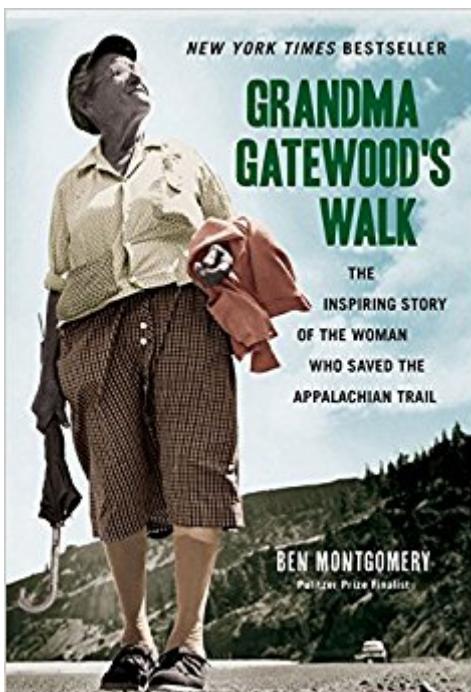


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# Grandma Gatewood's Walk: The Inspiring Story Of The Woman Who Saved The Appalachian Trail



## Synopsis

Emma Gatewood told her family she was going on a walk and left her small Ohio hometown with a change of clothes and less than two hundred dollars. The next anybody heard from her, this genteel, farm-reared, sixty-seven-year-old great-grandmother had walked 800 miles along the 2,050-mile Appalachian Trail. By September 1955 she stood atop Maine's Mount Katahdin, sang "America, the Beautiful," and proclaimed, "I said I'll do it, and I've done it." Driven by a painful marriage, Grandma Gatewood not only hiked the trail alone, she was the first person—man or woman—to walk it twice and three times. At age seventy-one, she hiked the 2,000-mile Oregon Trail. Gatewood became a hiking celebrity, and appeared on TV with Groucho Marx and Art Linkletter. The public attention she brought to the trail was unprecedented. Her vocal criticism of the lousy, difficult stretches led to bolstered maintenance, and very likely saved the trail from extinction. Author Ben Montgomery interviewed surviving family members and hikers Gatewood met along the trail, unearthed historic newspaper and magazine articles, and was given full access to Gatewood's own diaries, trail journals, and correspondence. *Grandma Gatewood's Walk* shines a fresh light on one of America's most celebrated hikers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1955, at 67, Gatewood left her small Ohio town and her 11 children and 23 grandchildren and set off to trek the Appalachian Trail. She'd long been fascinated by the 2,050-mile trail and was particularly lured by the fact that no woman had ever hiked it alone. Knowing her family wouldn't approve, she didn't tell them when she set out with a little 17-pound sack of supplies and no tent or sleeping bag. Journalist Montgomery draws on interviews with Gatewood's surviving family members and hikers she met on her five-month journey as well as news accounts and Gatewood's diaries to offer a portrait of a determined woman, whose trek inspired other hikers and brought attention to the neglect of the Appalachian Trail. She became a hiking celebrity, appearing on television with Groucho Marx and Art Linkletter. Montgomery intertwines details of Gatewood's hike with recollections from her early life and difficult marriage. Maps of the trail and photos from Gatewood's early life enhance this inspiring story. --Vanessa Bush

“Go, Granny, Go! . . . This astonishing tale will send you looking for your hiking boots. A wonderful story, wonderfully told.”  
•CHARLES MCNAIR, BOOKS EDITOR AT PASTE MAGAZINE AND AUTHOR OF PICKETT'S CHARGE“Grandma Gatewood's Walk is a brilliant look at an America both good and bad that has slipped away, seen through the eyes and feet of one of America's most unlikely heroines. Gatewood's story suggests anything is possible; no matter your age, gender, or quality of your walking shoes.”  
•STEPHEN RODRICK, AUTHOR OF THE MAGICAL STRANGER“Grandma Gatewood's Walk is sure to fuel not only the dreams of would-be hikers, but debates on the limits of endurance, the power of determination, and the nature of myth.”  
•EARL SWIFT, AUTHOR OF THE BIG ROADS“A quiet delight of a book.”  
•KIRKUS REVIEWS

