the street? We checked. The church had an outside water spigot and there was a grassy area behind the next building, an old Masonic Lodge. We decided to stay.

But the site made an imperfect campground. It was too exposed; a careful observer could see the tent from one side of Dotson's, nearly a block away. I thought the only people likely to look that closely were the police. Yet after Spencer, I didn't want to alarm them. There was no telling what they'd think; we could be vandals, burglars or worse. On the other hand, what would happen if the vandals found us? That didn't seem very likely, but I couldn't forget a news story I'd seen earlier that day in the Nashville Tennessean. The story concerned the murder, for no apparent reason, of a hitchhiker. The man's body was found in a ditch. He'd been shot several times in the head. It was hardly the kind of story I wanted to see. More than once before morning, I woke in a sweat, flinching.

Breakfast was at Dotson's. I needed their coffee to shake off

the sleepiness of the night. Over eggs, I made a promise to Linda-- and myself--not to camp in town again. It wasn't worth the worrying.

Before we left Franklin, we stopped by a grocery to restock with food. One of the check-out women greeted us outside, full of questions. "How much do your packs weigh?" she asked.

"I don't know," Linda said. "But you're welcome to pick it up and see for yourself."

The clerk was a round, heavy woman. She hoisted the pack to one shoulder. "I don't see how you can move with this on your back."

We'd heard that response before. Everywhere we went, people said they liked the idea of hiking Tennessee. But always, in the same breath, they told us why they couldn't do it. "I can't walk a mile," they'd say. Or "I'd do it if I didn't have to carry that pack." Better objections were safety or lack of time. But we'd heard them all and we knew better. After all, only a few months before, we'd had the same objections. Now we knew that almost anybody in reasonably good health could walk as much of Tennessee as they wanted. The key was simply desire; you had to want to do it. Once you wanted to bad enough, the objections faded away. Exercise and training solved the physical problems. Lightweight packing helped solve the backpack problem. Safety was a continuing problem, but caution and good judgment helped reduce the dangers. As for time, the solution was simple. If you really believed the journey was worth your time, you could make time for it. You could, for example, save your vacations. Or take a leave of absence at work. Or simply quit your job. One way or the other, you could find the time.

As far as Linda and I were concerned, a lot of people should

have been on the road with us. Some of them needed it, needed to break out of their routines, to live new lives for a time. We thought it would do them good, and like the check-out lady, they usually thought so too. Yet apart from the Appalachian Trail, we had failed to meet a single hiker in Tennessee. Everybody liked the idea, but we were the only people doing it.

Before we left Franklin, I called the Associated Press in Nashville. I thought we deserved a little publicity, and besides, it might win us some friends in the miles ahead. Little did I know how right I was.

We were just a few miles out of Franklin when the first television crew found us. I was surprised that Nashville's Channel 2 was out so quickly, but I was even more surprised when the reporter said they weren't looking for us but for a mule-pulling contest. They missed the contest, the reporter said, but they thought we might be a story. They hadn't even seen the AP report.

Channel 4 had. They arrived a few minutes later and we went through another round of questions. (We were getting good at the answers by now.) The attention was flattering, but by the end of the second interview, I was interviewed out. We weren't walking--and we needed to. Also, standing in the August sun was wearing us down.

We followed 96 all day. This part of the highway was new; the shoulders were wide. The traffic was light, too, since we were now away from Interstate 65. We were walking to Fairview, but by late afternoon it was clear we wouldn't make it. As darkness approached, we paused long enough to photograph some colts at a farm near the South Harpeth River. Just down the highway we crossed the river. A sign at one end

of the bridge pointed to the South Harpeth Church of Christ. A church beside a river sounded like a campsite to us. We headed for the church.

We found a brick building in a groomed little churchyard. To one side of the building sat an old cemetery enclosed by a wall of thick limestone blocks. It was an old-fashioned fence, the kind no one builds anymore. We figured we could camp somewhere on the churchyard, but we'd be very obvious. We decided to ask permission.

At a log house across the street, we met Wayne Sinks. He was a member of the church and he didn't think anyone would mind if we camped. While we talked, Wayne's wife Sherrie called the minister to make sure. The minister wasn't home but his wife didn't mind--she'd just seen us on the six o'clock news. So we were set for the night.

But we never slept in the churchyard. We never got a chance to cook supper, either. The Sinks took care of that. They invited us over to their yard to camp and into their home for a spaghetti supper with the family.

CHAPTER XV

THE SOUTH HARPETH

Sunday was wonderful, completely and absolutely wonderful. ..

The Sinks had started us right on Saturday evening: good food and good company. Sherrie's spaghetti hit the spot and dessert was a special treat: hot peach cobbler topped with ice cream. We talked to Wayne and Sherrie all evening about camping, baseball, their children, Nashville--anything that happened to come up. We were still talking at 11 so we turned on the television and saw ourselves on the news. It was a thrill for us, but Sherrie was more excited than we were. Sherrie was a character: zany and quick to laugh, even at herself. She had a hundred questions about the hike--and she asked most of them. But we had a wonderful time. Wayne and Sherrie were cordial and gracious, all we could ask for in new-found friends.

We woke up Sunday with an obligation. Wayne and Sherrie had invited us to church. They didn't pressure us and we didn't have to go. But we'd been meaning to visit a church all summer and had always put it off. So we agreed: church in the morning.

But in the morning, before church, we wanted to bathe. Since we didn't want to impose on the Sinks, we tried the river. There was a gravel beach and swimming hole adjacent to the Highway 96 bridge. Several dozen people had been there Saturday when we crossed the bridge, but on Sunday morning the river was deserted. Even the highway was empty. We had the South Harpeth to ourselves.

The river flowed quick and cold. I stepped in and the water

lapped my ankles. I felt the cold in the bones of my feet. A shiver ran up my body. And suddenly, the heavy August heat we had walked in for weeks was very far away. There was, now, only the river, the South Harpeth, wet and cold. I waded deeper. The cold increased. The water swept around me, fresh and clean. Another step; the cold beneath my crotch. I paused. The cold throbbed up my thighs, across my chest. And then I pushed into the current and let myself fall into the flow. The river overloaded my senses. I floated face down with my eyes closed. The cold was above me, beneath me, penetrating every pore, every cell. I stood up, took a long breath and lay back in the river, facing the sun. The cold washed over me again, clear and sweet. And all the pain of all the days of walking washed away. The river made things right. The sore feet were soothed, the shins relieved. The sweaty afternoons, the shadeless stretches of asphalt, the never-ending hills--all this was gone. There was only the river and its quick, cold current.

I knew now why I had been walking and what I was looking for. This was it: the flow of the river. It was something I had to find and understand my own way. I had to find it walking. I had to explore my native ground. I had to know my neighbors. And I had to break out of my workaday, middle-class world, had to consider my life in new terms, had to build a vision from the walk across the land. Only then, only after all that, could I feel the river taking hold; only then was I ready to understand and know the power and purpose of its flow.

The river offered comfort and relief. It offered strength. But it offered something more: the river offered renewal. It offered life, a home for the heart, a place for the spirit. The river made me believe, in a way no sermon ever could, in the existence and perfection of God.

The river was God's own creation and, when it wasn't fouled with trash or sewage or chemicals, it was a perfect physical thing. I felt the South Harpeth now and I knew this perfection. I knew this renewal, absolutely and entirely.

I don't mean I was "reborn" or that I had a religious experience. What I felt was more subtle than that, yet no less profound. The South Harpeth simply let me feel the flow of a river and draw from that flow a vision. I saw the river flowing now and as it had for generations, for centuries, for thousands of years. I saw it as an eternal flow beside which the movement of man was no more than a drop of rain in the sea. And now I understood something about nature and man and God that I had not known before. I had glimpsed, just for a moment, the perfect harmony of the earth.

I stood up again, face to the sun, and the water drained down off my head. I closed my eyes, took another long breath of morning air and felt my lungs swell with life. Chest deep in the South Harpeth, I knew that I had lived for one perfect moment in the hand of God. I was, for that moment, at peace. I had no doubts.

And as suddenly as it had come, the feeling passed. I lifted my feet from the sand again and immersed myself in the river.

Linda felt it, too. She followed me into the river and felt the cold power of the water. She too felt the cleansing force of the current, the strength of the encompassing flow. But I could not know if she felt the river the way I had. Nor could I direct her to it. She had to decide for herself, to follow her spirit where it led. But I think she felt it. I think we shared the river in a very private

way, in a way we each knew in our hearts but could not talk about. The river's flow could not yet be put into words.

We tried. We talked about it while we were in the river, while we were floating in the clear water. We knew something was happening, something good and right. But it took weeks, even months, before we could sort it out. After the summer, after time had cooled the emotions and soothed the pain, the South Harpeth still lingered as a special place where something special happened.

The experience became clear only then, months later, when I tried to write about it. At first, I failed. I still hadn't thought it through completely; there was still too much I couldn't grasp. But I kept writing and finally, two years after the river, I found its meaning. And then I knew that of all the experiences of the hike, the river had changed me most and would stay with me longest.

So it was no wonder that the church service at the South Harpeth Church of Christ struck me as inspired. The congregation's robust singing was particularly moving. They sang hymn after hymn with a vigor I'd never seen in a Methodist church--or any other church for that matter. The Rev. Ron Moon, the minister, had a sermon that was particularly relevant too. He talked about taking time in life to live well. Jesus set the example, Moon said. Though his life was short, Jesus took time to worship. He took time to rest and relax; made time for his friends. Jesus taught us how to live, Moon said.

It was a message we appreciated. In our view, it confirmed the hike. Though we weren't hiking for religious reasons, we were taking time, as Moon had suggested. We were trying to live better lives, to know ourselves well, to understand our place and our fellow men. We

had these notions, vaguely, before we started walking. Now, 50 days into the hike, the notions had become clear and important reasons. We knew what we were looking for and we were beginning to find some answers.

After the service, we discovered firsthand the power of publicity. Many in the congregation had seen us on television and we were mobbed by a crowd of well-wishers before we could get out the door. I was a little embarrassed by it all, but flattered too. And I wasn't about to complain about good will--we needed all we could get. Yet what interested me most was the comment we got from several people: "I've always wanted to do something like you're doing."

One such comment came from Bill Vander Linden, a tall, friendly man of about 40. He introduced us to his wife, Ann, who immediately asked us to their home for Sunday dinner. We were planning to walk all afternoon, but to food fanatics like us, Sunday dinner sounded too good to miss.

Bill and Ann and Linda and I had a number of common interests. For starters, Bill and Linda were art teachers. Bill was also a photographer and we toured his darkroom and talked shop. Bill and Ann were also collectors of Indian artifacts. Bill had lined the walls of their house with rows of arrowheads and stones mounted in frames. We were fascinated--and envious.

But what really captured our imagination about the Vander Lindens was their blending of old and new. Their home was a two-story log structure built from the logs of several old cabins Bill had salvaged. With a little help from their friends, Bill and Ann had done it all themselves. It was a magnificent home on a lush, wooded lot near a branch of the

South Harpeth. Bill and Ann also had a large garden, a pond, and several hogs.

