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## Skyline Sketch

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# Skyline Sketch

## Lonesome

I had to escape the noise in my head. The city, the motorcycles, cars, angry people, the daily news catastrophes. I made reservations to stay at the two Appalachian Mountain Club huts that are easier to reach. The first night I had stayed at Zealand Falls Hut, where I spent the evening talking with long-distance hikers on their way to Maine. I hiked out the next morning, reveling in solitude.

I drove to Lafayette Place Campground to begin my next hike up to Lonesome Lake Hut, near Cannon Mountain. I got my sleeping bag and backpack sorted and headed up the trail.

Many years before, I had hiked by a brook babbling over smooth granite stones. I didn't see that now. This was a well-trod, blazed, switchbacked climb over boulders. By 10 A.M., day-hikers and a rowdy group of teenagers were passing me. Four hours later, I arrived near the crest of the 1.5-mile trail. I was exhausted.

At the hut, I took a nap, then jumped in the refreshing lake and gloried in my accomplishment and the stunning views of the surrounding White Mountains. The huts were filled with excited teens on their senior year trip. With my ear plugs, I slept like a baby.

The next morning, I asked one of the hut croo members if there was a more graded descent down



*Kinsman Falls near Franconia Notch extends the feeling of solitude.* BEVERLY SKY

to the parking lot. She suggested Cascade Brook Trail and the Basin–Cascades Trail, a 2.6-mile route that would alternate flat and steep sections, with lots of little brook crossings.

“The bridge is out,” she said, “but the water is fairly low, and you can take off your shoes and cross Cascade Brook.” In a jaunty mood, I set off downhill at 7:30 A.M. Rivulets and brook on my right, I followed the water downhill, alone again and glad of it. The forest was fresh and greenly magnificent in the early morning shafted light, with an occasional chipmunk, birdsong, and gurgling waterfall.

Two hours later, the trail diverged with no sign or markers visible. After reciting a bit of Robert Frost’s poem, I took the trail less traveled because it followed the river. Downhill about a half-hour later, the trail disappeared into the stone-filled river. To the right and left was forest brush, and in front, I saw a wide expanse of rocks, boulders, and water. I could not turn back. I’m 74 years old. I was already tired. I panicked and weakly yelled, “Help!”

I took a deep breath, calmed down, and decided that no matter what, if I followed the river, eventually I would be in civilization.

I remembered a snippet of a poem by David Whyte entitled, “Lost”: “Stand still. The trees ahead/and the bushes beside you/Are not lost.”

I stood still. Across the river, I noticed a thin blue rope tied to two trees and thought a human person must have done this for a reason. Upriver I saw a narrowing with jumpable rocks. I didn’t need to take off my shoes. I bush-whacked my way along the bank and stepped across to the string. I looked around. Several trees away I saw a beautiful blue blaze. I yelled, “Whoo hoo!” That must have been the river crossing the croo member had mentioned. Whew! Life is good! I love this world!

The scenery became spectacular as I passed through two narrow granite walls, and on the other side of the river I admired the huge gushing Kinsman Falls. I stood in awe and recited every prayer of gratitude I knew and continued blithely along the path, singing, “Michael row your boat ashore . . . Hallelujah!”

Another half-hour downhill and the path turned and seemed to end in the river. A second wave of panic swept over me.

The self-berating began. How stupid am I to hike by myself? I ate a few nuts, drank some water, and assessed my situation. The river was loud, rushing wider and deeper now.

I stood still.

A few feet in from the other shore on a tree, I noticed a horizontal piece of wood attached to a tree.

Using my two poles, I stepped over rock, boulder, rotting tree trunk, rock, and boulder until I reached the other side. My boots were still dry!

I scrambled to the weathered “TRAIL” sign and turned downhill. A half-hour later, I heard a distant motorcycle and thought, “What a beautiful sound!” Hoping my partial knee replacement would hold up, I scrambled over rocks, scared and yet exhilarated by the magnificent and lonely place I was in.

Another half-hour and I saw my first people! They were so beautiful. They said I had arrived at the Basin–Cascades Trail, where the river flowed over huge, carved, smooth granite boulders into a series of shallow pools of sparkling green water. I knew I had to walk two more miles on the flat bike trail parallel to the highway.

Four and a half hours after I’d started, I got into my car. The road sounded like the rushing river, and I was already lamenting the end of solo hiking in this lifetime.

—*Beverly Sky*

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BEVERLY SKY is a Boston-based artist. She is working on a Holocaust memoir of her mother entitled *Remnants: One Family’s Experience of the Holocaust*.

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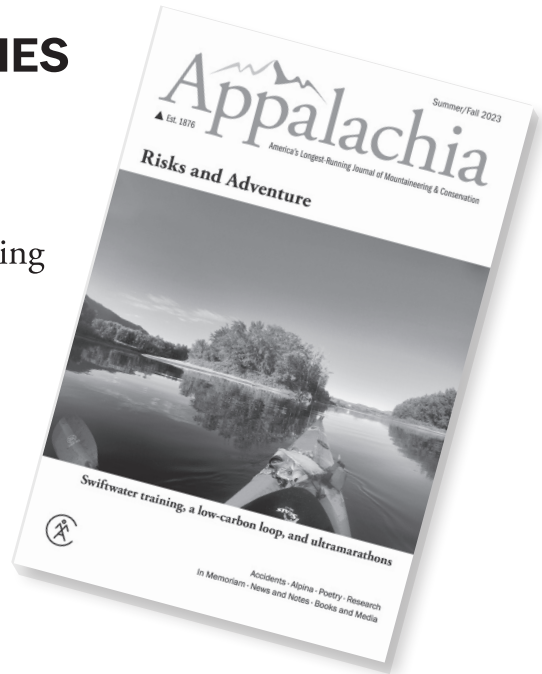
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