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THE CROOMS CONQUER THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

It's a sunny, warm February day in Catonsville, and I've spent the past two afternoons on the Appalachian Trail with neighbor Ann Croom. We hiked the entire 2198.4 miles. I mean, she did. I was with her vicariously—each day took me less than a minute to read and enjoy the beautiful views via her cell phone camera. My legs and feet and back did not take a beating.

Ann and Robert Croom of Osborne Avenue set out to hike the AT on April 14, 2023. Fortunately/unfortunately, Robert's knee gave out after 3 days on the trail. Being the wonderful partner that he is, he became trail name Supply Chain, and drove 18,000 miles with their Labrador Retriever, Scout (trail name, Smiley) in support of Ann (trail name, PokeMom) and friend Stephen Meyer (trail name Mr. Blue).

Ann's account of the hike, written at the end of each day on her cell phone, is a straightforward telling of the joys and challenges of life on the trail, with mileage, hours hiked, weather, climbing grade, and a symbolic song for the day. I tell you, it is compelling reading, even though I know how it ends. You can read it all yourself by googling "trail journals pokemom."

Though Ann sheltered with Stephen for about 80% of the hike, she essentially hiked alone. That's what you do on a thru-hike—every ounce of energy goes to moving forward towards your goal. You are not chatting, or keeping track of your partner. Ann averaged about 2 mph, except in New Hampshire, where it was more like 1 mph. Stephen was a bit faster, so they would meet up at a pre-arranged shelter or campsite.



Images from Pokemom, Mr. Blue, Supply Chain Smiley's Trail Journal <https://www.trailjournals.com/journal/entry/668931>

Some things I learned from talking with Ann and Robert, and reading Ann's journal:

1. "Trail Magic" is real. It is finding gallons of fresh water left by the trail, or being handed a Snickers bar by someone out for a day of handing out Snickers bars to thru-hikers. Or coming to a road crossing to find Supply Chain and Smiley, their SUV filled with donuts and Cokes, given freely to hungry hikers (which is all the thru-hikers who have probably eaten a couple of power bars and nothing else that day).
2. Most thru-hikers begin in Georgia in February or March, and finish in Maine mid to late-summer. Of those who finish (25% of those who start out) many are young and fast—hiking every daylight hour and then some and covering 30 or more miles per day.
3. The Crooms and Stephen did it the way the AT "officials" recommend. It's called "flip-flopping." You can start anywhere but they started in Harper's Ferry, WV, where the AT headquarters is, and headed north, so as to reach Maine while the days were still relatively long. Ann and Stephen got there August 17. They then were transported (after a West Coast wedding) back to Harper's Ferry and headed south, taking advantage of cooler weather in the South and somewhat easier trail conditions on shorter days. Ann finished the hike at Springer Mountain on Oct. 10.
4. The AT through Maryland, about 40 miles, is the "easiest" section of the trail.
5. A third of the trail takes place in Virginia.

6. Technology is very helpful on the trail. An app called “Far Out” gives incredibly detailed information about the trail ahead—how far to the next shelter, what the water supply is like, animals encountered, trail conditions. Obviously you could do the hike without it, but it beats paper maps. Though Robert has an amazing collection of those too—they helped him find the crossroads where he could meet the hikers to do his Supply Chaining.

7. It rains a lot, you get used to it. You go through about 4 pairs of boots or trail runners. You can eat all you want and still lose weight. Days off are huge—Ann took one about every 7-10 days. You think you’ve packed light, and then a few days in you start discarding things you realize you don’t need. Vitamin I - ibuprofen - is one thing worth its weight in the pack.

I’m going to close with Ann’s own words about the hike, and I encourage you to look for her trail journal online for an absorbing read about this amazing accomplishment.

A.T. Hike - Epilogue

It’s been 2.5 days since finishing my thru hike. I felt mixed emotions at the end. I was sad to see this journey end, but at the same time the joy was waning and my body was starting to get weary. I knew it was time to go home and re-connect with the real world. Before it becomes a blur, I wanted to try to capture the lessons and takeaways from this adventure.