When Ann called us to dinner we sampled the pork and knew instantly why they raised hogs. The pork was tender and rich, sweet and smoky. Bill explained that he and a neighbor do their own slaughtering and dressing of the hogs and curing of the meat. "After we eat, I'll show you the smokehouse," Bill said. Besides pork, Ann's dinner included chicken, beans, and something I'd never had before: homemade chow-chow. Everything was delicious. Dessert, for the second time in as many days, was peach cobbler. Surely God was smiling on us.

We were too fat and happy after dinner to think of walking to Fairview. So Bill and Ann showed us more of their place. The smokehouse was a small, square building with bright slabs of rich pork hanging inside. Bill said he built the smokehouse from some old building logs a neighbor had planned to throw away. Linda and I had to admire Bill's ingenuity.

Then Bill and Ann walked us across the road to a place they called Dripping Springs. We followed a path through a stand of trees and soon arrived at a large two-story log house with a breezeway in the center. Through the breezeway, just 30 feet behind the house, we saw a stream at the base of a dark, glistening cliff. Bill and Ann led us through the breezeway for a closer look at the cliff. Water trickled over the rock and fell randomly into the stream. Now we knew why this was Dripping Springs.

It was an ideal place for a cabin. The stream and the shade of the cliff kept the air cool and moist. The sound of the spring water falling into the stream and the quiet murmur of the stream itself were

steady, calming sounds. The back porch of the cabin faced the spring and the cliff. It was a place to sit in the shade and think.

Bill explained that the house was made of two cabins he had reconstructed for Ann's parents. He showed us around inside. The house was furnished with rustic, old-fashioned tables and chairs. The curtains, the kerosene lamps and nearly all the other items in the house gave the rooms a 19th Century look. Linda and I were in love with Dripping Springs. I'm sure if the Vander Lindens had asked, we would have moved right in. It was that perfect. I couldn't get over the fact that we were 15 miles from downtown Nashville, 15 miles from the state capitol, traffic jams, and hot, brick row houses. Yet Dripping Springs might have been in the Smokies. In fact, it reminded me of the pioneer cabins the Park Service maintains in Cades Cove, the most idyllic spot in the park.

No, we couldn't move in, Bill said, but we could spend the night if we wanted. And we wanted. It was just a matter of logistics. We huddled quickly and worked it out. Bill would drive us back to the church and we'd walk toward Dripping Springs on old Highway 96. Bill could haul our packs for us. In the morning, we could start from Dripping Springs. Bill even told us of a shortcut to Fairview that would keep us from having to backtrack.

There was a bonus to this plan too. After the walk, we agreed to go back to church with Bill and Ann for evening services. To be frank, I wasn't as interested in another service as I was in the evening's next event: an ice cream supper. We'd seen signs at little stores all summer for church ice cream suppers, but we'd never been in the

right place at the right time. But at the South Harpeth Church of Christ, we struck it rich.

It didn't come easy. First, we had to get in our day's walk. It was already the middle of the afternoon and church started early in the evening. Without packs, we kept a steady pace for over two hours. We didn't make Dripping Springs but we didn't have to; we could start in the morning where we stopped today.

The evening service was nearly all singing. I soon realized that the joy of the morning service was no fluke: the congregation genuinely enjoyed worship through song. So we sang and sang. And I must admit, I enjoyed it too.

We assembled afterward in the church basement for the ice cream. Two tables at one end of the room were crowded with ice cream freezers. A line of people formed quickly and we joined in. Ahead was a feast of flavors. There were several vanillas, a chocolate or two, and exotic mixtures like banana, peach, and yogurt, maybe 25 freezers in all. We filled Styrofoam cups with several scoops and circulated around the room, talking and tasting. All the flavors were good. We were soon at the ice cream table again. We noticed, however, that some of the ice cream eaters were veterans. The Rev. Moon, for example, did not have a tiny cup like we had. He carried a large china dish, overflowing with ice cream. He explained with a smile, "I don't fool around at these suppers. I bring my own bowl."

Linda and I knew why. We tried most of the flavors, but settled on one of the vanillas as our favorite. It was a creamy, golden vanilla; Linda said eggs were the secret. We savored it and went to the table once again. We ate as much as we could.

Sunday night we slept at Dripping Springs. Through the open window, we could hear the quiet movement of the water. We were tired and full of ice cream, ready for sleep. Even so, we didn't want this day to end.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOME STRETCH

It was time to make our run. It was August 20 and we had 10 days to walk to Reelfoot and still get Linda back to Knoxville in time for work. I studied the map. We were 140 or 150 miles from the lake, depending on what route we chose. We could still make it if we walked 15 miles every day--and if we were lucky. Those were big ifs.

We started well. Ann cooked a good breakfast and Bill dropped us off on Old 96 before 8 a.m. That early, before the heat of the day, we made good progress. We were in Fairview well before noon. We hoped to be in Dickson by dark.

We crossed Interstate 40 west of Nashville in mid-afternoon, tired but still looking forward to reaching Dickson. It seemed easy enough; we were seven miles away. But the road to Dickson dropped down a steep hill within a mile of the interstate. At the bottom of the hill was Turnbull Creek. We took one look and headed for the water. We spent an hour sitting in the shallows, splashing each other and washing the sweat away. The water was good again, but Turnbull Creek was not the South Harpeth. We felt no movement of the spirit. Still, we knew that magic ran in the cool water. Knowing that was satisfaction enough.

We left the creek when thunder clouds rolled overhead. A light rain began and we took shelter under the bridge until the rain ended. Then we started again, but the hills beyond Turnbull Creek finished us off. We climbed well at first, but the hills rolled on and on.

And with every hill, Dickson seemed no closer. I checked the map. A town called Burns was somewhere ahead. We decided to camp there--if we could make it.

After another slow climb, we reached Burns and flopped down in front of the first place we came to, a convenience store. A few minutes later, a man in his mid-30s approached us. His name was Jimmy Cagle and he'd seen us on TV. We were welcome to camp in his back yard, he said. He directed us to his house, a half mile up the highway.

The Cagle household was not what I expected. I didn't expect to be invited in for brownies and Cokes. I didn't expect to get a free haircut. And I didn't expect that Linda and I would take over little Wally Cagle's bedroom for the night. But that's exactly what happened.

We already had the tent up and the sleeping bags unrolled when Jimmy invited us in. There was a hair cutting party in progress. We met Sara, Jimmy's wife, and Wally and Christie, the Cagle children. We also met Diane Brewer, a friend of Sara's. Diane was from Camden, Sara's hometown, and she had come all the way to Burns to give Sara a permanent and, more importantly I thought, to catch up on old times.

When Diane finished with Sara, Jimmy got a trim. And then they drafted me. I washed my hair in the bathroom sink and returned to the den. Diane clipped away. It was crazy: here I was in a strange town in a strange house getting a haircut from a strange woman. Yet it was wonderful--Linda and I were among friends. The hike (and a little publicity) brought out the best in people.

Diane finished and I brushed the clippings away. By then Sara, who worked for the hospital in Dickson, had invited some hospital friends over. Jimmy worked at the hospital too, so the pace of the party

increased. Murry, one of the friends, looked over my map and recommended places to stop--and places to avoid. Diane told us to give her a call when we got to Camden. Julia Byerly, a reporter and a friend of Sara's, dropped by too. Julia interviewed us for her paper while Murry, Diane, Jimmy and Sara debated the merits of our hike.

When the party broke up we headed for the back yard, but Jimmy and Sara insisted that we stay in Wally's room. They offered us their shower, too. They didn't have to ask twice.

Goodlark Hospital in Dickson was a modern glass and brick structure. The parking lot was crowded with cars. We'd never been to Goodlark before but the place seemed immediately familiar. It should have; it seemed as if everybody in town worked there. We walked in, packs and all, and found Sara. She directed us to the hospital's third floor restaurant, a high glass-enclosed room. I was surprised that the hospital had a public restaurant, especially one that looked this fancy. We ordered a big breakfast while, unknown to us, word of our presence spread around the hospital. Soon people were stopping by the table congratulating us and asking us questions. The publicity had reached Dickson, too. Before we finished eating, a woman on the hospital's administrative staff came by. "Don't worry about the check," she said. "Breakfast is on us. We're just glad you came to Goodlark." Needless to say, so were we.

After breakfast, Jimmy gave us a quick tour of the hospital. Along the way we met Marie Harrell, who worked in the business office with Sara. Marie lived in Tennessee City, our destination for the night. Marie offered her lawn for a campsite and we told her we'd be there when we got there.

Time was becoming more and more of a problem. We needed to walk as far as possible every day, yet ever since my call to AP, we'd been swamped with people wanting to talk. We didn't mind, really, but the miles wouldn't walk themselves. We had to do it.

We had to do other things, too. Laundry, for example. Our clothes were soiled and sweaty so we spent over an hour at a coin laundry. Both Linda and I donned swim suits: everything else went into the suds. Don't think our appearance didn't raise some eyebrows.

In downtown Dickson we stopped by the birthplace of Frank Clement, the late governor. We could hardly miss the place; a huge sign was permanently attached to the building. As we stood there, an old man introduced himself and started talking. The man was Frederick Chandler and he said he was 75. In our 15 minutes with Chandler, we learned something about Clement ("a great governor"), how to cure arthritis ("drink six ounces of sherry three times a day"), and how the principles of a gyroscope had been applied in the design of helicopters ("I met Sikorsky once at an air show and told him my idea. He said I was right and offered to pay me for it. But I volunteered the idea."). Chandler's gyro lecture was technical--too technical for me to follow. But I was beginning to believe Chandler's stories. There was some wishful thinking going on, I was sure; but I was convinced there was some truth in his stories too.

Then another man who had been eavesdropping on Chandler's speech said to Linda under his breath, "Don't pay any attention to Chandler. He's just an old fool." We weren't sure what Chandler was, but we were sure of one thing: we didn't like the eavesdropper.

Our final stop in Dickson was Sadler's Restaurant. Julia Byerly,

the reporter, had told us it was the best place in town. We ordered fried chicken and black-eyed peas. A couple of bites later we knew Julia was right. I ordered chocolate chess pie for dessert. It was good too. Linda and I decided our next hike of Tennessee would be an eating tour of small town restaurants.

Mr. Sadler, a black man in his 60s, apparently handled all the cooking by himself. The waitresses were black, too. All the customers, at least while we were there, were white. We struck up a conversation with a young woman who worked for the telephone company. "I live in another town, but when I'm in Dickson, this is the only place I'll eat," she said.

Toward Tennessee City, U.S. 70 is straight and hilly. We left Dickson late, anxious to walk the nine miles or so to Marie Harrell's house. But the western sky was cloudy. By 7 p.m. it was ominously dark, and Tennessee City was still distant. We walked in a light rain from one wooded hill to the next. Cars rushed by. The sky flashed with lightning. There was more rain. Then lightning again---closer. But still no Tennessee City.

We stopped for a quick conference. If Tennessee City isn't over the next hill, Linda said, let's pack it in. We've got to get off the road.

