

One Nation Under God - Walk Across America

Vol. 3 No. 5

May 2004

We have a professional artist, Dane Tilghman, in our congregation in Downingtown, PA. Many of his paintings are of baseball players running, hitting and fielding. Like most artists, he paints scenes that are pleasant to the eyes. He would never paint a ballplayer committing an error, but there are artists, who are the exceptions to the rule in that their paintings are not beautiful nor were they meant to be. *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, *Hell* by Jerome Bosch and *Guernica, the Beastiality of War* by Pablo Picasso are such examples.

Again many photographers take shots of things that are pleasant to the eyes, but the news-photographer is different. His photos tell a story that may not be pleasant to see. He would like to have published his photo of a ballplayer committing an error, if it was crucial to the outcome of that game. That is reality, good and bad. In the news during the last several weeks there were photos that are appalling, but they tell the story, a world without Christ's love.

When I first started the long journey along the American Discovery Trail, I prayed, "Lord, let me see what you see. Let me hear what you hear." With some notable exceptions, I have been focusing on the good and not the bad with my photos and writing. Like a photographer who can focus on a wild flower along a road while behind him a barn is on fire, I have not been telling the whole story. If all Americans were obedient to the Lord, there would be no need for me to walk and pray across our nation. This newsletter is a change to a truer picture.

In Maryland, the American Discovery Trail is separated by the Chesapeake Bay. There are 4.3 miles of water between Kent Island and Sandy Point. On May 2nd after a two-year hiatus, the annual Bay Bridge Walk returned, allowing me to connect the two sections of the trail. It was raining that Sunday morning as I drove along I95 towards Annapolis. Choosing to stop at the Maryland House, a rest area, I waited 45 minutes to hear if the bridge walk would be canceled. It was not. At the same time, a lady living near the Pax River Naval Station was sipping coffee for thirty minutes before she left her home to travel to Annapolis. We would meet two hours later on Kent Island. I already asked four people to pray for America before a bus drove us from the Naval Academy football stadium across the northern span of the bridge to Kent Island. As I waited to pass through security, I turned to Dottie Taylor, who was on my right, and asked her to pray while she walked the bridge. Not only did she walk and pray, we walked together, prayed together, and laughed with each other. Even though we just met, we were like brother and sister, which we are through the blood of Jesus Christ. We hugged each other when we were finished. I do not have a photo of us together but if I did, one would immediately see that we are not brother and sister even though we are about the same age. Dottie is black and I am white. In America times are changing for the better in the area of racism between whites and blacks. During the 1950's in Georgia, two men-one white, one black- were jailed for the crime of socializing together. There is still racism in America, now more with the people from the middle-eastern countries. One day this will too past.

There was one photo I took on the bridge that reminded me of scripture. On the down span of the bridge (the last half mile) one could see hundreds of people walking towards the western end of the bridge. *“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”* Matthew 7:13-14

Of all those people, men, women, and children, how many will take the narrow gate? Lord, how many? What can I do to help those lost people find their way? Lord, give me the boldness to witness for You as You would do it. Amen.



Most Christians wish to have what is called a “mountain top experience.” Most of the time it is during a Christian concert, when an evangelist preaches, etc. On May 9th I planned to have a real mountain top experience as we would reach one of the highest points in West Virginia. What happened as I looked to the east from Bear Rocks at Dolly Sods, was not what I expected.

The war in Iraq has touched many people in America. West Virginia is no exception. On May 8th we stopped in Keyser for gas. As I went to pay for the gas, I saw the headlines on a local newspaper, *Family steps forward in support of soldier – Spc. ***** charged with assaulting Iraqi detainees.* The article was written by the news editor that was to interview me but we never met except by phone. The soldier lived in a town that we already walked and prayed. That article would set the tone of prayer for that day and many days later.

Several minutes later we met Steve Herrell again. He joined with Terry Harman and me to walk southward along Knobly Road. The happy-go-lucky Steve became very serious when I asked him about the prayer needs of this picturesque area. He spoke about drugs coming into the area and about the headlines in the paper since he once attended the church in which that family attended. After passing a church that was preparing for a wedding, we turned and headed for Greenland Gap. Patterson Creek cuts through Knobly Mountain and New Creek Mountain with spectacular results. It seemed that when God made the earth, He worked overtime in this area of West Virginia. This area, which is so peaceful with abundant wildlife, was once the site of a Civil War battle. After Steve left, Terry and I proceeded along Jordan Run Road. The view to the west of the Allegheny Front, towering two thousand feet was awesome. Tomorrow morning, I would have my mountain top experience, but first Nadine drove us to Smoke Hole Caverns Log Motel. We were invited to attend church with the owner of the motel, Jerry Hedrick and his wife, Janet. Jerry not only owns the motel, he also owns the Caverns, a gift shop, a second motel near Seneca Rocks and the Smoke Hole Log Cabin Resort. He also is a guide and outfitter to the fishermen, hunters, hikers and rock climbers that visit the area.