I have learned how other folks view an Appalachian Trail thru hike by the questions they ask me. Ironically, it is almost always the same 3 questions:

- 1) The whole thing?
- 2) Will you be by yourself? Are you/were you scared?
- 3) Are you carrying a gun / bear spray?

At this point the answer to #1 is obvious. :)

#2 is interesting. I consider myself an introvert and I know I enjoy my own company. Still, this is many, many hours alone. In general, the solitude inside the grandness of nature energized me. And gratefully, I met people to talk to every day. I was never more than 4 or 5 days from seeing Robert & Scout, and that



was always something to look forward to. And for much of the journey, I had Mr. Blue / Stephen to compare notes with at the end of the day.

I never really felt scared about being alone. A time or two I had to remind myself to be careful here as it would be a while before anyone found me if I got hurt. And there may have been one or two shelters, far off of the beaten path, where I had to keep the classic horror film narrative from filtering into my brain. I kept telling myself that if you wanted to murder someone, there are many places where you don’t have to climb 4,000 feet to do it. But no, I was never really scared. And, I assume most folks ask me that question as a woman. I don’t think I ever heard men being asked if they were scared.

I can honestly say that every thru hiker I met on trail was extremely supportive of women as equals in this challenge and would have given the shirt off their backs if a fellow hiker needed it (in fact 2 women in Vermont DID give Mr. Blue their gloves when he said his hands were freezing). I think that’s just the type of people that are attracted to an endeavor such as this. Of course, that also meant there was a lot of what men do when men are together (cuss, fart, burp, talk about sports & women, etc.). Occasionally

they would look up, notice I was there, and needlessly say “excuse me.” :) I loved it all.

The third question made me laugh. While I respect the right of folks to carry firearms, I was actively trying to figure out ways to reduce my pack weight by 8 ounces. So no, I did not consider carrying a gun. I wouldn’t have carried one even if it was weightless. The handful of people I met who did carry a gun were all section hikers, and I honestly felt less safe around them. I was more concerned that I would get up in the middle of the night to pee and they would mistake me for an attacker or a bear. I was more afraid of that than an actual attacker. And bear spray for black bears just didn’t seem necessary (Grizzlies are another story), although I would agree that it was a reasonable precaution. I met 5 bears and I am grateful for having had the chance to see them in their habitat.

I’ve tried to think about what were my favorite parts of this journey, and/or why did I love it? How can I explain the appeal to those who would never consider such an experience? I’m not sure I can. But here’s how I came to describe it: A combination of a sabbatical and a boot camp. I am finishing with my body dramatically stronger and my soul lighter.

A true adventure where I had no real idea what each day would bring. That doesn't happen very often in the real world. Yes, I had maps and apps and intelligence, but each day was truly a surprise, with only a vague notion ahead of time as to what it would be like.

There was freedom. Freedom to and freedom from:

- Freedom to enjoy the company of strangers from all walks of life and all around the world.
- Freedom to revel in fresh air and mountain springs, and occasionally complete silence or darkness.
- Freedom to feel the true unfettered force of nature firsthand.
- Freedom to rise at dawn and close my eyes at sunset, and enjoy the absolute downtime from dusk to dawn without guilt.
- Freedom to re-discover my strength. Although I am still hiker hobbling at this moment, I feel great overall. Yes, of course, I've lost half my toenails, and my heels are tender and blue. But I assume those ailments will fade in time. I feel strong, invincible and 25 years old (yes, I know I don't look 25, but without mirrors.....).
- Freedom to take the time and energy to do something big.
- Freedom from the everyday minutia that, heretofore, I had not realized had dominated my life. Like the freedom from a multitude of daily decisions (wardrobe, food, bedtime, what will I do today, etc.). The fact that there are no mirrors on the trail, and no one cares what you look like anyway is a blessing in, and of, itself.
- Freedom from the daily news (I can check in once every couple of weeks and not miss anything).
- Freedom from unnecessary, time-consuming habits. (Do I really need to shower every day?).

