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A Peak Ahead: Reversing Roles in the Mountains

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Reversing Roles in the Mountains

“YOUR LIFE WAS OURS, WHICH IS WITH YOU./ GO ON YOUR JOURNEY. We go too.” John Fuller’s poem, “Lullaby,” captures that tug of wistful responsibility any adult caring for a young one feels. They start out small, and need help doing even everyday tasks. Then they grow up—and usually at some point, the parents or guardians reverse roles with the former young ones. We’ve all heard, and experienced, role reversals in hospital rooms and nursing homes. But this transformation of relationships happens in all sorts of ways much earlier.

The next issue of *Appalachia* looks at family trees—not just biological families, but assembled families—and the role reversals within them. These changes unfurl in wild places, when circumstances can force younger, stronger ones into parental roles. One of our stories is by journalist Stephen Kurczyk, who described his climb of Aconcagua in our Winter/Spring 2016 issue (67 no. 1). He writes a tender story of guiding his mother on an overnight trip through the Presidentials in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Linda Kurczyk, the wife of a pastor, has never hiked before.

An Australian hiker named Paul Evans died of a heart attack before he could thru-hike the Appalachian Trail. James Edward Mills will tell us the full story of the hikers who carried Paul’s boots the distance.

A story by Ty Gagne will tell how a hiker emotionally rescued a suicidal man she met on a mountain. Dan Szczesny and a friend who became like a stepdaughter together write about how they bonded on the trails.

In other essays, Lisa Ballard ponders the intersection of humanitarian aid and exploration in earthquake-ravaged Pico de Orizaba, Mexico, and Christopher Johnson visits the suffering redwood forest.

Sandy Stott will analyze accidents in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Steven Jervis will update big-mountain adventures in Alpina, and we will bring you reviews of books, media, and the latest news of the backcountry.

—Christine Woodside