

Appalachia

Volume 71
Number 1 *Winter/Spring 2020: Farewell, Mary
Oliver: Tributes and Stories*

Article 21

2020

Letters

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Recommended Citation

(2020) "Letters," *Appalachia*: Vol. 71: No. 1, Article 21.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia/vol71/iss1/21>

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Letters

Responses from the Caregiver and Her Son

My son's article, "Care for the Caregiver" (Summer/Fall 2018), gave great attention to the stresses of our three-day traverse across Mount Washington and the Northern Presidentials, but I sincerely find great joy in remembering all of our conversations and laughs, the breathtaking scenery, and the many firsts I was able to experience at the young age of 60. Yes, the 71-MPH winds pushed me down, but I got up.

Many individuals, particularly moms, who read the article told me how they would love to have such one-on-one time with their sons and feel so cared for, believed in. As we drove into the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, I remember saying to Steve, "So you really believe I can do this?" His response was, "Absolutely." He based this not on hope but on knowing me literally for all of his life. We have had many adventures together: riding on the back of a moped through the crowded streets of Phnom Penh, bicycling across Manhattan, hiking in Connecticut. Steve knew that I am not one to give up, am extremely determined to get through hard times, and love the story that follows an adventure.

For years I had wanted to hike Mount Washington, being intrigued by my son's love for the White Mountains, and at times I wished I was a bit younger to experience their majestic wonder. My son determined it would happen. Steve made sure I had all I needed for the trip: adequate shoes, non-cotton clothing, and even the perspective that we would go step by step. We made plans but knew the weather and my physical capability were factors out of our control. One of my most vivid memories is at the end of the difficult, wet, stormy traverse across Gulfside Trail. Stopping short of Crag Camp to stay at Gray Knob cabin because of the utter darkness, we both absorbed all we had been through during that 16-hour-long day, which had begun at Hermit Lake below Tuckerman Ravine. I can only describe that moment of rest as one of immense grateful satisfaction. And it was shared with my son.

As a mother of three adult children, I have struggled to know how to be the mom they each need. I have found the greatest gift I can offer is belief in them. I offered Steve my belief he knew what he was doing, could be trusted, and loved me enough to challenge me to face a new decade in my life with renewed belief in myself and hope for new beginnings. I am so very grateful.

The article shared how turning 60 was extremely hard for me. I saw only endings ahead: of my teaching career, of my role as pastor's wife, of my income. I truly couldn't see beyond my life as I had known it. This was prompted by both my parents dying in their mid-60s and their future being taken from them. It made me sad and afraid. Today, I have a picture of me at the summit of Mount Washington. It is a reminder I didn't give up. I wasn't alone. The future is just another adventure and a story waiting to be told.

—*Linda Kurczyk, Woodstock, Connecticut*

Responses to my essay "Care for the Caregiver" (Summer/Fall 2018) have ranged from praise to harsh chides over my decision to take my mother on a storm-laden semi-traverse of the Presidentials for her 60th birthday. I think each reaction has said as much about me as about the commenter.

In a recent letter to the editor, Bev Esson of Maine said it "was so damn lucky that this was not a tragedy requiring rescue by others." To a degree, I agree with Esson. Everyone is, to some degree, lucky when they come down from the mountains without incident. We must all weigh and accept a level of risk. But I believe Esson overstates in saying that mere "luck" saved us from requiring rescue. While my mother's previous experience in New England's mountains went no higher than Monadnock, she was then jogging 5 miles daily and was physically prepared for this trek. Our traverse was challenging amid hail and thunderstorms, but we proceeded with diligence and were off the trail soon after nightfall.

My favorite response to the essay came from the noted author and environmentalist Laura Waterman, who at age 80 is still exploring the outdoors, writing books, and pushing herself in the mountains. She seemed to appreciate my story for what it was intended to be: not a guide for what you should or should not do, but rather a tale about a mother-son relationship and my personal journey toward realizing that I need to better consider others' abilities and limits. True to Waterman's reputation as a booster for wilderness adventure, she asked me to pass along this message to my mother: "Please tell her how much I admire her spirit!"

—*Stephen Kurczyk, Brooklyn, New York*

1965 on Rainier: The Dark Ages of Diabetes Care

I read “Notes from 1965: A Teenager Climbs ‘Unauthorized,’ and a Man Conceals His Diabetes” (Summer/Fall 2019, *News and Notes*, page 144) without looking at the title, since I have a habit of opening magazines to random pages and reading stories from the middle to end or skipping around. I read this story with great fascination, as I just returned from an eighteen-day stint at AMC August Camp in Packwood, Washington, near Mount Rainier, until I read the last paragraph and realized the story was about a diabetic.

I found the author’s conclusion disturbing. He does explain how the guide services have modernized and allow more time for acclimation and physical conditioning. Perhaps this type of program could allow a person to summit if he or she completed the course satisfactorily; however, he implies that a person who is diabetic or has some other existing condition should not be allowed to climb at all. The author does make an attempt to discuss the issue of disclosing such a condition, but his final conclusion sidesteps that issue and concludes that even if the issue was disclosed, the individual should not be allowed to climb.