The lightning hit again, very close. The rain was light but hard, driven by the wind. But then, in the dim light, we saw a sign: "Tennessee City, Unincorporated." We could see a dark building maybe 300 yards ahead. Linda, who usually lagged behind me by 15 or 20 yards, closed the gap. She rushed past me. The lightning hit again. She

pulled away. I lowered my head and ran after her. Linda beat me to Tennessee City by 50 yards.

We were luckier than we knew. Five minutes after we got to the Harrells, the storm broke. The rain fell with a fury. We watched from the Harrells front porch until the lightning scared us inside. A minute later, another bolt hit nearby and the lights went out. Marie lit candles while her husband Bill checked the fusebox. Linda and I sat tight, thankful for shelter and thankful we'd run into Jimmy Cagle who was married to Sara who worked at the hospital with Marie. The circumstances of our lives on the road were peculiar sometimes, but things usually worked out.

We had planned to pitch the tent at the Harrells, but that was clearly impossible now. When the lights came on, we moved upstairs to an unused attic bedroom. We slept on the floor and the room was hot. We didn't mind at all--we were dry.

We spent the next day walking to Waverly. The sky was clear now, and we made good time. Not far from Tennessee City, we passed a sign pointing to Ruskin, a socialist commune which prospered for a time in the 1890s. We ate lunch a few miles later in McEwen, a small town which claimed a Scottish heritage. Before we left town, a car pulled up beside us. The driver was an outgoing man in his mid-30s named Tom Adams. He worked for the state Public Service Commission and he had stopped to tell us one thing: beware of the Tennessee River bridge at New Johnsonville.

"Don't try to walk it," he said. "People have been killed trying to walk that bridge."

We hadn't heard about the bridge before and we promised to find

a ride. Adams thought a minute and then asked, "When do you think you'll be there?"

"If the walking goes OK, we'll cross the bridge Friday morning." That was two days away.

"Listen," Adams said. "I can't promise but I'll try to be in the area and give you a ride. Just don't try to walk that bridge, whatever you do." We promised again and Adams drove away.

In Waverly, the publicity helped us again. We stopped at a market on the edge of town. The store was run by two brothers and one of them, Bob, remembered us from a radio news story. "I remember thinking that you'd never make it to Reelfoot by the end of August," he said.

Unfortunately, we were beginning to agree with him. We had just a week left, but Bob was willing to help. He gave us the key to a camping trailer he had parked on a lot near town. The electricity works, the water doesn't, he said. We walked another mile, found the trailer and moved in. It was wonderful: we had privacy, air conditioning, and a comfortable bed. We used the bathroom at the gas station across the street and bought supper at a nearby store. Bob stopped by the trailer before dark to check on us and we thanked him. Somehow a simple "thank you" wasn't enough. In our minds, Bob was a saint. So were all the others who had helped us along the way. Miles ago, I had made myself a promise: I would always help strangers in need. I knew now that such help was generosity of a special order. It was the best way I could return the kindness I had received.

We headed for New Johnsonville and the Tennessee River on Thursday. It was a humid, overcast day and we spent a good part of it getting wet. We took shelter once under a greasy flatbed trailer parked

beside the road. When another shower came, we ducked under the eaves of the box office at a drive-in theater.

By late afternoon, the sky was clearing and we were on the edge of New Johnsonville, a town with an extraordinary supply of trailer courts and transit housing. Several people had told us about a campground near the bridge so we jumped for joy when we saw a concrete structure rising on the western skyline. We stopped a man outside a restaurant. "Is that the bridge?" I asked, looking west.

The man nodded. "That's it," he said.

Hallelujah! We'd been shooting for the Tennessee for weeks, and we'd made it. The river was important geographically as well as psychologically. The western end of the Tennessee runs south to north across the state, dividing Middle Tennessee from West Tennessee. All summer we'd been walking toward the river. Reelfoot was within striking distance west of the Tennessee. And we could see the river bridge from where we stood.

The river crossing called for a celebration. We knew what to do: the restaurant promised Tennessee River catfish. We tried it with beer and loved it.

We took our time eating. The restaurant was cool and the seat was soft. We read a Nashville paper and sipped more beer. We had it made.

As we strapped on our packs in the parking lot, a man named Ellis Carter introduced himself. He also introduced a springer spaniel sitting in the back of his pickup. Her name was Belle. I was ready to walk again but Carter, a Waverly real estate man, wanted to talk. We got

away 30 minutes later. It was nearly 8 p.m. now and only a few minutes of light remained. But the bridge was in sight.

Fifteen minutes later, I was ready to kick myself to Reelfoot Lake. There was a bridge ahead, all right, but the closer we got the more apparent it became that this bridge didn't span the Tennessee River. It didn't span any river; it was an overpass. I'd been duped again. Or, more accurately, I had duped myself. I had asked, "Is that the bridge?" A vague, leading question will get you a vague, leading answer every time.

"How dumb can a person be?" I asked myself, Linda and anyone else within earshot. And like fools, we'd spent over an hour celebrating in the restaurant, thinking we were there.

I tried to regain my composure and get on with the hike. But where was the "real" river bridge? Where was the "real" river? Where was the campground?

The sky was nearly black now and the headlights of the oncoming cars stared at us over the dark pavement. Neither Linda nor I could see any sign of a bridge or the river. I was still kicking myself. I didn't want to face another dark stretch of road. We'd be sitting ducks for the cars. And I had only myself to blame if we got hit.

It was my worst day of the summer. The walking had tired me; the rain depressed me. Even my body, which had carried me well for over 400 miles, failed me. I had no energy. My calves ached. Linda massaged my legs and tried to cheer me. That helped. But now, having celebrated too soon, having once again outsmarted myself, having once again to walk a dark, narrow highway, now I was finished. Exhausted.

We made it to the river campground though I don't remember getting

there. But I distinctly remember the motel next door and its promise of comfort and luxury. We couldn't afford the motel so we pitched the tent in the damp grass by the river and hobbled to the campground showers. The water brought me back. A sip of Jim Beam helped, too. All I needed now was sleep, lots of sleep.

But down the campground road came a Cadillac. It parked beside us. "Now what?" Linda asked. It was Ellis Carter, the man we'd met outside the restaurant. He didn't have his pickup now, but he still had Belle. He said he was just checking on us to make sure we made it OK. I think he really just wanted to talk. We tried, but Linda did all the talking; I was poor company.

In the Friday morning light we got our first good look at the New Johnsonville Bridge. No wonder Tom Adams--and several others--had warned us: it was barely a two-lane bridge. Add a tractor trailer and it wasn't even that. Walking the bridge was obviously dangerous if not suicidal.

Fortunately, we didn't have to find out. Ellis Carter, bless his soul, had volunteered to drive us across the bridge at 8:30. His cadillac made the crossing simple. He dropped us off at the foot of the bridge: West Tennessee, finally! We thanked him and started walking. Within a minute, a car rolled up. It was Tom Adams.

"I see you got a ride. I had some time so I wanted to make sure you weren't stranded," he said.

We thanked him for his trouble, and Tom said he'd try to keep an eye on us as we passed through Camden, the next town on U.S. 70. He drove away. Nice fellow, I thought, but I doubted we would see him again.

But I didn't know Tom Adams. We not only saw him again, we ate lunch with him, went home with him, and took a guided tour of Camden in his car. He was our guardian angel and before the day was over, we found we needed one.

We were trying to push on to Bruceton, five miles beyond Camden, but the rain was steady. We walked for an hour, wetter and more miserable with every step. Diane, the woman who had cut my hair at the Cagles, found us slogging along the highway. She offered a ride back to Camden, but I wanted to make it to Bruceton today so that we could make it to Huntingdon tomorrow and on, town by town, to Reelfoot. She left without us.

A miserable half hour later, Tom Adams returned. "This is my final offer," he said, smiling. Linda and I conferred on the wet shoulder. Our shoes and our clothes were soaked. If we camped, the tent and probably our sleeping bags would get wet too. On a clear day we would have kept walking. But after rain in Waverly and more rain today, we didn't want to sleep in it tonight. We stayed in Camden's only motel, courtesy of Master Charge and the good heart of Tom Adams.

We didn't see Tom after that but we felt his presence. Before we checked out of the motel Saturday morning, a flashy Camaro pulled up. Through the open doorway, we saw a bearded young man get out of the car.

"You two the ones that need the ride?"

I hesitated. We did want a ride out the Bruceton highway to the place Tom had picked us up. But who was this man?

"I'm supposed to give two hikers a ride toward Bruceton. Tom

Adams asked me to come." It was all clear now: Tom was still looking out for us.

The walk to Bruceton was easy. That is, it would have been easy under normal circumstances. But the road, the weather, and the daily physical grind were taking their toll. We needed a full day of rest, maybe two, to build up our strength, to beat the fatigue. We walked into Bruceton slowly. It was raining again.

We stopped at the first business in town, a gas station which doubled as the town's bus station. On our third straight day of rain, we were thinking of home. We still had a week to walk, but it was clear by now that we couldn't do it. Reelfoot was 100 miles away and seemed farther. Sometime soon, a bus would take us home. Linda went in the station to check bus schedules.

There was a woman, about 50, inside. She answered Linda's questions. As they talked, a car pulled up and a woman jumped out with a casserole dish in her hands. She gave it to the clerk. The room soon smelled of baked chicken and I stepped closer just to smell it better. What I would have given for that chicken casserole!

Our business done, we turned to the rain again. But Linda had an afterthought, probably brought on by the casserole. "Is there a restaurant in town?"

The woman directed us to a steak house a half mile away. Linda and I decided we'd eat there and try to dry out. But we had more pressing matters in mind, too. What were we going to do about the hike? Could we go on? What about our dream--the mountains to the Mississippi?

Over steak, eggs and steaming coffee, we considered our options once more. I wanted to finish. Linda did, too. But we had to be

realistic. To walk to Reelfoot, we'd need another week. We had just that before Linda returned to work.

Yet we both knew we couldn't do it physically, not in a week. We were already pushing the limits of our endurance. We needed time to rest. Linda needed time to recuperate before she went back to school. It wasn't possible to walk to Reelfoot, rest for a few days, and still get Linda back to work on time.

I looked over my journal. We'd been out 56 days. We'd left Shenandoah Estates a month ago. Since then, we had crossed Middle Tennessee, suffering when we had to but more often finding friendliness and hospitality on the road. And we had made it to West Tennessee. Come to think of it, we had done everything we set out to do--except make it to Reelfoot.

I checked the map. As of Bruceton, we had walked 496 miles. We had 100 miles to go, 100 miles we didn't have the time or energy to walk.

Yet we didn't have to give up either. We could always walk to Reelfoot another time. We could come back. Over lunch in Bruceton, we made a promise to ourselves: we would finish the hike later.

We were through eating and watching the rain out the window when a woman entered the restaurant. It was the woman from the bus station. She had come for us.

"Since it's raining, why don't you come to the house and rest. I'll fix you something hot to drink and you can stay dry," the woman said.