Note: freedom seems like an odd word for an activity where I literally followed in the exact footsteps of thousands of people, and yet that's the feeling I came back to time and time again.

I know me. Over time I will minimize the difficulties and the challenges of an Appalachian Trail thru hike. But I'm pretty proud of what I've accomplished. It wasn't easy and there were times I wanted to cry for fatigue or pain. I can't say I ever seriously considered quitting, but in those times of exhaustion I may have questioned my sanity in deciding to do this.

In short, I am forever changed. This was indeed the rewiring event that I was looking for. Thank you to all those with me and those I met along the way that made it not only possible but the rewarding adventure of a lifetime. ■

by Ann Quinn

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, April 13, 8:00 a.m. - Noon

OCNA Yard Sale

See details on page 5

Tuesday, April 16, 5:30 - 8:00 p.m.)

Networking Reception and Town Hall Meeting

Bwtech@UMBC

1450 S. Rolling Road

Halethorpe

Saturday, April 20, 8:00 a.m. - Noon

OCNA Clean Up Day

See details on page 5

Sunday, April 21, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Catonsville Concerts at 3: Charlie Zahm and Friends

Catonsville Presbyterian Church Sanctuary

April 27, 7:00 - 9:30 p.m.

Neighbor Ride Basket Bingo

FOP Lodge 69

2832 Nine Mile Circle

Catonsville

April 29, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Meet Mystery Writer Amanda Flower

Arbutus Library, Age Group: Adult

Saturday, May 18, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

3rd Annual Maryland Psychiatric Research Center Art & Creativity Exhibition & Auction

Rice Auditorium, Spring Grove Hospital Campus

55 Wade Ave

Catonsville

May 5th, 9:00 a.m. - Noon

Artist Vendors at the Sunday Farmers Market.

Sundays through November 24

May 18, 2024, 7:00 -10:00 p.m.

Walt Michael & Co.

The Catonsville Clubhouse, 10 St Timothys Ln, Catonsville,

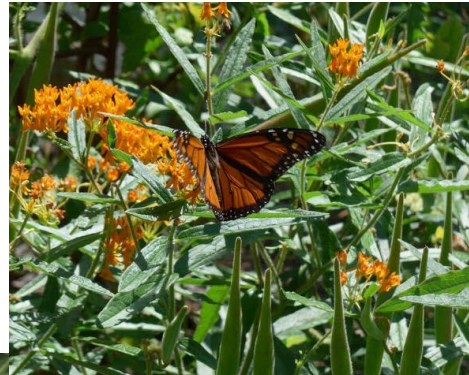
Saturday, May 25th, 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Baltimore Herb Festival

Leakin Park

CALS Train rides hours are 11:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

TRANSFORMING MY ECOSYSTEM

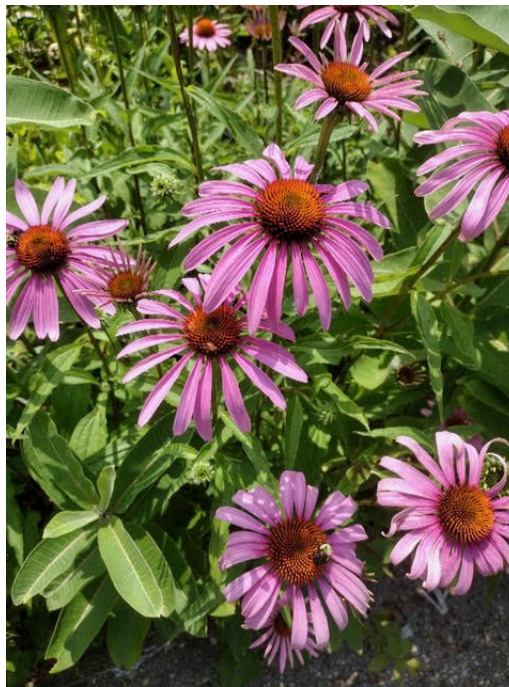


In my yard I have many invasives that I am working to remove, English Ivy, Periwinkle, Privet hedge, Lesser Celandine, Liriope, Zoysia grass, etc. In place of the Privet hedge I am currently working on making a mixed

