



Walking Home: Via the Appalachian Trail

Michael Herrick

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Vivid imagery of the Appalachian terrain and wildlife allows the timid to live vicariously through this adventurous hiker.

A middle-aged man embarks on a journey into the soul along the winding Appalachian Trail in this revealing look at unfulfilled expectations and pronounced disillusionment. Michael Herrick's *Walking Home* is a quest for lost youth and an inner battle to regain the zest that somehow got displaced on the way to mediocrity—what many like to call the “good life” in America.

Domestic contentment cannot erase the need for personal freedom or the drive to achieve in this candid story. Walt, the protagonist, follows a much younger man's footsteps as he traverses the difficult trail, sometimes at high altitudes, while enduring uncomfortable temperatures, determined to get his body back in shape. Alternating between scenes extracted from a twenty-year-old journal and Walt's viewpoint, the plot juxtaposes Strider's cavalier procedures with a mature man's challenges as he tests his body as well as his mind. While hiking these endless miles, he contemplates what turned bad within his family. Though nothing is overtly wrong with Walt, he clearly believes that something is amiss. Attributes such as stamina, passion, and purpose seem to taunt him from the depths of his disgruntled spirit.

Teeming with potentially dangerous wildlife and colorful characters that make spot appearances along the way, Herrick's novel is realistic, gritty, and often funny. For those who would not have the courage to step onto the Appalachian Trail—a raw, desolate environment that stretches more than two thousand miles, devoid of commercial development and modern conveniences outside of rudimentary shelters for hikers—the detailed narrative is a learning experience. Introspective and descriptive scenes are rich and evocative. Every word is used for maximum impact, selected with care; there's a specific intent behind what may at first look like a casual delivery:

His head ached. He was hungry. His feet hurt. His legs were on fire from the stinging nettles and briar scratches. He was afraid to put his hand down between his legs for fear of what Anne might have left there. A mouse scurried around looking for food. One of the couple was snoring. The hard slanting boards of the shelter were as miserable as they got. His bag felt clammy. And he had to pee.

Immediately, the rustic atmosphere and physical sensations are not only seen but also felt, allowing the timid to live vicariously through this adventurous hiker.

Much more informative than a travel guide, well researched, and a pleasure to read, *Walking Home* may instruct better than a reference book. Walt's distinctive personality and snarky sense of humor make him a standout protagonist.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (May 26, 2015)

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