Her offer sounded great--and it was. The woman, Jean Bogle, fixed tea and opened her home to us. Jean was a warm and generous woman

and we discovered we had much in common. Jean was a part-time painter as well as a potter and photographer. We talked for two hours in her kitchen, but it took only 10 minutes to realize we had found a friend. We liked Jean Bogle and she liked us.

When the rain stopped, we walked a few miles beyond Bruceton. I wanted to do it to complete 500 miles. Jean picked us up near Huntingdon when we had made it 502 miles. We had done all we could do in one summer. We'd finish the rest of the hike later. We'd be back.

We spent the night at Jean's house. For supper, she and her husband Louis took us out for pizza. The next day, Sunday, August 26, Jean and Louis found us a ride to Nashville where we caught a bus to Knoxville. We were home Sunday night, weary but more satisfied than ever about the hike. We had covered a lot of ground since those first tender days in Mountain City. We hadn't made it to Reelfoot, but we knew now that we would.

PART III
WEST TENNESSEE

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND SUMMER

We were hiking again 10 months later. It was June 23, the beginning of a new summer, and it was 1980, the beginning of a new decade. We drove back to Bruceton, parked at the Bogles, and prepared to walk to Reelfoot. I figured it would take a week.

Our year off had thrust us back into our other lives. We both stayed busy. Linda was teaching art again and finding it satisfying but, with more students to teach, increasingly frustrating. I was back at The University of Tennessee, studying and learning again how to think.

But we found ourselves obsessed with the hike. We spent hours reviewing our photographs. Linda made up a bulletin board of pictures and newspaper clippings about the hike. I mounted a huge map of Tennessee on the wall and traced our route in orange across the state. At parties, we bored our friends with details of our suffering and stories of people we'd met.

The obsession lasted all year and finally brought us back to complete the trip. Yet we found that time dulled the pain and disappointment of the first summer. What stood out in our minds were the good things that happened, the cool mornings in the mountains, the long showers at the end of weary days, the people all across the state who'd helped us. We had shared so much and most of it was so good. That's why we'd come back.

When we met Jean Bogle the first summer, her last name struck a responsive chord. Where had I heard it before? Then I remembered: Andrew Bogle was the Revolutionary War soldier buried at the Eusebia Presbyterian Church only a few miles from our house in Seymour. We'd taken a picture of his grave. Was he an ancestor? Jean didn't know, but she said she'd find out.

This year she knew. She had a Bogle family history which traced Louis' family directly to Andrew Bogle. According to the history, Andrew moved from Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, to Blount County, Tennessee, in 1786. The area around Eusebia was once home to so many Bogles that it was called Bogle Settlement. Andrew died in 1813 and his tombstone is badly crumbled. But the family historian had discovered what it said: "First owner of the soil under which he lies." Our home in Seymour was no more than four miles from Bogle Settlement. It seemed more than coincidental that we had walked 400 miles to meet Andrew Bogle's descendant and his wife.

There were three of us on the road now. We had returned with Greta, a black part-Dalmatian, part-Weimaraner puppy. After our experience with Bones I wasn't sold on the idea of hiking with a dog. But at least Greta was our dog by choice, not a stray as Bones had been. And Greta seemed to have more respect for cars than Bones had. Just in case, we kept Greta on a leash most of the time.

We left the Bogles at 6 a.m., but we were beginning to think Bruceton was bad luck. It had been raining in Bruceton last year and it was raining in Bruceton now. We took shelter under the awning of a store while the worst of the rain passed. A few minutes later, the

downpour started again and we ducked into a Texaco station. We stayed an hour while a steady rain fell. Fortunately, business was light so the station owner, Gerald Patterson, showed us a 1938 Dodge he had restored and a 1928 Model A Ford he was working on. The Ford had a rumble seat and Patterson said he wanted the car just so his grandchildren could ride in it. But we were getting anxious. On our first day out the second summer, I wanted to get our miles in early, while we were fresh and before the heat of the day. Thanks to the rain, we were losing some good walking hours.

About 9 a.m. the rain slacked off. We walked hard now to make up the miles. A shower hit near a community called Rosser but it was brief and we kept walking. A few minutes later another shower began, and this time the rain fell in buckets. We had only trees for shelter and they soon proved inadequate. Just up the road, though, I saw a sign: Larry's Used Cars. We ran for Larry's.

We spent the better part of an hour under the metal awning attached to Larry's office-in-a-trailer. The rain kept falling and we grew melancholy. Greta was even more miserable, whining and shivering like she was sick. My hopes of walking to Reelfoot in a week were washing away with the rain.

The rain finally ended. In fact, by noon the rain clouds had disappeared over the horizon and the sun was bearing down. All of a sudden, the day was turning hot.

We ate lunch at a little barbecue restaurant near the stockyard in Huntingdon. The restaurant was housed in a small frame house which had long ago fallen into ruin. It was decidedly unappealing. We went in anyway, figuring any restaurant this close to the stockyard would

have fresh pork. (Later the wind changed and we found that the stockyard delivered the scent of fresh manure.)

Inside, the restaurant was strictly makeshift. The tables and benches were crudely constructed and a hand-lettered menu was tacked to one wall. We ordered pork sandwiches, fries and iced tea, and while we waited, I found the bathroom. The old tub was still there, covered by years of accumulated dirt and rust. The walls, the floor, the ceiling--every surface was soiled and chipped. I warned Linda but she used it anyway--not that she had much choice. Linda and I had used public bathrooms all over the state and we had come to appreciate a clean, well kept toilet. This bathroom was one of the two truly filthy ones we'd discovered so far. (The other was at a Woodbury gas station. I had to kick a rusty muffler aside to close the door at that one.)

But it's not fair to judge a restaurant by its bathroom alone. Obviously, the food is more important. And the pork barbecue here was moist and chunky. The fries were regular frozen fries but they were old and soggy. Yet on the basis of their specialty, barbecue, the restaurant was a success. Linda and I only wished we'd never seen the bathroom.

We stopped in Huntingdon to photograph some old houses. A two-story boarding house with rockers on the porch interested me, as did a white brick house with fancy wood decoration across the front. We rested a few minutes on the courthouse lawn and asked a couple of old-timers about places to camp. They suggested a county park six or

seven miles from town. At the end of our first day, I didn't think we could walk that far.

We headed out State Route 22 toward McKenzie late in the day. The heat was oppressive now, and all I wanted to do was find a campsite. At the top of a hill on the outskirts of town, I saw a black man watching us. I asked him if we could camp on his hill. He told us to wait while he checked at the house. When he returned, he was friendly but his answer was no. He suggested we try the next house down the highway.

We did and we received an immediate welcome. Our hosts for the night were Ray and Nell Rich, and they were wonderful. They were the center of a large farm family and before the evening was over we had met several of their children and grandchildren who lived in the area. Nell ("Call me Mama Nell," she said.) grew up in the house next door and had always lived close by. I asked her why. "Our friends are here," she replied.

At dusk, the sky was dark with rain clouds and Ray devised a novel tent site for us. He backed his pickup out of the garage and placed a large piece of paneling on the gravel floor. Over the paneling, he placed a thick section of carpet. We erected the dome over that to protect us from mosquitoes and provide some privacy. I had never imagined we would camp inside a garage, but when the rain came we were dry and comfortable. Greta, however, was an unhappy dog. She wasn't used to her new surroundings and spent a good part of the night whining and howling. More than once that night, I stuck my hand out of the tent and lobbed a piece of gravel at the dog.

Mama Nell had a big breakfast waiting for us in the morning--including gravy. After we ate, we said goodbye and Mama Nell said something that made me think. "I'll never forget you," she declared. I was sure she meant it. I had known all along how much the kindness of people like Mama Nell meant to Linda and me. But Mama Nell's simple statement confirmed that we meant something to others, that our hike and our experiences had added something to the lives of those we met on the hike.

We left Ray and Mama Nell on a full stomach. Our next goal was McKenzie, seven or eight miles north. We were there by noon, hungry again. Everybody we talked to recommended a restaurant called Pruitt's and we walked a half mile out of our way to find it. I overate with a hamburger steak platter and too many fries. (There must be something about walking that stimulates the appetite.)

The center square of McKenzie is a park shaded by large oaks. We rested there before tackling the afternoon walk. While I looked around town, an elderly fellow wearing a Schlitz ballcap started talking to Linda. His name was Fred Parker and he was a sassy character. He played with Greta and flirted with Linda until I returned. Linda introduced me and Fred started telling us about the land he owned, the money he'd made, and the political clout he had in McKenzie. Fred was a particular fan of Gordon Browning, the Huntingdon lawyer who had been a congressman and was twice elected governor. "He gave many a speech on this very square," Fred recalled. "He was a hell of a speaker."

But Fred had even more interest in women. When an attractive

woman walked or drove by, Fred's face would light up: "Wouldn't you like to snuggle up to that every night?" Fred was a widower. He said his marriage lasted 56 years and he spoke reverently about his wife, dead now three years. But a minute later, he was grinning and watching the women again.

We pitched the tent that night on Fred's front yard. Fred came up with a watermelon for supper and we shared it with a neighbor lady Fred invited over. Fred was in fine form now, taking every opportunity to compliment the woman and play up to her. He put on quite a show, but the woman didn't believe a word of it.

We spent the next day walking to Greenfield on State Route 124. We had originally planned to stay on Route 22 to Dresden and on to Union City, but Fred convinced us that 124 to Greenfield was a better route. Greenfield was a good town, Fred told us, and 124 had less traffic than 22, which we knew was too heavily traveled for good walking.

We left Fred's house at 6:30 a.m. and it was still early when we passed an open lot crowded with elaborate and decorative birdhouses. There were five-story apartment birdhouses, steamboat birdhouses, toy train birdhouses, even a series of birdhouses in the shape of a cross. A large sign explained it all: "Purple Martin Village." No one was up at the adjacent house; there weren't many birds in sight either. Nonetheless, the village was impressive because of its size and imaginative construction. Someone had gone to considerable trouble to befriend Purple Martins. (Later we learned that the village was built by a retired mechanic named Reuben Chandler. He's sometimes called the Bird Man of McKenzie.)

Later that morning, we were impressed by an encounter of a different sort. Across a rolling stretch of highway, a lone walker approached us. As the distance closed, we saw that the walker was a woman. She was in her mid-30s and carried a gnarled hiking stick. We waved and she waved back. What followed was a conversation of no more than a minute but it was a revealing meeting. The woman was a recreational walker out for her regular morning walk. We understood. She understood our trip too. She wished us good luck and we wished her good walking. Over all the miles of Tennessee roads, she was the only dedicated walker we had met.

The morning grew hotter and we plodded on through wide fields of soybeans and corn. We rested under a shade tree on the edge of one field. Before long, an elderly woman emerged from the nearest house and walked to her mailbox. She saw us spread out in the shade and offered to help.

"You boys have trouble?" she yelled.

Linda chuckled and explained what we were doing. The woman didn't hear well so she walked over and Linda explained again.

The woman was frail and probably 70 or more. I thought she might be suspicious, but she treated us like family. "I thought you might have had car trouble," she said. "But since you're walking, I'll let you get on your way."