Nineteen sixty-five was for diabetics the dark ages of diabetes treatment. There was no way to test blood sugars without boiling test tubes of urine. Control of diabetes was hit or miss or maybe or never. Traveling with diabetes was extremely difficult. Diabetics were told not to exercise strenuously. What is routine for a diabetic today (for instance, running a 5-kilometer race or going for a hike or a 30-mile bike ride) was discouraged and rare in the 1960s. Now a quick finger prick will do the job of testing the blood sugar. It doesn’t always work in the cold and the gloves need to come off, but it can be done in most conditions. Continuous blood glucose monitors show the blood sugar on the smartphone. Again, they may not always work, but the technology is light years away from what was available in 1965. And there are several methods of insulin-delivery systems—yes, dependent on technology, but fairly reliable when tucked under the jacket. Diabetes is a different disease in each person, and each person will react differently under different conditions.

These days, diabetics regularly participate in marathon races, 100-mile bike rides, professional sports, strenuous hiking and—dare I say it—climbing. Never easy, but it can be done without endangering the rest of the party. We live in the 21st century, and I would hope that we can also move forward with more knowledge, understanding, and inclusion of those whose lives require challenges far greater than climbing one mountain on one day.

I want to publicly thank all of those who have hiked, biked, cross-country skied, backpacked, kayaked, or gone on other adventures with me. Not easy for me, but it has so enriched my life, and I couldn't have done those things without all of you including me in these activities.

—Paula Burton, Sandy Hook, Connecticut

Tuckerman Ravine, Then (1967) and Now

Skiing Tuckerman Ravine's Left Gully on May 12, 2019, I reached the lower section, where the gully opens up and turns back left into the lower bowl. There I was informed that I could not continue down further. The bowl had been cleared of people in anticipation of an expected helicopter arrival to transport an injured man.

An experienced skier, 60, had slipped on ice and fallen the full length of the chute in the steep center wall. A helicopter was soon overhead. It circled and landed on the flat area at the ravine base. Soon it took off with the victim. In all my years in the mountains, it was the first time I had witnessed a helicopter rescue.

The ravine was on the cool side that day. A bit of icy crust near the top had discouraged me from my plan of hiking across the alpine zone from the top of Left Gully to Hillman's Highway. I took a later run in the relatively low-angled bowl and was surprised how far I slid after falling while climbing up. The cool weather obviously didn't keep people out of the ravine that Sunday, including many on the steep center wall where the injured man had fallen. Unlike others, he was not wearing a helmet or crampons.

That day got me thinking about changes in Mount Washington skiing in the years since I first experienced it back in 1967, the same year Nelson Gildersleeve published an article with data on all the mountain's ski runs ("Mount Washington Skiing in 1967: The Year of All Winter and No Spring," *Appalachia*, December 1967).

Skiing Mount Washington used to be strictly a warm-weather event; now there are skiers on the mountain in winter. In warm spring conditions, the risk of avalanche is typically low (although falling ice chunks are a hazard). Winter or winter-like spring skiing requires more skiers to have avalanche training and specialized equipment (beacon, shovel, and probe) that we used to associate more with backcountry skiing out West. The skier who died in the April 11, 2019, avalanche in Raymond Cataract had these basics, although

he lacked a skiing partner who might have dug him out quicker than the snow ranger who arrived on the scene nearly two hours later. (*Editor's note: Read about the Raymond Cataract fatality in Accidents on page 110.*)

A positive change is that many more Tucks skiers wear helmets now. And quite a few had crampons the day I was on the mountain. This explains so many climbing the steep center wall (although it also means the skiing, intimidating enough in soft snow, can be even more challenging). Quite a few people also had ice axes on May 12, although doing an effective self-arrest when you are carrying skis and poles is not that easy.

Another trend I have noticed is that more people are using backcountry ski equipment and skinning up the trail to the ravine. When you climb up the old-fashioned way, as I do, with skis and boots on your pack, this new trend looks pretty attractive; however, it works best early in the season, when the Tucks trail is still fully snow covered. I did, however, witness a few people in skis clamoring over rocks where there was a break in the snow cover!

Despite the risks, the joy and thrill of skiing Mount Washington remains timeless. Early on May 12, I encountered two eager first-timers, a man and his young son hiking up Tuckerman Ravine Trail. Later, back down at Pinkham, they recounted their run on lower Hillman's Highway with a smile and sense of accomplishment that all of us who ski Tucks know so well.

—Doug Teschner, Pike, New Hampshire

Interesting, but Tread-worn with Self-absorption

I've collected *Appalachia* issues since 1995 and been a member of AMC since a body-raising experience on Agiocochook [an indigenous name for Mount Washington] circa 1988. Your publication is worthy of a library, but I feel it's becoming a little tread-worn with self-absorption. Discovery is different from self-discovery.

Most of the articles remain interesting, though some sound like the same one the author wrote in another issue. I'm always saved by *Accidents*, *Alpina*, and *News and Notes*.

I guess my problem is feeling provincial in this interconnected world. At least I don't need a phone-ectomy. It used to be the exploits of Joe Dodge and the trailblazers. Now it's how fast you can run the AT [Appalachian Trail] with your fan club or a one-day 15,000-foot, e.g. 50-kilometer, jaunt in little

more than a jockstrap. I witnessed my son doing the latter. He doesn't see the point in repeating.

Which is why I like hiking. It's a noncompetitive sport. My partners and I usually spread out on the trail to have a little solitude.

—*Douglas Yohman, East Waterboro, Maine*