

STACEY WARING

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

I was finishing my graduate degree and found the article in Newsweek as the group left San Francisco. I decided this was The Time to go. I had missed out on a 6 month biking trip around Europe and needed to have my "wild year." I wasn't seeking anything weird or overly spiritual, I just wanted to see the country and loved hiking and thought it would be a great experience (it was). I had just turned 25 (God, could I have been that young once?!). I recall meeting John Mills for the first time and being awed because he was the guy that the Newsweek article had covered! How funny...

2. What is your favorite experience from the hike?

Wow, there are so many. But one memory stays with me...in Oklahoma, I caught a ride with someone to camp (not sure why, I wasn't short cutting, maybe I had gone to a store?)...anyway, this nice woman throws my pack in her trunk, drives me to camp and then takes off. I had no idea who she was, she had just been nice. About 30 minutes later, I realized that my camera had fallen off the pack into her trunk. I was so bereft, I was in tears, I loved taking photos and had no money to buy another nice camera. I cannot tell you how depressed I was. Well, about an hour later, she drove up and looked for me--with the camera. She said that she usually didn't go into her trunk but for some reason she did after she dropped me off. She drove about 25 miles to get the camera back to me. I will never, ever forget that. It reinforced to me that there were so many beautiful people in this country and that I was going to get to meet many more along the way. And of course, we did...

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

Yes. I was hiking in Oklahoma a very long day getting into Waggoner for the Big Feast. It had been a really hard day and I was all alone most of the day, not something I usually enjoyed as much as hiking with others. At one point, I dropped my back and just started to sob. I was so pathetic. In a while, after no one came along to soothe me, I sat there and realized that it was all up to me--the hike, my life, everything. Not in a bad way, but in a strengthening way. I guess the other ah-ha moment was leaving Damascus with Cindy in a foot of snow. Again, I realized that it was me and nature (and Cindy) and that I had to do it. There were no other ways to get home. By then, I had developed a lot more strength and confidence.

4. What was your favorite state and why?

Keeping in mind that I joined in eastern Colorado, it was (1) Kansas and (2) Va. In Kansas, the weather was beautiful, everything was new to me, the people were so friendly and I just loved getting to know everyone on the hike so much--what an interesting group of people. In Va., spring on the AT was so beautiful

and it was a fairly easy trek at that point (except that snow)! I really loved the AT a lot.

5. What was your least favorite part of the hike?
Maybe Missouri. It was heading into winter, I got sick for 4 days and had to ride with Monty, and it was cold. I remember at the Mississippi River, just thinking I wanted to go home. There just didn't seem to be much beauty in Mo, but of course the season was a huge impact. I recall camping in 13 degrees, I have a photo of that! Ugh.
6. How did the hike change you?
Funny, I was telling someone this the other day. I think the biggest lasting change from this experience was to discover my resilience and persistence--and stop whining. I had always been a bit goal oriented, but this was huge. There have been so many times since the hike when something has to be done, and I just do it. I don't ask for help, I don't complain, I don't worry or whine. I know that I have to do it and so I do, even if it's hard--it's all up to me. I realized that I was emotionally strong in doing this hike--walking 18 miles in pouring rain in KY, or hiking when I was sick. I had never pushed those limits before. Those lessons have stayed with me 35 years later. I am not at all the same person I was before the hike, even many moons afterwards.
7. What do you tell people about your achievement now?
I don't brag about it, but I am proud of the achievement and am happy to share it when it comes up. Sometimes they ask questions but mostly folks just seem amazed by it and move on, and that's fine with me too. I haven't had many opportunities in a long time to present anything about the hike to groups. But I tend to be a person who lives in the present, so I just have fond memories and mostly have those for myself. I have one photo on my desk of the my hugging Tim Ernst at the ending in DC, published in a California paper (my 2 seconds of fame). That is always a nice reminder.
8. What would you have changed about the hike?
Not much. It was amazingly well organized, Monty made the trip possible in so many ways, the people were so diverse and interesting and if you got tired of someone, you could just move on and hike with others. There was one person who bothered me on occasion, but that was ok, I just let it go mostly. As I sit here thinking, I cannot come up with anything significant I would have changed! I had never thought about that question before but it seems easy to answer now. It was an incredible, wonderful experience--not perfect but as close to perfect as it might have been able to be.
9. Did you pursue other hiking/backpacking afterwards? Long journeys or short weekends?

