

TONI MARTINAZZI

- 1) Why did you sign up for the hike? How old were you?

I had lost my home and children and felt abandoned. I had no one to take care of and no one wanted me. I did not like lifestyle choices I had been making and wanted a new start. I wanted to get away from a very painful past. I was 45 a few days after the hike started.

- 2) What is your favorite experience from the hike?

Realizing I was free

- 3) Did you have a moment of enlightenment or “ah-ha moment” on the hike and if so, what was it?

One day, I was lying in the grass looking at the sky so ethereal. I realized that although I had no keys, no car, no home, no insurance, no job, no responsibilities and yet I was euphoric!

- 4) What was your favorite state and why?

Colorado. My daughter Rhonda, my son Mike and my Dad and step-mom all came to see me. My dad and I went to see land beside the Rio Grande River that his grandfather had bought around 1884.

- 5) What was your least favorite part of the hike?

Feeling left out and not happy with myself.

- 6) How did the hike change you?

I became aware that I had a right to be on this earth and that I was ok as a person. Because of my hike experiences I have no fear of snakes and a lot of other things.

- 7) What do you tell people about your achievement now?

That I used to be 6 feet tall but wore myself down to 4 feet 11. I just do not think most folks would understand so I don't talk about it much. Well, that is until around reunion times!

- 8) What would you have changed about the hike?

Nothing.

- 9) Did you pursue other hiking/backpacking afterwards? Long journeys or short weekends?

Yes, I worked on several volunteer vacations. I went backpacking in New Zealand but I became a runner instead.

- 10) What did you learn about yourself that you are willing to share?

I learned that I am very strong both mentally and physically. I know that I can sleep outside and may be wet, cold, and miserable but I will live.

- 11) Did it make you a stronger person?

It absolutely made me a stronger person.

12) Are you proud of your accomplishment?
I am very proud!

13) What was the dumbest thing you did on the hike?
I left the group when they had their Christmas party so that I could spend that holiday in Chicago and am sorry every time I see pictures of their fun without me!

14) What was your most vivid memory from the hike?
All of our tents lined up alongside a narrow space beside a highway. Way off ahead you could see a grain elevator.

15) What was your funniest moment on the hike?
It was often difficult to find a private place to answer the call of nature. One late afternoon there was only low sagebrush around so I walked and walked and walked until I found a spot quite far away from our campsite. As I was taking care of business one of the other hikers said quietly, "Isn't this a beautiful sky?" I had no idea there was anyone else around!

16) What was your most embarrassing moment on the hike?
In Nevada we stopped at a place that had a building over a hot spring. I went inside, disrobed and washed not only my body but also all of the clothes I was wearing. However, my panties got away and the current took them right out a small opening where not only could people see them but I had to later go claim them.

17) What was your nickname on the hike?
Ma

18) Any other thoughts or stories you'd like to share?
I have made some lifetime friends.