

The Good Hike: A Story of the Appalachian Trail, Vietnam, PTSD, and Love

Tim Keenan

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The Good Hike: A Story of the Appalachian Trail, Vietnam, PTSD, and Love by Tim Keenan is an engaging memoir about a physical and mental journey to healing.

After a treacherous tour of duty in Vietnam as a young man, Keenan spent his next decades desperately hiding from what he'd experienced, and struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder that often controlled his life. Then, at the age of sixty-two, he decided to hike the entirety of the Appalachian Trail as a way to conquer his fear of the forest, and to seek mental healing. He shares his literal and figurative journey to health in a voice that is irreverent, heartfelt, and open.

Keenan's relatable personality and good-natured spirit are at the heart of the book. The opening scene of the loss of his childhood innocence—killing a sparrow with a BB gun—captures his character and foreshadows the devastating effects military service would have on his mental health. Throughout his journey, it's his warmth and vulnerability that draw the audience in.

Along with his own story, the author shares tales of people who influenced him along the way, in Vietnam and on the Appalachian Trail. His book shows that individuals must choose to face their fears and heal, but that no one can do it alone.

The book has a journal-like style, detailing Keenan's thoughts and experiences in a conversational manner. This approach keeps his voice and perspective central to the book, with occasional informal syntax and punctuation.

The narrative is organized state by state along the Appalachian Trail. Keenan's recollections of Vietnam are intermingled not chronologically but along the way, as he processes each experience. This approach puts the emphasis on the results of each event, rather than on crafting a cohesive story of his wartime experiences.

Headings and indented type for flashbacks make the narrative easy to follow. At times the adventure gets bogged down in trail descriptions and accounts of day-to-day events.

Other Vietnam veterans will be most able to relate to Keenan's experiences, and those familiar with PTSD will be inspired by his determination to overcome the damage that the war did to his mind. But his story will also inspire others who have faced different kinds of persistent pain.

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MELISSA WUSKE (October 3, 2017)

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