I stayed with backpacking a bit--a few of us did Whitetop Mountain, I hiked some in NH, and Va. But as I aged, I lost my backpacking "spirit" due to so many other demands--a job and a family mostly, travel soccer, schoolwork, etc. I wish now that I had gotten my kids into backpacking more. We did a couple of great hikes into the Grand Canyon and up to a Vermont hut. But mostly over the past decade it's been day hikes. When I retire in a year or so, I hope to get back in good shape and maybe work on finishing the AT someday.

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

See above on how the hike changed me...

11. Did it make you a stronger person?

Absolutely!!

12. Are you proud of your accomplishment?

More than I can say. When it gets cold in the winter, I remember camping when it was nearly zero and wonder how on earth I did it. I am pretty sure that I could not do this kind of hike again, at age 60. Which makes me really, really admire Marcie and John! But yes, I am very proud of it and have never had a moment when I tell someone that they are not really amazed at that achievement too! And that always makes me proud.

13. What was the dumbest thing you did on the hike?

Being desperate to watch the episode when JR was shot on "Dallas" and going to great lengths to see it. I have no idea why now. I recall asking Linda and Tim to let me watch it on their little TV and they did, but I think they thought I was a nut. And I was. And I never watched that show again, that's what is so funny!!

The other dumb thing I did was to accept being on the steering committee after only two weeks on the hike. I think that really riled some folks and understandably so, I realized later. I did not have any history or knowledge but here I was, trying to help manage the hikers. I have sometimes wondered if that caused others to judge me negatively. I should have declined politely but I guess I was sort of wrapped up in the notion that I was liked! High school 101...

14. What was your most vivid memory from the hike?

There simply are too many to single out one. I've mentioned several in this response, all of them were wonderful. Hiking in nice weather, hiking in snow, enjoying talking with different folks, challenging myself. I didn't have the ecstasy of hiking in Utah or on the Divide, but I really went on the hike more to meet people, not see scenery as much since I had lived 5 years in Colorado already. And I met SO many great people who were SO kind to us! So that was wonderful. Eating lots of food but not gaining weight was awesome! The Pizza Hut lunch where we cleaned up! My first night in Kansas, lying in a corn field surrounded by new friends and being so happy. And of course, a very wonderful

memory was hiking thru Lewes and ending at the ocean. That was incredible-- but it was only one of many. So, so many wonderful images that are still captured in my mind's eye years later...

15. What was your funniest moment on the hike?

I recall one night in Kansas, or possibly Oklahoma. It was a warm, beautiful fall night, the moon was out, and some of us were hiking late into the evening. Joe Shute, Phillippe and I started punning. We just went at it for a couple of hours while we hiked and we were laughing SOOOOO hard. I had lots of fun moments, but that one probably rises to the top, in part because of the laughter but also because it was such a beautiful night too...those guys were so funny! I could not keep up for long but I tried...

16. What was your most embarrassing moment on the hike?

I was the pathfinder on the last day in Kentucky. It ended up being an 18 mile road hike in pouring rain ending at an armory. I had scouted the route with Monty the night before and saw a small store about halfway to the end. So I told everyone that they could stop there and get warm, get food, etc. But then everyone found out that the store had been closed for a while. So the whole group had to hike 18 straight miles without any stop or relief, in pouring rain. I felt awful, though I don't really recall anyone trashing me too much fortunately. The second worst thing I did was a few hours later. A guy stopped and let a few of us warm up in his truck--but then we had to get out and finish hiking in the rain! What stupidity. I almost got hypothermia, truly. That was one very difficult day and my worst pathfinding experience!

17. What was your nickname on the hike?

I frankly do not recall any!! Maybe I had an AT name but I don't know what it was...I'll have to look it up in my journal!! Oh, aging...

18. Any other thoughts or stories you'd like to share?

Hikination was an amazing experience for so many people--the "thru hikers," the "partial thru hikers" like me and those who joined for a day or a week. It was a reflection of how our country comes together, with all of its craziness, beauty and everything in between. Who would have guessed we'd walk the USA with a baby in a push cart, a 14 year old freckled kid and a 69 year old dude who probably weighed 90 pounds? In that light, the ability of people to meld into the hike and walk across the country as a group really reflected to me all that is good about our country--how we have so many various cultural groups who have been bound in this unique American experience and who flourish because of our differences, not in spite of them. I am so honored to have been a part of it.