native shrub lawn edge bed. In the spring you can look for Beauty Berry, Buttonbush, Elderberry, Spice Bush, Carolina Allspice, Summer Sweet, and Winterberry intermixed with the existing hedge. As the new plants grow the old hedge will be trimmed back and removed.

After reading Doug Tallamy's book, *Natures Best Hope*, my view of what is beautiful and how I should maintain my property changed completely. This was reinforced by visits to the beautiful Mt Cuba Center in Delaware. It has been a year and a half since my awakening. Maybe you do not see my progress, but I can no longer plant new non-natives just for their beauty and am working to remove all invasive plants. I now think of the fauna in my yard as belonging to my ecosystem and deserving of my assistance.

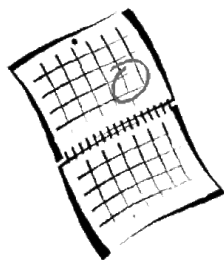
Tallamy's book tells the story of how our decision to consider the aristocratic European garden as the only definition of beautiful as a problem helping to push out our native plants and animals. None of the plantings in Europe were native to North America, as Europeans had not come to North America until after the lawn landscape was established by the aristocracy. What I did not know is how the bottom of our local food chain is dependent on native insects. How many/most insects only reproduce on specific plants that they were co-evolved/created with. It is well known now that the Monarch Butterfly needs the milkweed family of plants to reproduce. Less known is that it needs the Aster and Goldenrod family to provide energy for their long yearly migration. All of these plants were considered weeds when my mother was a child. The caterpillars were all considered pests, even though the butterflies they became were revered.



I am expanding the perennial flower beds while reducing turf grass. I have added various varieties of milkweed, asters, goldenrod, mountain mint, Boneset, Ironweed, Sweet Joe Pye Weed, Orange Coneflower, Ohio Spiderwort, Purple Prairie Clover, White Turtlehead, Pennsylvania Sedge, Blue Sedge, Cardinal Flower, Wild Petunia, Mistflower, Lance-leaf Coreopsis, Golden Alexanders, Smooth Penstemon (Foxglove Beardtongue), Snakeroot, Wild Bergamot, Golden Ragwort, Cream False Indigo, coral honeysuckle, Blazing star, Blue Star, Green and Gold, Evening Primrose, Wood Poppy, Cup Plant, and Cardinal Flower. New plants were purchased locally at Lauren's Native Plant Nursery and Herring Run Nursery. Plants have been given to me from divisions by friends and neighbors. Some were mail ordered from Prairie Moon Nursery. I am hoping the small plants I have now will grow and need to be divided and shared in other neighborhood yards.

Stop by for a chat or garden tour when you see me out in the beds. ■

by Julia Alexander
19 N Beaumon



SAVE THE DATES!

OCNA COMMUNITY YARD SALE

Saturday, April 13
(Rain Date: Sunday, April 14)
8am - 12 Noon

If you plan to participate in the yard sale, please email Kim at fftiger18@yahoo.com and we'll create a list to add to the promotions we do about the sale.

NEW THIS YEAR:

Do you have items that you will probably bring to the Trash to Treasure area on Clean Up Day? Put them out on your curb labeled as "FREE" on Yard Sale Day (April 13). If they are not collected on Yard Sale Day bring them to the Trash to Treasure area on Clean Up Day.

(We had an overwhelming amount of "treasures" that ended up in the trash last year; let's try this in an effort to re-home more items!)

OCNA CLEAN UP DAY

Saturday, April 20
Rain or Shine
8am - 12 Noon

See full page flyer for more details.