We ate lunch at Pillowville, a tiny crossroads in the middle of more soybeans. Pillowville consisted of two stores and a farm equipment dealer. We found shade and a cool spigot at the nearest store and took a long lunch break.

The sky was clear and the sun scorching by the time we left Pillowville. We walked and rested in cycles, sometimes resting for longer periods than we walked. It was our hottest day yet in an unusually hot summer. We'd already heard the reports from Texas: 110 degrees in Dallas, 112 in San Antonio. It wasn't that hot in Tennessee, but people told us the heat was moving east. I hoped we'd be swimming in the Mississippi by the time it came.

We baked for another hour or two before we holed up in an air conditioned store. A gang of men inside thought we were crazy. They advised us to ride to Reelfoot and forget the walk. After the heat, it was a tempting idea.

We prepared to leave by spraying each other with the hose out front. The gang pretended not to look but they were watching us through the window and laughing. As we dripped dry enough to pick up the packs, a man approached. He was about 60 and was obviously concerned about us. Surveying our condition and the unoccupied car at the gas pumps, he asked, "What are you two doing?"

"Getting cool," I said.

"What about your car? What happens when you get in?"

"That's not our car. We're walking."

He understood then, but only smiled and walked inside. The gang was laughing harder than ever.

We were four miles from Greenfield but the sun was hotter than ever. We looked for shade but there was little to be found. We walked slowly over small hills, hoping we could hold out until we made Greenfield. I stopped in the shade of an old store at the city limits.

Linda was a hundred yards behind, but I could tell from her pace she was hurting. Greta was hurting, too. Unlike Bones, Greta didn't pull on the leash constantly. When she was tired, she lagged behind with her head hung low and her tongue limp. That's how she looked now.

We stayed in the shadow of the building for over an hour, unable to face the heat. I poured some precious canteen water over my feet. Linda mopped her face with a handkerchief. The dog collapsed in the grass, panting heavily.

At 5, we were ready to try again. I hoped the heat was dissipating, but it seemed just as hot as before. But we were in Greenfield now and there was shade and, ahead, the promise of air conditioning. Downtown Greenfield was built along a railroad and the town's line of old storefronts faced west. We explored a few minutes and soon found Allison's, a restaurant where we consumed several quarts of iced tea. Their barbecue was good, too, but their homemade pecan pie was even better. We were so cool and comfortable in the restaurant that we stayed longer than we should have. We needed to find a campsite before dark. When we finally started looking, we had less than an hour of daylight left.

We walked through several subdivisions without any luck. Some lots were too small; we wouldn't have any privacy. There was no one to ask at some of the lots that would have made attractive campsites. In the last light of the day, we walked north of Greenfield and came upon the Greenfield Church of Christ. Wednesday night services were in progress. We rested till the service ended and then asked around the church parking lot until we found a man who owned a lot adjacent to the church property. He didn't mind if we camped.

It was completely dark when we pitched the tent. We stripped, sponged off the sweat quickly to avoid the mosquitoes, and crawled into bed. Even in sleep, we were hot.

CHAPTER XVIII

HEAT AND HOSPITALITY

North of Greenfield we changed direction. We had planned to walk north on U.S. 45E to Sharon and Martin. From there we had planned to turn northwest to Union City and then further west to Reelfoot. But a woman at a little store where we stopped for breakfast questioned our route.

"That's the long way," she said. "You ought to cut west through Kenton. It's shorter."

The map showed that she was right. So we turned off 45E onto a farm road the woman said would take us to Kenton. The change from a busy highway to a country road was immediately obvious. There were few cars and even fewer trucks on the farm road. Every now and then, a massive tractor would lumber past but the farm road was altogether more pleasant walking than the highway. Greta liked it better, too. We let her off the leash and she trotted from one spot of shade to the next. When there was no tree close by, she would burrow down in the honeysuckle and weeds along the fence rows. The shade-to-shade pace seemed to suit her temperament better.

We soon discovered the result of Greta's weed wallowing: ticks. The summer had been hot and dry and the ticks flourished in the roadside underbrush. Greta got them all over her body, but they were particularly attracted to her ears. At first we were surprised and horrified by the nasty pests. But after a while it became routine at every stop to pick the ticks from Greta's ears.

The sun was blazing by 10 a.m. We took two morning rest stops at churches along the way. At both, we drank plenty of water and re-filled our canteens. We had 10 miles more to walk and we knew we'd need all the water we could carry. It was going to be a hot one.

The road ran through large fields of soybeans and corn. Farmers on tractors worked the crops, but these were not the kind of tractors we had seen in East Tennessee. These tractors were larger and the farmers were protected from the heat by air conditioned glass boxes, tinted green. Farming may be hard work, I told Linda, but tractors like these make it a lot less painful.

By noon, the heat had intensified. We didn't have a thermometer but the forecast in the Memphis paper had called for a high in the mid-90s. On the black pavement in the middle of the flat fields, we had no doubt that it was over 100. There was another sign, too: the tar and asphalt on the road was melting. We noticed it only occasionally at first, but as the day wore on the asphalt became increasingly stickily. Soon our waffle-like soles were gummed with a heavy fudge residue and there was a line of waffle sole prints on the road behind us.

We continued walking from farm to farm. The map showed that somewhere ahead we would cross the South Fork of the Obion River. I didn't know whether we would find a swamp or fertile bottom land, but of one thing I was certain: the road would be sizzling.

We traveled around a curve and down a slight hill. Soybean fields spread out around us. There were no houses in sight and no cars on the road. Ahead was a thick stand of trees and underbrush.

In the middle of the trees was a tepid, muddy stream. The roadside around the South Fork was covered with trash. We were alone and burning in the wide swamp.

We moved on and the swamp gave way to more fields stretching on both sides of the road as far as the eye could see. We soon crossed another stream, as straight as an engineer's rule. This was the new South Fork, a man-made channel free from nature's snags and twists. The road was 20 feet above the bottom land and as straight as the channel. The nearest shade was on the western horizon where the land rose from the bottom and someone had built a house. In the blistering heat, we only hoped we could make that house.

It took maybe 20 minutes, but it was the longest 20 minutes of the hike. Because there were few landmarks across the vast fields, it was difficult to sense our progress. Our pace was good but after five minutes, the house seemed no closer. It was hard to keep walking. I felt weak. Linda's face was grim. Both of us were soaked with sweat. Yet there was nothing to do but walk. I carried one of the canteens in my hand and took a swig of the hot water every few minutes. Linda lagged behind, slow but steady. I passed the canteen to her and she drank too. Greta stayed ahead of us but she wasn't running anymore. There was no shade to run to.

I got to the tree first. I was so tired I dropped my pack when I tried to set it down. Greta lay on her stomach, panting. Linda soon entered the shade but she was obviously suffering in the heat. Her face was red. I worried about heat stroke.

A few minutes in the shade helped. When we had the strength,

we walked up the rise to the house and asked an older couple if we could use the water hose. They didn't mind. I sprayed the cold well water over Linda's head and into her face. She sprayed me too and I broke out in goose pimples from the delicious cold. But as soon as the spray stopped, the sun burned again. I held the nozzle a foot from my face and turned the water on full force. I showered for another minute before I was wet enough.

We left the shade of that tree 90 minutes later after a lunch of beef sticks, cheese, peanut butter and carrots. But the cold well water was the best part of the meal and we drank almost a quart apiece.

The long rest revived us but we still had to get to Kenton. If we walked now, we'd face the afternoon heat, heat worse than we had endured so far. If we stayed in the shade until later afternoon and walked then, we might not make it to Kenton before nightfall. I wanted to push on, to get it over with so we could spend a restful night in town. Linda was not enthusiastic, but she agreed to try.

We walked from shade tree to shade tree all afternoon, resting as much as we walked. The heat had slowed Linda and she needed frequent breaks. I stayed close and made sure she drank plenty of water. At one rest stop, she noticed a rash on her calves and thighs. We weren't sure what it was but we were sure it was caused by the sun. Linda called it sun poisoning. The rash was barely visible in the morning but it turned increasingly red every afternoon. By the end of the week, I had it too.

We took another long break only a mile from Kenton. The sun was low but still hot and we had one final task for the day: we had to

cross another shadeless expanse of bottom land. My road map didn't show it but I could see the wide fields ahead. When we felt we were ready, we walked into the sun again. We could see the cool trees of Kenton across the bottom. It seemed very far away but at least we could see it.

Thirty minutes later we were there, but we had paid the price. Linda was red and weary, and I ached all over. Neither of us could go further. We slumped under a tree at the edge of town.

In a minute or so, a blonde boy on a bicycle pedaled by. I called him over. Linda said, "Would you fill our canteen with cold water? We just walked across the bottom and we're dying of thirst."

The boy agreed, took our canteen and disappeared around a corner. In a few minutes he returned on foot, carrying the full canteen in one hand and a glass of ice water in the other. We could have kissed him.

We camped in a churchyard a block away. The boy, Wade Simpson, and a friend of his, Stephen Cross, suggested the campsite. They also suggested the Dairy Bar for supper. We tied Greta in the shade, pitched the tent, and stowed our gear inside. Wade and Stephen led us through Kenton to the restaurant.

Kenton's main street was only half a block long. One edge of the block was U.S. 45W. On the other was the Illinois Central Railroad. The brick storefronts in between were of 1920 and 1930 vintage. Kenton was old-fashioned and we found it very appealing.

We ate burgers and fries at the restaurant and prepared to settle down for the night. But the tent was hot and our skin sticky.

We decided we had to wash before we could sleep, but where could we bathe? We walked back to town and asked around. The owners of a Texaco station across from the Dairy Bar let us use their facilities. We locked the door to the women's bathroom and scrubbed each other clean. I shaved, too. The Texaco bathroom wasn't the best bathhouse imaginable, but it sure beat sleeping in sweat. Before we left, we borrowed the station's mop and left the women's room cleaner than we found it.

We started packing up at daybreak. I was determined not to spend another afternoon roasting on the road. Neither Linda nor I could take much more heat. We planned to make Trimble, the next town west, by noon. We could spend a cool afternoon there and head for Obion in the early evening cool.

We stopped at the store in downtown Kenton for a quick breakfast. I checked the forecast in the Memphis paper: mid-90s again. The store manager said he'd heard of a 113-degree high in Texas. After yesterday's walk, I couldn't even imagine 113 degrees.

We walked well all morning. On the way out of Kenton, we noticed a squirrel running up an oak. It was a natural and ordinary event except that the squirrel appeared to be white. When it was on the ground we thought it was a rabbit. But then it climbed, its long white tail arched behind it. Linda and I mulled it over. The animal climbed like a squirrel. It acted like a squirrel. It even looked like a squirrel--except that it was white. Conclusion: it must be a squirrel, probably an albino. (Later we learned that Kenton is famous for its albino population of squirrels. A local entrepreneur has even printed white squirrel post cards.)

