

One Nation Under God - Walk Across America

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Downingtown, Pennsylvania, my hometown, lies in the outskirts of the elongated strip of land that lies between Boston and Washington D.C. called the Northeast Corridor. Life in this area can be fast paced, hectic and tumultuous. In the Northeast Corridor, the definition of a split-second is the time that it takes the driver behind you to beep his horn after the traffic light turns green. During this time, if one would glance into his rearview mirror, he may also see some hand gestures accompanying the beeping of the horn. As noise from traffic, trains, factories, radios fill the cities and towns of this area, we try to filter out this clamor by closing our windows in our homes and cars and turning on our stereos and televisions, only to add to this noise.

During the week, from time we wake to the time we sleep is a very regimented routine. Quickly we shower, dress, eat breakfast (perhaps) and jump into our cars to race to work. For eight tension filled hours, we strive to meet deadlines or quotas. Then we leap back into our cars, only to be trapped in a traffic jam with more beeping horns and hand gestures. By this time, we also may be doing some hand gesturing. After finally arriving home, we eat a microwave dinner and scurry back into our cars to take our kids to soccer practice or even to church for bible study.

Do we rest on Saturday? No! We do laundry, mow the yard, clean the house, change the oil in our cars and watch our kids play soccer.

Now Sundays, that is a day of rest or it should be! After staying up late on Saturday night to watch a movie on TV (resting?), we are late for Sunday school or worship. Then we rush out of church (no fellowship), eat, then go shopping at the mall or watch the big game on TV. The next day the cycle starts over again.

During vacation, many people in the Downingtown area drive to the Jersey shore, only to get caught in a traffic jam. At the shore we walk the boardwalk along with thousands of other people. One year, my family and I drove to Disney World. After two days of driving and hearing, "Are we there yet," we arrived in Orlando. I wanted to see as much as possible. My family worn out as we dashed from one attraction to another with me leading the way. After five days, we headed back to Pennsylvania and two more days of hearing, "Are we there yet." Where is our time of resting in the Lord and where is our quiet time with our Lord?

Our Lord has been dealing with me about taking time to relax within this ministry. During the days from October 8th to October 10th, the One Nation Under God – Walk Across America slowed down and actually returned to a town that we walked through last March. Until this May, most of our nation never heard of the town of Fort Ashby, which is located along Patterson Creek; then journalists from around the world arrived in this friendly town looking for a hateful community that bred one of the abusive soldiers of the Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal. Last May, the citizens of Fort Ashby began to distrust strangers in their town, particularly the news media. How would they respond to me, a stranger in their town asking more questions? What happened during my three days with the people of Fort Ashby amazed me.

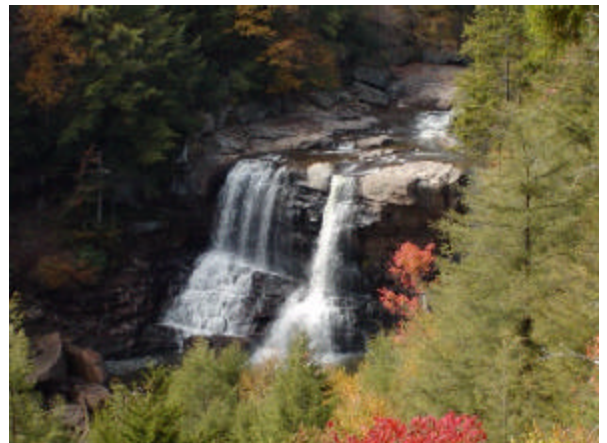
My first intention was to prayer-walk alone around Fort Ashby on Friday, walk five miles in Blackwater Falls State Park on Saturday, sleep at Red Creek Campground and attend church in Davis, West Virginia on Sunday before returning home. Apparently our Lord had a different plan. Arriving in Fort Ashby at noon, I parked my car at the IGA market and began a walk along the streets of the town. In the proceeding two-hours, I passed the primary school, several trailer parks, many attractive homes and two apartment complexes. After walking by the one traffic light in town three times, an ice cream billboard attracted me to the Flour Cupboard, a bakery and café, on Washington Street. While ordering two dips of chocolate-chip ice cream, I asked the waitress if she knew anything about the history of the town. After saying that she just relocated from Michigan, she led me to a table, which were seated a husband and wife. “This gentleman will tell you anything you wish to know,” she explained. Five minutes later, I knew about the founding of the fort, an Indian massacre, and how the name of the town changed from Frankfort, to Alaska, then to Fort Ashby. The lady enlightened me to the fact that everyone knows everybody else in small town. “In Fort Ashby, most people don’t even lock their doors,” she declared. She also added about the accused soldier, “She just made some bad decisions.”