To ensure the success of this event we need lots of volunteers. Kids are welcome to volunteer with their parents. Sign up for one or more shifts here:


<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70A094EABA723A7FA7-47228713-clean>

by Kim Marshall



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NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMER (& BEYOND) HELPERS

Note, the online issue doesn't show contact information for Summer Helpers

Contact the OCNA Newsletter or OCNA list for info

Gigi

Hi! My name is Gigi Mikel. I'm years old and CPR certified. I would love to babysit your kids! I'm also available to pet sit, and/or water your plants while you're away this summer.

=====

Delaney Available for pet setting and babysitting.

Email or text

=====

Nathan

Available for babysitting and petsitting. Can be reached at

Circe

Lots of babysitting experience.

Tristan

Mowing lawns and yard work.

Owen

Mowing lawns and yard work.

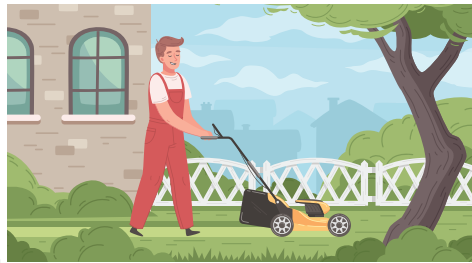


Image by macrovector on Freepik



Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik



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(Reach out to parents **Gina & Colin** if interested)

Will

Interested in lawn service and pet sitting

Cate

Interested in babysitting and pet sitting

Contact parents Lindsey or Chris

=====

Lily

Pet sitting / bring in mail / water plants

Text: Natalie

=====

Rachel

Available for babysitting and pet sitting. Experienced with infants through middle school. Can provide references.

BALTIMORE COUNTY RAIN BARREL & COMPOST BIN SALE

Residents will be able to order products only online at this website <https://baltimore.enviroworld.us/> through April 12. The following prices include tax:

Compost bins—\$55 each
Rain barrels—\$65 each

Please bring receipt of purchase with you when picking up your order. All orders must be picked up on Saturday, April 20 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at:

Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)-
Essex Campus
7201 Rossville Boulevard, Lot 7
Baltimore Maryland 21237 ■

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<http://www.weinkam.com>

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 to get into the next issue (usually flexible):

Next Issue ads due September 15

Spring/Summer issue:

March 15

Fall/Winter issue:

September 15

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Contact Allison Dietz, allisonnoz@hotmail.com
 for more information.



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- Review this issue to see the types of ads that we run for local businesses.
- Choose ad size.
- Supply artwork in black and white. Please supply high resolution artwork for your ad. If you need help creating your ad contact us. Ads have to be reviewed before they're approved.
- You must have permission to use any images in your ads.
- Proofread your ad for errors.
- Payment accepted via check or Paypal. Ad must be paid in full before it can run.
- You can start advertising at any time of the year. Updated artwork can be provided for current ads by the next issue deadline.

Contact Allison Dietz,
allisonnoz@hotmail.com for information.

Deadlines to submit newsletter articles and ads to get into the next issue (usually flexible):

Spring/Summer issue - March 15
Fall/Winter issue- September 15

Archived copies of the OCNA Newsletter are now available on <https://www.oldcatonsville.org/connect>

Do you want free advertising? Volunteer to write for the newsletter regularly and live in Old Catonsville, get a free 1/8 page ad in each issue.

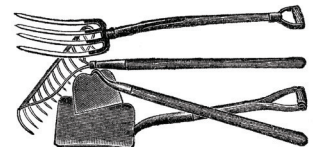
1/8 page ad size:
3.75" wide x 2.375" high
\$75 / year

1/4 page ad size:
3.75" wide x 4.75" high
\$100 / year

1/3 page ad
(not shown)
\$200 / year
7.5" wide x 3.25" high



SAVE THE DATES
OCNA Yard Sale: April 13
 (Rain Date: Sunday, April 14)
OCNA Spring Cleanup: April 20
 (Rain or Shine)



More info on flyer