We made it to Mason Hall, a tiny place surrounded by farm land, before the day turned hot. Mason Hall was only four miles from Kenton but we were glad to be in a new town so soon. Agriculture was clearly the main business in town and a local farmer told me the main crops were soybeans, corn and wheat. He said a few farmers still grew cotton but that most didn't because the yields weren't high enough to make the crop pay for itself. West Tennessee used to be cotton country, the man said. He blamed chemicals--insecticides and herbicides--for the lower yields.

We didn't stay in Mason Hall long. The sun was hot now and only getting hotter. I still wanted to make Trimble by noon so we could sit out the worst of the heat. The road to Trimble led through large, rolling farms. The sun was blazing now but we walked a good pace and watched for Trimble. At the top of one hill, we saw a water tower standing in a grove of trees dotted with houses. "Walk to the water tower," I told Linda, "and we'll take the afternoon off." We both walked a little faster.

We were climbing a hill in the middle of a huge corn field when a red Pontiac stopped beside Linda. A woman rolled down the window and offered us a ride. Linda declined. But as the car rolled away, Linda and I agreed that the driver was unusual. We'd been offered plenty of rides on the hike, but this was the first offer we'd had from a woman traveling alone. I figured she was either braver than most women or she simply wanted to help us. Linda said maybe both.

We found out soon enough. We were resting in the shade near an

old farmhouse when the Pontiac returned. The woman stopped, walked over to us and introduced herself as Billie Taylor.

"I got back to town and started thinking about you out in the sun," Billie said. "When you get to Trimble, why don't you stop by the drug store. My husband is the pharmacist. You can cool off there and get something to drink."

We said yes. Billie Taylor was obviously a friend. We also knew now that we had guessed right about this woman: she had both courage and generosity in her heart. But Billie wasn't through. She volunteered to take our packs to town in the car and she told us not to eat lunch.

"We've got a good restaurant in Trimble and we'll treat you to lunch," Billie said. "And by the way," she added, "just call me Mama Bill. Everybody else does."

It was almost noon, but the heat didn't seem so oppressive after Mama Bill's visit. We had a lot to look forward to in Trimble. Without packs, we made good time and we were soon on the edge of town. We entered Trimble on a tree-lined street of old frame houses and well-kept lawns. The shade of the sidewalk made the walking cool. We liked Trimble already.

Like Greenfield, downtown Trimble was one-sided and faced the railroad. But Trimble was an older and more attractive town. We walked past a grocery and a bank to the drug store. We tied Greta to a tree and entered. Inside, we met Edwin Taylor, Billie's husband. He was a quiet, distinguished man with graying hair. Billie, he said, was running an errand and would return soon. In the meantime, he invited

us to rest and offered us soft drinks. We sat down and soaked in the air conditioning. Trimble was almost home.

It got even better. Lunch was barbecue and it was rich and smoky, the best we'd every had. I ate every bite. Billie looked at me, "Your plate is as clean as a cat's bowl." She was right.

At the restaurant we met Bill Headdon, a friend of the Taylors. He was retired and lived alone, and he invited us to stay the night at his house. We said we would, more impressed than ever with the hospitality of Trimble.

We had a busy afternoon. Billie took us back to her house for a rest (after the meal we needed one), and then we made arrangements with Bill Headdon to pick us up later in the afternoon in Obion. We wanted to walk the four miles to Obion today so we could make it to Reelfoot tomorrow. Bill also agreed to shuttle us back to Obion in the morning.

We left for Obion without Greta. She'd been lagging for two days and we thought she needed a nap in the shade more than another walk in the sun. We left her food and plenty of water but she was resting and barely acknowledged us.

A train was parked on the crossing in downtown Trimble. We waited a minute or so but the train didn't move. The caboose was just down the track so we walked over, planning to cross behind it. I crossed first, nearly falling on the loose gravel covering the cross-ties. Linda followed me but lost her footing and stumbled. She picked herself up and stepped off the tracks.

A second or two later, the train lurched back with a roar and

the caboose rolled over the place where Linda had fallen. We looked at each other with wide eyes: she had been lucky. We turned quickly to the road, vowing not to try that again.

Obion was at the end of a hot, straight walk through bottom land and swamp. We didn't care for another hot walk, but we made it as scheduled and Bill picked us up. We were sweating like mules. At Bill's house we washed our clothes, bathed, and enjoyed his air conditioning. The house itself was large and comfortable and Bill was a thoughtful host. He offered us Early Times and 7-Up before dinner and then drove us back to Kenton for a catfish dinner.

After supper, we talked for two hours in Bill's living room. Bill had worked as a county agent so we talked about farming, raising cattle, and erosion control. He walked about his family, too. Bill had been a widower for 12 years. He had a married daughter and two grandchildren in Knoxville. He was proud of his grandsons: "They come visit every summer. They call me Daddy Bill," he said.

We liked Daddy Bill. He had a quick smile and an easy manner. Yet his life recently had been nothing to smile about. Bill told us he had undergone open heart surgery some years ago. While recovering in the hospital, he met a nurse and struck up a relationship with her. The nurse loved to dance so when Bill was well enough, he and the nurse danced and dated for seven years. But the relationship had ended just three weeks ago when the nurse died of a heart attack. Bill was mourning her loss; we could hear the loneliness in his voice. Yet we could see Bill's inner strength, too. As he talked, we saw his

face light up as he remembered the good times. His eyes still gleamed and his laugh was contagious. Maybe he wasn't our grandfather, but we still found it easy and natural to call him Daddy Bill.

CHAPTER XIX

REELFOOT

We were up early, filled with anticipation. This was the day we had walked 61 days for, the day we would walk to Reelfoot Lake. The lake is a geologic oddity. It was formed when a series of earthquakes in 1811-12 dammed the Reelfoot River and caused the land nearby to fall. One quake even caused the Mississippi to flow backward. For years, I had heard about Reelfoot's cypress trees and good fishing. In a few more hours, I told myself, we would see Reelfoot for ourselves. Just another day's walking, just one more day. I found it hard to think about anything else.

We started the day in Obion, just 15 miles from Reelfoot. But as we crossed the flat landscape in the dull morning light, I found it hard to imagine the walk to the lake. Where would we walk today? Whom would we meet? What would the lake be like? I watched the road ahead and the gray, western sky, but no answers came. Reelfoot remained fuzzy and illusive.

Yet it wasn't difficult at all to remember the miles we'd walked and the places we'd been. We played the hike back in our heads like a movie and once again the small towns and friendly faces came alive. In our minds, Mountain City was close. So were Grassy Ridge and Greeneville and Dripping Springs. So were Paul Fink and Ronnie Hart and Mrs. Vincent and Wayne and Sherrie Sinks. Somehow our minds linked all the people and places of the hike so that we now saw Tennessee as a great web of life and land bound together by a common heritage

and shared values. We could follow the web all the way back to the Johnson County airport, a zigzag across the state of nearly 600 miles. But we still couldn't imagine the 15 miles to Reelfoot. I knew just one thing: come hell or high water, we were going to get there today.

Early on Saturday, Obion was quiet. Daddy Bill dropped us off and we thanked him for all he had done. The walk out of town led us past small houses and farms. The land was very flat and damp, but the countryside didn't look very prosperous. We passed more than one crumbling mansion. The old houses were still lived in, but their glory was long past. The bricks were dark with age and the mortar was cracked. The once-white columns were the color of dust and their porches sagged like old beds. From the looks of it, the farmers near Obion had fallen on hard times.

At mid-morning, we entered a place called Glass. The houses there sat low on the land, as if they were sinking. The hog lot we passed as we entered town gave the air an earthy smell. We passed a small church with a soiled door and a tin roof. At a nearby house, the yard was full of old Corvairs and Plymouths and their radiators and engine blocks. Nowhere in Glass was there any sign of prosperity. We walked silently, wondering how the people of this forlorn place managed in life.

On the far edge of town we found Pollock's Grocery, a weathered shoe-box building with three open doorways and no screens. Chickens pecked in the dusty parking lot and someone peered at us from the dark interior. We crossed the lot and propped our packs against the building. We looked to the front door and found no steps to get in.

We entered instead through the side door. It took a few seconds for our eyes to adjust to the dim light.

Only half of Pollock's was stocked with goods. The other half was a makeshift lounge decorated with old furniture, a fan, and three soft drink machines. Four men and two children were resting in the lounge and another man was facing them from behind the counter. Everybody had a soft drink and everybody was looking at us. The room was quiet. It seemed a little early for colas, but we decided to join them.

The men were a lean and worldly group. They were dressed in work jeans or overalls and faded shirts. Their soiled ballcaps bore patches for Ford and John Deere tractors. I worried that we were intruding; they might not appreciate a couple of strangers barging in on their Saturday morning conference. But just the opposite was true. Someone invited us to have a seat and the conversation started again. In a few minutes, we were talking like old friends.

I sat next to a dark, rangy man named Clifford Butler. He was a commercial fisherman on the Mississippi most of the year and a trapper during the winter. He said in a husky voice that he'd tried factory work but preferred to work outdoors. He and two of his sons put out nets and trotlines for catfish and sold their catch at the river or at their house in Glass.

"People come to your house to buy catfish?" I asked. Glass didn't look like much of fish market.

"Sure. They come from all over. I sell them to people from Memphis, St. Louis, lots of places. Why I sold 100 pounds of catfish to a man from California who flew them back on an airplane."

"How do these people find you?"

"Oh, they find me OK. We sell good river catfish and we sell them cheaper than the competition. So the word spreads. We don't worry about that."

The way Butler talked, Mississippi River catfish were an unparalleled delicacy. He said river fish--fish that swim against the current all their lives--are better eating than pond or slack-water catfish. By this time I was convinced. I promised myself I'd come back one day and try one of Butler's Mississippi River catfish.

Trapping season runs for 90 days, Butler said, and he sets traps for raccoon, mink, and bobcat. I mentioned the bobcat Linda had spotted beside the road near Readyville.

Butler said, "Some people go looking for animals to hit. But I don't hit anything if I can help it."

I was surprised to hear a trapper express such sentiments. But Butler understood better than I did that people have to work in harmony with nature in order to profit from it. He mentioned, for example, that the state had intentionally limited the price of bobcat pelts last year so that the cats wouldn't be trapped out of existence. "I'd hate to see them go," Butler concluded. "There ought to be a place for them."

I'd never met a commercial fisherman or a trapper before, so I couldn't say what kind of people they were. But I hoped that many of them shared Clifford Butler's uncommon love for the land and respect for animals.

The day was turning hot, even in the darkness of Pollock's Grocery. A couple of the men left and one of the children, a boy of

three or so, ran across the room swatting at flies with a broken metal chair leg. In fact, one of the main characteristics of Pollock's was the flies. Since the store had no screens, the flies were thick and you had to keep a hand free to wave them out of your face and off the Coke bottles.

