



*On May 26, 2016, AT Hiker, John McFarland sent this e-mail to our director, Peter Huston. Though John can't qualify for our Women's Walk-Of-Famers, it is clear that Emma inspired John, so here's his story!*

Dear Peter:

It was great to meet you recently at Bowman's Hill. I really enjoyed the film that you have made regarding "Grandman" Gatewood. I wish you tremendous luck with the project and hope to someday see it again on PBS and eventually own it when it comes out on a DVD.

This is my story and my connection to Grandma.

I first went on a backpack trip with my Boy Scout troop in 1967. I was 22 years old at the time. We started up from Delaware Water Gap on the Appalachian Trail on a Saturday morning and hiked to Sun Fish Pond where we camped. On Sunday, we hiked through to High Point State Park where we got picked up and transported home.

My next back packing experience came in Vietnam in the Army. As a member of Company C, 1/501st Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, I patrolled the coastal villages around Hue and Phu Bai, climbed the high mountains of the Ah Shau Valley along the Laotian border, and fought amid the rolling hills west of Tam Ky. Returning to the United States, I was requested to lead scouts on treks to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimmaron, New Mexico amid the Sangre de Christo Mountains in 1971, 1973, and 1974. For these trips, I exchanged my old Haversack for a new Kelty Tioga pack.

In 1975, I purchased a two volume set published by Rodale Press entitled *Hiking the Appalachian Trail*. It was a compilation of stories from various folks that had hiked the entire trail. In Volume One, I read about an amazing woman named Emma "Grandma" Gatewood who had hiked the entire 2000+ mile trail for the first time at the age of 68 and then returned later to hike it a second time and then complete sections that when added up gave her three trail completions. I immediately became inspired to make this a lifetime goal for myself. I noticed that she had completed her first thru hike on 25 September 1955. I was celebrating my 10th birthday at the time. This was too much of a coincidence for me. I copied her picture from the book and began to carry it in my wallet. Over the next three years, I looked at it over and over again and continued to dream.

Finally in 1978, I quit my job as a chemical technician with PQ Chemicals, recruited a hiking partner, and got a friend to drive us to Georgia where on 15 April I set my footsteps in a northerly direction heading for Maine. During the next six months, I became part of the thru-hiker class of 1978 and "Grandma" went every step of the way with me in my wallet wrapped in plastic in the top pocket of my pack.

Whenever I got discouraged, I took her photo out, looked at that determined face, and then found the inspiration to continue on my trek. By October, I had completed 1800 miles but the winter weather of New England had arrived and closed in on me. In addition, I was broke. Therefore, I ended my 1978 trek and got a job working at the Pocono Environmental Education Center in Dingman's Ferry, Pennsylvania. With the Appalachian Trail just across the Delaware River from me, it was only a matter of time before it would lure me back. So during my vacations in 1982 and 1983, I returned to the trail and finished up the final 300 miles that I needed to join "Grandma" as someone that had hiked the entire trail. Once again, she went with me every step of the way.

Since that time, she has remained in my wallet continuing to inspire me to overcome the challenges that I have faced throughout my life. Until I viewed your film the other night, I was unaware of all that she had experienced in her life prior to her trip in 1955. Knowing what I now know, I am even more inspired by this remarkable woman.

Once again, thanks for producing this project.

John W. MacFarland

"The Haphazard Hiker"

*John also sent two photos. The first one was taken at Camp Keewadin along the A/T in Maine on 20 September 1978. He wrote, "... It was taken by fellow thru-hikers, Don & Balbi Brooks. Grandma's picture is in that top pocket on my Kelty. I have also attached a photo of me on top of Mt. Dix in the Adirondack Mountains during the summer of 1977 while training for my A/T hike in 1978. Notice the weight difference. I ended my A/T hike in 1978 at 120 pounds but was still carrying a 50-60 pound pack."*

