

# A Walk Up the Hill

By Jim Blasdel

I'm so happy. I woke up this morning still alive. Last night I wasn't so sure. I even wrote out a will before I dropped off the sleep. I left it all to anyone who wanted whatever I have, or in case I didn't wake up tomorrow.. I had.

"Ah, come on," she said. "it'll be fun for the whole family."

"*Yeah, if I live through it.*" I thought. "*It'll be fun for you...*" I added to my previous thought. "*...if you're into funerals for dead husbands.*"

"Just the five of us. We'll take a picnic lunch, we'll see places we've never seen before, the kids will love it and we can feel good about what we did for them. After all, it's only a couple of mile up hill, to the falls. And it's paved all the way. What's the matter old man, getting feeble, are you?"

"Yep! I am. So hiking up to Laurel Falls is out of the question. How's about a movie instead? The Sound of Music is back. They'll love it, too.

The first few steps told me I was in trouble. Actually, the fact that I had lost the battle of the "Hike For Better Health," had already given a strong indication that I was in trouble. She came up with a more compelling argument than did I. "We've already got everything we need for a picnic lunch," she said. All we need to buy is a twelve pack of cheap drinks and we'll bottle some water to take along. It's gonna be fun."

Notice the positive assumptive statement just made. She said *IT'S*, as in *it is*, not *IT WILL BE*, as in *if you agree*. That's when I knew the fight was over. I lost. Wives are really good at that sort of things. That was enough, however, she continued to pour it on...

"And besides, we don't have the money to take the family to the movies. There are.. let's see..."

She knows how many there are of us. But she just had to keep on selling her plan.

"There's you and me... that's two, then there's the boys, that's Lawton and Nathaniel, that makes four, then there's Jaymi, that's five of us, and there's..."

She paused just long enough for me to jump in to the argument which I was losing in grand style. "No there's not any more *let's see*. That's it. Five. That's all we are."

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“Ok then,” she continued, “take the price of a theater ticket, add popcorn and a drink, you can’t go to a movie unless you have a giant bag of hot buttered popcorn and a drink, maybe some candy. That comes to about...”

The human calculator continued to whirl and buzz while crunching the numbers. But I had already beat her to it. At least fifty bucks was my bottom line.

She continued, “I see at least fifty four dollars and fifty seven cents, tax included.”

OK, mine was a ball park figure. I forgot the tax. “OK,” I said. You win, we’ll go for a hike up the hill. I can handle it. After all, I’m a man.” The thought of a twelve pack of cheap drinks and ten bucks of unleaded versus nearly a hundred dollars was a powerful argument for better health. Maybe it will rain.

The ordeal began shortly after lunch. My last meal consisted of a ham and cheese on whole wheat. Health food, wouldn’t you say? A half bag of Chips Ahoy, some Pringles and a soda with a generic name. After the first few miles, (or so it seemed,) up the hill, We came to a post in the ground with the number one on it. Probably one of those cross markers like you see along the road side to indicate someone died there. Yeah, that had to be it, Some other father had paid the ultimate price to see his family have a healthy day. Poor soul.

The next post had a number two on it. This is more dangerous than I feared. I’d better inform the rest of the family. Too far ahead. Oh drats! I picked up the pace. Finally I saw them off in the distance, frolicking, skipping along their merry way, singing a song about the hills being alive with the sound of music. I’ll shout to them, I thought. I tried. No shout came from my mouth when I tried. Just a wheezing cough. Lawton has great ears. He heard me, stopped, turned around, saw me bending over from the waist and came back to me. Good son.

“Dad, what’s wrong?”

Wheeze-cough-wheeze-, “Son,” that’s about all that came out.

“Is something wrong, father dear?” He’s a good boy, I thought while wheezing. I’ll tell him of the danger, then he’ll tell the others and we can go home. I’ll live through this day yet. So I told him. “Look at the post. What do you see printed on it? See that number? It’s a two. Do you know what that means, my child?”

“Yes sir. It means we’ve gone two tenths of a mile since we started walking up the path. That’s about one thousand four hundred feet so far. About the same distance we walk from the car into the Wal Mart store and back. Why do you ask?”

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Oh drats, I thought again. A living calculator just like his mom. Maybe it will still rain.