After visiting a bookstore, the library, and the Family Dollar store, I drove to Steve and Jeanne Herrell’s home in Rawlings, Maryland, where I was invited to stay the night. Steve took me out to dinner near the town of LaVale, Maryland. While eating, Steve introduced me to gentleman from Calvary Assembly of God in Fort Ashby. Soon there was another person praying for America.

The next morning, Steve and I headed for breakfast buffet at Blackwater Falls State Park, situated on the south rim of the Blackwater Gorge. The lodge provided a panoramic view of the densely forested canyon arrayed in autumn colors. After a hardy meal, it was time for walking. As we drove along Canaan Loop Road, Steve in his truck and me in my Kia Rio, the road changed from macadam to a four-wheel drive mountain road. After driving through a stream and up a steep grade, I pulled my car off the road one mile short of our destination. Steve drove us back two miles to a parking area along the macadam section of road. As we walked back to my car, Steve asked how was I going to get my car back to the main road without damaging my car. His truck lost its tail pipe extension and the trailer hitch came apart. My answer was, “God will make a way where there is no way. I drove my car in and I’ll drive my car out.”

God did make a way. We slowly drove my car back to Steve’s truck. Steve had to return to his home, since he was hosting a fishing rodeo at his pond for a group of people from, of all places, Fort Ashby Calvary Assembly of God. Steve also invited me to fish, take part in a cookout over a campfire and to stay the night. Of course, I said yes.

I walked two more miles alone before visiting the incomparable Blackwater Falls. At one o’clock in the afternoon, it was now time to relax. The view of the falls tumbling sixty feet is spellbinding. “Thank you, God, for allowing me to view this creation, that only you could have created.”



I spent the next two hours touring Canaan Valley and the quaint town of Davis, before returning to the Herrell's residence, an hour's drive away. The fishing rodeo was an event for the Royal Rangers and their parents of the Calvary Assembly of God. Royal Rangers is an organization similar to Boy Scouts with an emphasis on Christianity. The senior commander was Jim Harris, a burly man with a full black wavy hair and a full beard, making him look like a biblical apostle. This gentle giant was patently teaching boys how to fish. Each boy eventually caught a fish. Afterwards hot dogs and marshmallows were cooked over an open campfire. The evening ended with Jim presenting awards for the largest fish. To my surprise since I did not fish, the last award, a compass, was handed to me because of the walk across America. The people of Fort Ashby were honoring me, a person, whom they did not know before that evening. Jim also honored me, when he asked me to close the event with prayer.



The next morning, I attended service at Calvary Assembly of God. After Jim Harris announced to the Adult Sunday School Class, who I was and what I was doing, Paula Hansen, who was training for her first marathon volunteered to walk and pray one mile of the American Discovery Trail in Fort Ashby.

On way home, I discovered cash, an anonymous donation, was placed secretly under my praise CDs on my front passenger seat. This was combined with a check given to me by a member of the church. The community of Fort Ashby also taught me a biblical lesson. No one ever spoke harshly to me about the accused soldier and everyone spoke fondly of her family.

Romans 13:9-10

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love works no ill to his neighbor.

Romans 14:13

Let us not therefore judge one another anymore, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

All towns in America can learn from the citizens of Fort Ashby. They love the stranger in their midst and they also love their neighbor with an unconditional love that never fails.

To see two sideshows of the walk on the Internet, go to photos.yahoo.com/jims19372

God bless,
Jim Shaner
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Total miles walked of the American Discovery Trail	- 420 miles
Number of walkers	- 43 walkers
Number of people praying for America	- 21,926 prayer warriors

There is a lady from Fort Ashby named Karen, who needs prayer. She is a wife, a loving mother of two fine boys and a faithful servant to our Lord. Jesus, she is reaching for a touch from You. May You do more than just touch her. May You hold her in Your tender arms. Restore her, O'Lord. Amen.