Every now and then, a customer stopped in. Mr. Pollock did a thriving business in soft drinks, but he didn't sell or stock much else. There were several rows of dusty cans and other odds and ends, but you'd be hard pressed to buy more than a week's worth of groceries. One of the customers was a middle-aged woman in a plain print dress. Like the men, she was lean and hard. Her voice had a rich, country twang. She stayed only a moment, but the instant I saw her I thought of the 1930s photographs of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. Come to think of it, everybody we'd seen in Glass seemed out of another era. Glass itself looked that way: plain, spare, almost deliberately unadorned. In a land of look-alike shopping malls where every town boasts a McDonald's, Colonel Sanders, and Long John Silver's, Glass was stark and run-down. But after an hour in Pollock's, we had to wonder what was so great about plastic, suburban America. It offered luxury, to be sure. It offered more shopping and more diversions--more ways to spend your money. But did it offer anything close to community? Did it guarantee happiness? Did any of those things in the stores make a real difference in anyone's life? Linda and I had lived that life and we were beginning to see the essential emptiness of it. You could buy comfort but you couldn't buy happiness or peace of mind.

Glass offered no guarantees either. Life here was tough. No

one had money. But Glass offered genuine community which could nurture the spirit. It offered an old-fashioned simplicity and a hard-won existence that might bring both joy and satisfaction. Glass was not prosperous; it wasn't even attractive. But the people who lived in Glass had something they couldn't find anywhere else: they had a home.

But we had to move on. Beyond Glass, we turned north toward Hornbeak. I thought the rest of Tennessee would be flat, but suddenly there were hills again. There was also the full heat of the mid-day sun. Early in the week, we hoped we would get used to the heat after a few days. Instead, we found the power of the sun accumulated over the week so that now, after six straight days of sun, we wanted only to get out of it. Linda still had sun poisoning every afternoon. My skin was tender. Greta's coat showed no sign of damage, but she still lacked vigor. We kept her watered and let her rest as much as possible.

At the top of one hill, I spied a shade tree and headed for it. Linda was close behind. I stood in the shade only a second before a man rushed out of nearby house. He was carrying a chair and he was walking toward me.

"Have a seat," he said.

"That's OK," I replied. "I just want to stand in your shade a minute. To cool off."

"No, no, no! Come on up here and have a seat. Take the pack off and sit down."

The man offered the chair and I couldn't resist. Then he rushed back in to get a chair for Linda. We both sat in the shade of his

front yard--amazed by this man. He returned with his chair and then made another trip inside. This time he emerged with a plastic pitcher of ice water and two glasses. The water tasted wonderful and I couldn't believe the service.

Grady Albritton was the most spontaneously generous person we'd met so far. He had gone for my chair while I was still on the road, had done it without me uttering a single word. After we'd been there a few minutes, he even offered us lunch.

Grady was a farmer. He was over 60, with short gray hair and a no-nonsense manner. We talked about the hike and he told us about Reelfoot. A few minutes later, Grady's wife Evalee returned. She immediately offered to fix lunch but we declined again. Instead we kept drinking ice water and trying to recover from the heat.

Grady and Evalee told us about their lives and revealed much about their marriage. They traded good-natured jabs and kidded each other frequently. Grady was especially quick to pick on Evalee. She wouldn't return the teasing at first, but every so often she'd settle the score with a real zinger. Grady said they'd been married 46 years. Despite the teasing, it was obvious they were still very much in love.

After three pitchers of ice water, we were anxious to move on. It was mid-afternoon now, but we still had Hornbeak ahead. After that, finally, Reelfoot. Grady volunteered to take our packs to Hornbeak in his pickup so all we had to do was endure the heat for three miles. In Hornbeak, we could eat, drink, rest and let the sun fade to cool before we set out again.

The sun was all we could handle but more than Greta could take. A mile from Hornbeak, she started resting every few yards. Her breathing

became labored. I was walking as hard as I could--only a mile to Hornbeak--so I left the dog with Linda and walked ahead. I waited for them under a tree just at the edge of Hornbeak. Finally, I saw Linda walking slowly toward me. But she was pausing every few feet. I walked back to check on her and the dog.

Linda was OK but Greta was obviously suffering. She looked up at us with those sad dog eyes, appealing for help, for shade. We wanted to help but we couldn't stop now. I splashed a little water on her head. Linda kept offering her water to drink but she could drink no more. She just wanted to lie in the shade and rest. Linda agreed to stay with Greta while I continued into town. Ten minutes later, I was there. But I checked the road behind me: no sign of Linda and Greta. Fifteen minutes later, still no sign. I was getting worried now. I hoped they were OK and out of the sun. But I didn't want to rely on sheer hope so I walked back to find them. I got only a block before I saw Linda moving awkwardly toward me. She was holding something close to her chest: Greta!

"She gave up," Linda said. "She tries to walk but she just can't do it. She gets up and lies right back down again."

In the shade at Hornbeak, we rested for over two hours. Greta lay motionless most of the time.

We found Grady and unloaded our packs from his truck. Then we entered Smith's Supermarket and found it gloriously cool. I went out several times to look at Greta and each time I opened the door the heat hit me like a punch. The air was hot and damp--a steambath. Greta never moved except to breath, so I hurried back inside. There we got to the business of eating. It was nearly 3 p.m. and Daddy

Bill's breakfast was long forgotten. At Smith's store, we ate bologna, cheese and crackers. For dessert, cookies and Popsicles. We especially liked the cold of the Popsicles so we had a second round.

Mr. Smith, owner of the store, took to us immediately. He started introducing us to his customers and telling them our story. I visited with his son, Randall, a college student at Martin. But what really fascinated me about Smith's Supermarket were the sheets of butcher paper high on one wall. They were labeled "Smith's Supermarket Records" and Randall explained that he and a few friends started the record keeping. The records were simply a grocery version of the famous Guinness variety. Randall said the Smith's records were locally famous. I could see why:

Boe Jay Fussell drank one 5 oz.
bottle of Worcestershire Sauce in
45 sec. July 26, 76.

Bruce Ashley ate one 14½ oz.
can of whole tomatoes in 6 sec.
June 27, 1975

Biggest Dinner
Bill Everett ate and drank
15 bottles of Orange Juice (7 oz.)
2 qt sweet milk
2 hamburgers
2 honey buns
\$5.00 to anyone who can break this record
or drink over 15 bottles of orange juice
7 oz.

July 6

Lynn Yates broke Billy Stouts
banana eating record. She ate 4 lbs. of
bananas in 4 min. 25 sec.

Dec. 2, 1975

There were more: some odd, some offbeat, some just plain sickening. My stomach turned when I thought of that Worcestershire Sauce.

We finally said goodbye to the Smiths and to Grady. It was

after five and the heat of the day was finally dying. We had six miles left to walk. We strapped on the packs again and I reassured Linda: "Nothing can stop us now. We'll crawl to Reelfoot if we have to."

When I said that I didn't really think we'd have to crawl. And we didn't. But in six miles of walking, anything could happen. I wanted to get to Reelfoot quickly, before "anything" did.

The first problem was the dog. Greta was sitting up now, looking alive again and breathing normally. She'd had two hours to recover and she'd had both water and food during the break. But as soon as we walked into the sun, Greta balked. She sat and refused to budge. I yanked the leash and she jerked forward, only to regain her balance and sit again. I talked to her but she was impassive. Linda tried: still no response. This was ridiculous--six miles to go and the dog was broken.

Greta, of course, didn't know we had only six miles left. I was mad at Greta but madder at the veterinarian who had cleared Greta for the hike. Linda remembered his exact words about Greta's hiking ability, "She'll walk circles around you." But in the 95-plus heat every day, it wasn't working out that way.

Greta was still down so I resorted to violence. I yanked her leash again, harder than before. Greta held her ground. I cussed and yanked again. Still nothing. I gave the leash to Linda and looked for a switch beside the road. I whipped poor Greta. She stood up, walked with us a few steps and crumbled again. If she was that stubborn, I decided, I'd drag her to Reelfoot. So I walked ahead, dragging the dog like an anchor. The dragging didn't faze Greta though; she

was still resisting. Finally a combination of switching, yelling, and more yanks of the leash got her on her feet again. Greta walked behind us, her head hung low.

It was a painful thing. We loved the dog. We didn't want to mistreat her, yet we had to go on. And it was just six miles further. "Greta," we said, "walk just six more miles and you can take tomorrow off." We could walk to Tiptonville and the Mississippi without her. But first we had to walk to Reelfoot.

Two miles later, we headed down the last hill in Tennessee, the slope where the land at last gives into the wide flood plain of the Mississippi. Linda was in front. I was a few yards behind with Greta. Linda and I both noticed a blue Ford stopped in the road 50 yards ahead. Maybe it was having engine trouble. We both watched as it rumbled toward us.

I thought the driver simply wasn't paying attention. I figured he'd just let the car drift over to the edge of the pavement out of negligence. But the car kept coming. I fixed my eyes on the right front tire. It was still on the edge of the pavement. Then it was closer, in the gravel. Then, 15 yards away, it was in the grassy shoulder directly in front of us.

Linda reacted first, jumping left. I jumped too, a second later. The car was less than 10 yards away before the tire pulled back toward the pavement. And then in a rush, the car pulled even and passed us. As it did, I saw three high school boys on the front seat. They were grinning big. The closest one yelled something I couldn't understand.

Our reaction was shock followed by anger. How could this happen?

Why? But I was unable to think any further. I was too angry, too hurt. After all we'd been through, I was mad that the boys would tease us like that--they could have killed us! I wanted to get to Reelfoot worse than ever, but now I had a new goal: revenge. What if the boys made a second pass? Linda and I filled our pockets with rocks and I gripped the hiking stick as a club. We even pulled out our unused slingshot. I kept a close watch on the cars behind us. The adrenalin flowed and we walked down the hollow in a hurry, nervous with every car that passed. We would make it to Reelfoot or take three boys in a blue Ford to hell with us.

The Ford never came back. All we did was carry a lot of stones down the hill and tear up our feet because we walked so hard.

At the bottom of the hill, we entered the wide Mississippi plain. It was planted in soybeans. We walked around a curve to a long, straight stretch of road. In the fading western light, I saw a line of trees on the horizon. Even at that distance, I could make out the distinct shape of cypress trees. That was Reelfoot.

We would be there in a half hour. We would camp by the lake. Tomorrow we would walk to the river. Tomorrow we would complete our 600-mile hike from the mountains to the Mississippi.

CHAPTER XX

THE RIVER

The Mississippi swept away in a wide curve to the west. Missouri, on the opposite bank, looked very flat and very far away. The river was as brown as I had expected, but flowed much faster than I thought it would. I put my hand in the water. It was very cold.

We couldn't stay long beside the river because of the heat. The bank was built up with large stones, a part of the channel improvement. The stones faced west and had baked all afternoon in the sun. I touched one and jerked my hand away, surprised by the heat.

We took a long look at the river, trying to fix the scene in our minds. In the hot western light, it was difficult to do. The river was vast and quick. Yet it made no noise: it simply flowed on and on around the wide bend beneath our feet. Beyond this bend, there was another and another, a continuous curve of water and river bank all the way to the Gulf. The Mississippi might rise or fall, might flood or change its course, but its flow to the sea never changed.

