

A WALK ACROSS AMERICA
By Don Vermilyea



Ordinary People

While walking around I've begun to know many ordinary people of different colors, ages, nationalities and ethics over the past twenty-one months. For arguments sake let's say ordinary people are human beings who don't particularly stand out either positively or negatively from a distance.

Since I've become homeless ordinary isn't a description that would fit me too well. In my opinion, as I walk around most Americans would see me as a sorry lot, and anything but ordinary.

This is about three ordinary white couples from the good old U.S.A. Their paths crossed mine during our journeys through life.

Josh and Karma are in their 30's and were proceeding by car in the same southerly direction as I was walking on a U.S. highway in Colorado. They asked if I needed a ride. Because I'm walking across America I let them know I couldn't accept their offer and thanked them for their kindness.

They really wanted to help out and offered a pizza "No Charge" at their families eating establishment about 1½ hours away by car. I wrote their names and business address down and thanked them a second time.

A six to seven day climb from under 4,700-foot elevation to 11,000 plus had just begun. This would be 110 miles on the pavement and was intimidating for me due to the early April days. It can still dump copious amounts of snow at 11,000 feet even during June in the Rocky Mountains. The highest I'd walked was 7500 ft. on the walk and I remembered while hiking at 11,000 feet in California 3 years earlier I'd gotten headaches at that elevation, so I was concerned.

Five days later as I neared Ouray, Colorado, Josh's Mom, Mary, was driving by and stopped to remind me of the pizza. An hour later I entered the Portal Pub and Pizzeria located at 835 W. Main Street. I was greeted by several people, given a menu, and told to order whatever I wanted. It didn't take long to figure out a large pizza was just right. I can eat one of those when I'm hungry, which I was. This pizza was huge! I could only eat half and doggie bagged the rest.

The next day I was loaded with good energy partially due to the pizza from the night before and the love I was shown by Josh, Karma, and others at the pizza place. The good energy continued when I finished the other half of the pizza while climbing towards 11,018 feet. Twenty-three miles were

walked that day when I expected it to take 2 days to go from 7,700 feet to 11,000 feet and back down to 9,400 feet! The snow was five feet deep at that high altitude and it was gorgeous.

Praise God for Josh and Karma. I'm not into advertisements, but stop in cause the pizza is excellent. Tell them Don "The walk across America guy" sent you.

Heather and Kevin are in their 20's. They were on the road moving from Idaho to New Mexico when their truck broke down way out in the boonies on a U. S. highway in Utah.

Very few of us know the feeling of being stranded for a day and a half. They were in a caravan of two trucks and a car when their truck axle broke. While the other truck and driver continued to New Mexico for another rear end from a junk truck, Kevin and Heather waited with the car, the disabled truck, and a horse trailer with their possessions inside.

I walked along the road towards their situation, which was 20 yards off the highway in the desolate Utah desert. A major storm had been forecast for over a week. It was right on schedule, and its 20-30 mph winds had been blowing for days. Rain and then snow weren't far off from the looks of the clouds. I'd been pushing as hard as I could to get to civilization and shelter before the storm arrived and knew I might not make it in time.

Kevin exited their car and approached me saying, "Hey, we're stuck here and have more food than we can eat. You're welcome to join us!" I would have accepted his offer, but the storm was closing in fast and I had to keep moving.

Dust and sand were blowing everywhere as the winds increased to 30-40 mph. Very few times

have I put the rain cover on my pack and my rain suit on before the rain started. Usually I'm getting wet first, because the rain may not last long. It was difficult covering my pack and I highly recommend you don't try to "take a leak" when the winds are over 40 mph. because it won't end up where it's supposed to. Been there, done that—trust me.

I just got my rain gear on, the winds were over 50 mph, and out of the dust clouds comes this car down the road. At first I thought it was the Lone Ranger and Tonto, but it was Kevin and Heather. It didn't take them long to convince me to get in their car, return to their encampment, and spend the night.

As we arrived at their temporary home with howling 60 mph winds and the first rains, I found out the sleeping arrangements were them sleeping in the car and myself in their broken down truck. That's where I spent the night, with the wind shaking the truck all over and torrential rains that never did turn into snow.

The storm let up a while and a man drove up in the dark, just about out of gas. It was Kevin to the rescue again. He got his gas can from the broken down truck with 3 gallons of gas in it and put it in the man's gas tank.

Heather, Kevin and I talked about their situation being broken down for 1 ½ days and the only person who made contact with them to see if they were OK was a Utah State Trooper. And then there were the two of us who needed their help. No one else dared to stop in all that time.

The third couple didn't share their names with me, Like me, they were in their 50's and unlike me they were "clean cut". You know the kind of folks us white folks would feel comfortable living next door to.

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