Grandma Gatewood was a 67 year old woman, whose 11 children had grown up and left home when she decided that she was going to hike the entire length of the Appalachian Trail from Mt. Oglethorpe, Georgia to Mt. Katahdin, Maine. The key, however, is that she didn't tell a soul about her intended trip. She just took off. In addition to being the first female through hiker to complete the trail, she did it with a bare minimum of gear and equipment and she did it in the summer of 1955, when women just didn't do those things. She started in canvas top sneakers and ended up going through 7 pairs of shoes. The book alternates between the story of Gatewood's life from the time she was married to an abusive husband until the time she started her "walk" with the

story of her time on the trail. In addition, the author adds historical information, such as details about the damage done by Hurricanes Carol and Dianne. Grandma Gatewood did more to "advertise" the Appalachian Trail than anyone before or since, and became famous for her walks in various places. She not only hiked the AT three times (twice as a through hiker and once in segments), but she also hiked the Oregon Trail and helped to create a trail system in her native Ohio. It's wouldn't be out of place to call her one of the most influential women of her time. The book is a fascinating look at her abusive married life, as well as her interest in hiking. It is easy to read and provides a glimpse into life in the mid 1950's. I recommend this book highly to anyone as a great read.

What would you pack to walk 2050 miles? With all of the hiking equipment and instructions available today it would no doubt be contained in a 60lb backpack with propane, cooking equipment, tent, sleeping bag, water filters, fire starters, GPS, maps and cell phones. Grandma Gatewood went out to "take a walk" dressed in dungarees and tennis shoes with a small drawstring sack containing a shower curtain, a warm coat, a pocket knife, a flashlight and a few snacks. Barely enough food to last three days. What she did have in abundance was resolve, courage and utter fearlessness. Ben Montgomery, staff writer at the Tampa Bay Times, brings Grandma Gatewood to life in beautifully written and meticulous detail, not only following her perilous walk, but lush in description of the countryside around her, from amazing vistas on the tops of the many mountains she climbed, to the freezing cold, treacherous rock and storms that nearly took her life. The author also describes the history of each region she crosses and the many people she encounters, some good, some not so good, and some very unexpected. I had never heard of this amazing woman, but she was quite famous for what she did. Walking, it seems is a dying art, except for the few. All of us, at an early age should have to take Grandma Gatewood's walk. It would forever change our outlook of the world and what we are missing on the other side of the window as we fly by in our plastic cars. I read this book in one sitting. If you think you are old, read Grandma Gatewood's Walk.....then start walking.

What is there about little old ladies that they seem to get typecast in our minds, and then when an author like Ben Montgomery tells her story we are gobsmacked by this woman, and her life. We live in a time when the Appalachian Trail is a fixture of the nation, a trek attempted in whole or in part by hundreds of thousands. That wasn't always the case. When this "Grandma" did her walk, (1955) there was only a vague notion of the Trail, so much so that it shifted around a bit before settling into the route that so many know

well. And it's really to this Grandma that we owe the trail. Her walk made her famous, and by contact, it made the then almost-unknown trail famous. When I first got the book, the cover photo really got me: there's no air-brushing this level of "truthiness." She wearing a skirt, for Chrissakes, and granny stockings that I haven't seen in a long, long time, and tennis shoes. (TENNIS SHOES! Have you seen how we kit ourselves out these days for an hour-long walk in the woods??) But her face is lifted towards the light, and the jaw, well, it seems quite a determined chin to me. And you think, "You GO, girl!" For the trek, of course, she wore pants • dungarees • but still, those tennis shoes, and carried her supplies in a drawstring sack she made herself. And in that sack she stuffed: "A tin of Band-Aids, a bottle of iodine, some bobby pins, and a jar of Vicks salve. She stuffed in a warm coat, a shower curtain to keep the rain off, some drinking water, a Swiss Army knife, a flashlight, candy mints and her pen and a little Royal Vernon Line memo book that she had bought for twenty-five cents at Murphy's back home." The wonder of her doughty fool-hardiness is only matched by the story-teller's brilliant use of concrete details to bring her to life. This is how the book is written, with the drive of narrative: Old woman versus "a million spectacular ways to die" • captured with a million details that help us see her, and her journey. Montgomery seems to walk with her, and to carry us effortlessly along, step by impossible step. In her journey we get to know her and her life. We travel back into the past, both hers, and the Appalachians she walks through. Emma Gatewood • for that is her name • never quite answered the question of why she tackled so incredible a journey, but culling from her writings and those that wrote about her, Montgomery finds more than enough reasons to get started on a very long walk, and more than enough determination to complete the journey.

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