The next morning before church Terry and I finished the 4.7 mile walk to the top of the mountain. I have been waiting since last winter to see this view. The

Allegheny Front towers above the ridges of the mountains to the east. Fog was lifting from the valleys between the ridges. Then the splendor of the moment changed. I realized that I was looking back at where I walked. Three news-photos flashed in my mind. Four days later, another would be etched forever in my mind. I began to weep and pray, *“If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Lord, please forgive us.”*



We went back to our motel, washed and dressed for church. Then I met Jerry and told him why we were in West Virginia. I told Jerry how much friendlier the people appeared to be in this area than where I lived. Jerry proved it by driving me to his church in his Cadillac. The church was nestled between the mountains with the south branch of the Potomac River flowing past the back of the church. Jerry introduced us to the congregation of Cabins Assembly of God. It was Mother’s Day and two mothers gave testimonies of how their mothers led them on the straight and narrow path by being “the meanest mommies in the world” by not allowing them to see r-rated movies and to date before the age of 16.

After the service a gentleman came and asked me what was wrong with the church in America. One could notice that the pews were only partially filled and that the church was headed by an interim pastor. Also in the church bulletin, there were 19 names of those serving in the military. My answer was that the pastors do not preach the full gospel of Christ in fear of offending someone. They do not address sin because people may leave the church. Is the word, holiness, ever spoken? The man responded by saying that this was what transpired at this church and the church split several times.

We left with Jerry to go back to the motel and ate at their gift shop, West Virginia’s Largest/Souvenir Gift Shop. Our meal was “on the house.” Jerry and Janet Hedrick are precious hosts. If you are ever in their neck of the woods, please visit them. You’ll sure be glad you did.

As I began writing this newsletter, another sickening photo appeared on television. The three photos in my mind became four. The first photo happened one year ago. A 19 year-old female soldier named Jessica Lynch was photographed being carried on a stretcher clutching an America flag. Jessica lives near the village of Palestine in the western part of West Virginia about 12 miles south of the American Discovery Trail. One day I will be praying in her area.

The second photo occurred this April. This happened at Dover Air Force Base. The photo shows the flag-covered caskets of soldiers killed in Iraq returning to America. I thought the photo was in good taste even though our government did not. On October 5, 2002, we drove by the air force base on the first day of the walk headed for Cape Henlopen State Park and the start of the American Discovery Trail. The first church outside my home church to join in prayer with us for America resides in Dover, Delaware.

The third photo was taken at Abu Grab prison near Baghdad, Iraq. It showed a soldier sexually humiliating Iraqi detainees. I was shocked and ashamed to be an American. How could this have been allowed to happen? That soldier was from Fort Ashby, West Virginia, which we walked through on March 13th of this year. But as I prayed and remembered these words that Jesus spoke, *“He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.”* What would I have done at the age of 19, if I were in that person’s place? What would happen if Jessica Lynch had her orders switched with the accused soldier? Who would have been the hero? There but for fortune are you and I.

The fourth photo was taken of a young man from West Chester, Pennsylvania, who was about to be executed on film. His only crime was that he was trying to aid the people of Iraq and was an American. Last year I prayer-walked around the Chester County Court House in West Chester in order that the Ten Commandments plaque would be restored on the wall of that court house.

The media descended on the towns of Fort Ashby and West Chester. There are two very grieving families for two different reasons. I have been told that in Fort Ashby the media was on a “witch hunt,” looking for a hateful community that breeds those abusive soldiers. The witch hunt also went to the White House, where I also prayed last summer. We should all pray for the sins of our nation, a nation that confesses to be 85% Christian but one out three pregnancies in America ends in abortion. Have you ever seen a news interview asking a mother how she feels about her daughter having an abortion? On the average day, 4,320 children in America never get to see the light of day, but where are the reporters? Please pray for America.

This is also a nation where metal detectors are placed in schools to prevent children from killing other children. Who is raising our children? Not the parents, they are too busy working to keep up with the Jones. Please pray for America.

This is also a nation where homosexual marriages are taking place and there are homosexual pastors leading some churches. Pray for America.

What is the worst sin of America? The sin of pride. With that pride, we lost the fear of God. With pride we turn our eyes away from sin in our homes, schools, work-places and even our churches. We need to address sin. Why in America what was considered sin forty years ago, not considered sin today? Please pray for the restoration of God’s church in America. Amen.

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

God bless,
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Total miles walked of the American Discovery Trail	- 394 miles
Number of walkers	- 42 walkers
Number of people praying for the America	- 19,989 prayer warriors

Before I walk an area, I research that area. On some sites on the Internet, I found that West Virginians were described as being backwards, ignorant and some other words that I'd rather not mention. So far we have walked through three counties of West Virginia; Hampshire, Mineral and Grant. We did not meet anyone in the brief time in Hampshire County so I can not speak for them, but for the people of Mineral and Grant counties, I can not say enough praises. Two different men offered us rides thinking that our car broke down. A lady offered us water. A man asked if we would be walking through our inner cities, which need prayer. In the town of Fort Ashby, a couple came to open the doors of the fort, for which the town was named, so we could learn more about the history of our nation. If being gentle, considerate, helpful and loving to strangers is backwards, Lord, let me be backwards.