At mile marker four I saw a miraculous sight. I topped a rise in the trail and there before me the trail dropped down and out of sight to the right. "Thank you Lord. I made the summit and I'm still alive. But where's the waterfall? I don't hear the water." About this time I saw a man coming towards me. At first it was just an apparition, like a ghost from the mist. Only there wasn't any mist. As he came closer, I recognized the face. Well, I recognized the look on his face. He's been there and was on his way back down. He was dead and just didn't know he wasn't suppose to still be walking. His skin was pale, his hair was pale, his eyes were also pale. As he came closer, I saw that he probably wasn't dead. Just out of shape Like someone else I know. His lips were moving as he passed me up. It was a whisper but I caught it. He said, "Seen any good movies lately?"

Remember the part about the trail disappearing around a curve to the right? It didn't. It just took a new direction. As I turned the curve, my heart sank even lower than my appreciation for hiking and waterfalls. The trail began to rise before me, disappearing into a stand of towering pine trees. I put my mind on auto-pilot, hoping this whole thing would be over before the old gray matter realized that my wife and kids were trying to suicide me. "I can do this," I thought. "I'm still a virile, active man," I thought again. "If she can do it, I can do it," I continued to self think. "Shut up and walk," was my last sane thought.

At mile post nine, that's four thousand seven hundred and fifty two (4752) feet from my car, I heard a rush of air, coming up behind me on my right. A cheery voice said, "A bright good day to you sir. Isn't nature glorious?" The voice was coming from a tee shirt with a man inside. The man looked like the Charles Atlas add I remembered from the comic books as a kid. The shirt had a picture of an explosion on the front and the words, "Body By Jake" plastered on the back, which was the part I saw the longest as this fellow zipped his way up the hill in a blaze of super human determination. He was gone in sixty seconds, to quote a great movie I'd seen a while back and wished I was seeing again... right now. "Show off!"

I was saved a few feet later. A bench had been built into the rocks and a stream was babbling past the bench. "Rest and water. Oh boy, I'll live." The family allowed me two minutes to recoup. I told them to go on ahead, I'd look at the pictures they'd take at the falls, after I got home. I've seen waterfalls before. A bunch of rocks, a lot of water and a cacophony of sound. Big deal. But no deal. "Come on dad, it's not far now. And remember, every thing you walk up now, you can walk down on the way back."

Now, there's a promising prospect. Hadn't thought of that. I now had renewed energy. The final few feet of the trek went like a breeze, like a whirlwind, like a snap, like a walk up a hill, like a ...uh-uh... Like that last one I

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said. The falls were beautiful, lots of rocks, water and noise. A few pictures and time to skip merrily down the hill. Down hill all the way home.

At the ten mile marker I encouraged another faltering father failing his way up the hill. "It's nothing. From here on its all up hill." Perhaps I should have lied to him. He sat down on the asphalt walk way and begin to cry. His family left without him.

Oh, the walk down hill was good. Gravity just became my best friend. I was skipping along like a young man of fifty. I'm actually over sixty, but you don't need to know about that. Down, down, down.... Then.. Uh-Oh!

At mile post five I saw a most disturbing site again. Mile marker four, up ahead. And I really mean up. Everything that had been up, going up the hill had become down, on the way down the hill. And every thing that been down, going up the hill was now up, coming down the hill. Mile marker four was up.. way up the hill. Oh Lord, more upping to walk. My wife pulled me to the top, laughing all the way. Teasing me, chastising me for my long time dereliction to a healthy life style. As if she's so perfect. I saw her sweating. While pulling me and carrying the back pack with the water bottles.

By the time I once again sat beside the fourth mile marker, the wheezing had returned, along with a serious sounding cough. I did both till I was wheezed and coughed out. She offered me water. I drank some, spilled more on my shirt. It was cool on my skin and that finally gave me the strength to complete the ordeal. So I did.

When we finally reached the car at the bottom of the hill, the children greeted us with, "Oh loving mother and faithful father, let us now trek ourselves up another hill, more high than this one. Oh please.. can we?" Or something that sounded just as ridiculous.

"Another hill? Are you nuts? Absolutely not. Never again you demented juvenile delinquents."

So, I woke up this morning, still alive and breathing. Today I have a full day planned. Somewhere between my morning nap, my afternoon nap, my nap before dinner and my early to bed time, I'm gonna rest as much as I can, because the next day, I'm gonna tear up that will I made last night and give it all, assuming there's anything left after this bunch gets through with me, to the Salvation Army or Goodwill or some rescue mission who really knows how to treat a fellow, growing older in style and dignity.

Then I'm going to see The Sound of Music... Alone!