We had started with water and ended with water. I didn't realize it until later but our hike across the land was shaped and defined by water. We had begun a year before with a flight over the blue-green Watauga, a river that rises in North Carolina and cuts through the Blue Ridge west to the Holston and down the valley to the Tennessee. And finally we stood in the northwestern corner of the state, facing the continent's major river, the river that drained all the water from all the land we had crossed, from the French Broad to the Little Tennessee,

from Laurel Fork to the Sequatchie, from the Stones to the South Harpeth. The Mississippi carried them all. No wonder rivers marked borders and gave their names to states. Rivers were the land's renewing force, blood for the earth's tired body.

On the hot bank of the Mississippi, I saw only part of this. But I knew even then that the trip was complete. We had done what we set out to do. We had come full circle, too. From the mountains of the east to the waters of the west, we had followed the sun over the good, green earth of Tennessee.

It was, all in all, the best of times. We had discovered Tennessee for ourselves, our own way. We had learned firsthand that our Tennessee neighbors were generous and kind and we knew that we owed them more than we could ever repay.

We savored our success and our good fortune on the hot stones of the river bank for a moment longer. Then we turned away: toward town, toward the east, toward our old lives. But there was a new world of hope and possibility ahead. We knew now our lives had changed. We had memories for a lifetime and we had something more: a land to love and the people in it.

The hike was over.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

REPRESENTATIVE ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. On the second day out, my feet were hurting.



Figure 2. An optimistic smile during the early days of the hike.



Figure 3. Linda, Rob Killifer, Steve Collins and me on the Appalachian Trail near Hampton.

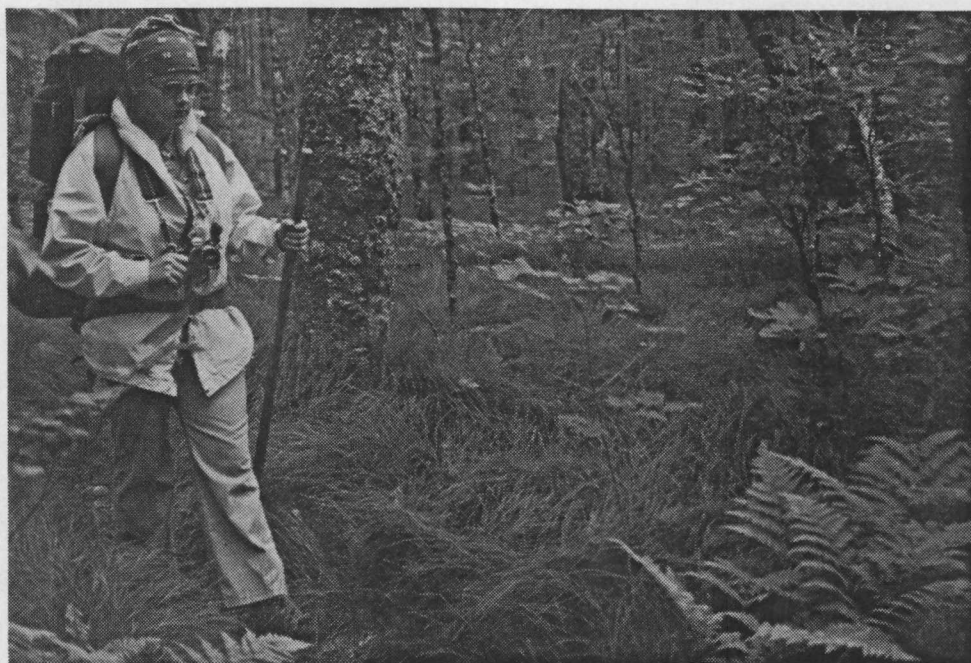


Figure 4. Walking through lush grasses and ferns on Roan Mountain.



Figure 5. The spring behind Mrs. Ellen Vincent's house in Dandridge.



Figure 6. Storekeeper Joe Greenway at his business near Greenback.



Figure 7. Linda, Greg and Bones take a break at a store near Athens.



Figure 8. A stretch of highway near Decatur.



Figure 9. Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Jones at their home near Dayton.

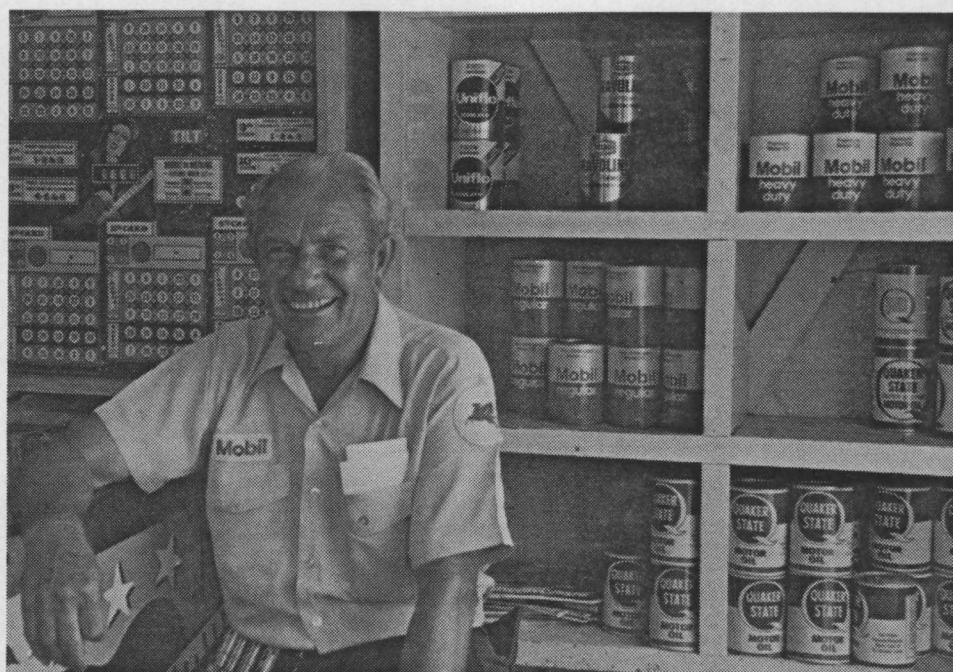


Figure 10. Aaron White, owner of a gas station near McMinnville where we sat out an afternoon shower.



Figure 11. Shadow and hot asphalt, the way it was most of the hike.



Figure 12. Resting in Tiptonville, just a few miles from the end of the hike.

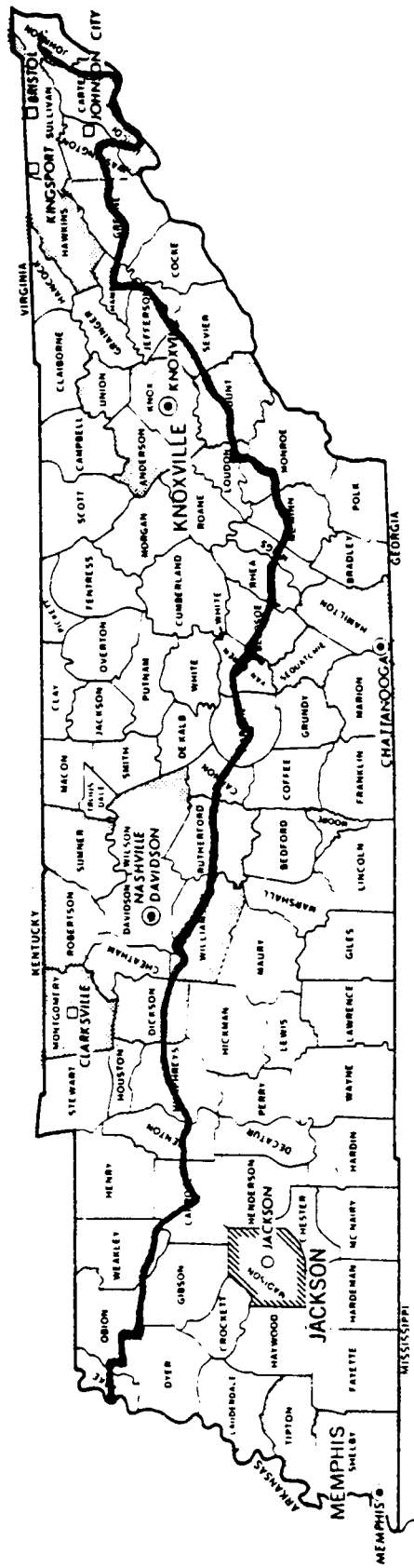


Figure 13. Route of the hike across Tennessee.

APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Purpose of Design

The design and specifications proposed for Hiking Tennessee describe a book which will: (1) appeal to a popular audience, (2) enhance the rural and outdoor themes of the text, (3) provide an adequate number of black and white and color photographs of the trip and (4) remain economical to publish.

Format

The format proposed for Hiking Tennessee is 6 x 9 inches. This is a standard book size and works well for this project because it is large enough for effective photographic layouts and small enough for efficient production and a modest cover price.

Body Type

Eleven point Baskerville is the proposed body type. Baskerville is an attractive and legible typeface which suggests simplicity and beauty. Eleven point type, leaded one point (11 on 12) and set 26 picas wide, is large enough for easy reading but small enough to fit the format efficiently. Captions will be set in 11 point Baskerville italic.

Display Type

The Baskerville face will be maintained for the display type. This will ensure typographic unity and carry through the simplicity

suggested by the typeface. For variety on the title page and chapter title pages, semi-bold and italic Baskerville will be used. Thirty-six point type will be used on the title page. Chapter headings will be set in 24 point Baskerville semi-bold.

Page Design

Pages for Hiking Tennessee will have a margin of 4½ picas on the inside, 5 picas at the top, 5½ picas on the outside and 7 picas on the bottom. Indentions will be one em (11 points). The type area is 42 picas deep, 26 picas wide. Smaller margins will be used on the photo pages and some color and black and white photos will bleed off the top, bottom and outside margins.

Copyfitting

The typed Hiking Tennessee manuscript is 195 pages. Estimated character count for the manuscript is 319,000. Eleven point Baskerville, leaded one point and set to the specifications above, will produce a book of 123 text pages. The dummy (in pocket) includes four 32-page signatures (128 pages) which allows room for the type, title page, chapter headings, and miscellaneous uses. Thirty-two pages of black and white photography (indicated in the dummy with blue edges) and eight pages of color photography (indicated with red edges) complete the 168-page dummy. The first 10 pages of the dummy are sample pages which illustrate the proposed type and page specifications.

VITA

John M. Coward was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on December 16, 1950. He attended elementary schools in Tupelo, Mississippi, and graduated from Science Hill High School in Johnson City, Tennessee, in 1968. He entered East Tennessee State University that September and was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism in 1972. He was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve in September 1972 and served three years on active duty aboard the aircraft carrier Forrestal and on shore duty.

He entered the Graduate School at The University of Tennessee in September 1975 and left after three quarters to work as a reporter for the Sevier County News-Record and Gatlinburg Press. After six months at the newspaper, he was promoted to editor and he served in that position until June 1979. He returned to graduate studies in September 1979 and received the Master of Science degree with a major in Journalism in December 1981. He is a member of Sigma Delta Chi, the Society of Professional Journalists.

He is married to the former Linda Kay Rimstidt of Johnson City, Tennessee.