



Grandma Gatewood

Ohio's Legendary Hiker

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An excerpt from:
Grandma Gatewood: Ohio's Legendary Hiker

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On October 25, 1887 Emma Rowena Caldwell was born "...in a ... house back of Mercerville about a mile from where the creeks fork." That's located in Gallia County, close to the Ohio River in the southernmost part of the state. A hop, skip and jump from West Virginia, really. When Emma was born, there were about 2,000 people living in the whole township - and it might have felt as though Emma's family was half of it! In her household, there was her father, Hugh, her mother, Esther Evelyn; and 15 children, including Emma.

Emma grew up helping with the household's endless chores - hoeing the corn, planting the beans and pumpkins, and worming and suckering the tobacco. She milked the cows; washed dishes; made sausage, lard and head cheese; mended and washed clothes; and cooked.

Eventually Emma met a young man named Perry Clayton Gatewood who liked to be called P.C. She would ride behind him on a horse and, one time, she fell off because she wasn't bold enough to put her arms around him to hang on. He brought Emma to his house several times and then told her he wanted to get married. She put him off for two months and then he said that, if she wouldn't get married right away, he was leaving to go out West. So, she said yes. Nineteen year old Emma and 27 year old Perry were married on Sunday, May 5, 1907. She soon realized, though, that P.C. had browbeaten her to get married; something, she said, that he did lots of times throughout their life together. Perry and Emma had 11 children before they divorced in September of 1940.

By 1954, Emma was a "free woman." Her children were grown and she was only responsible for herself. On July 7 Grandma was relaxing by reading a 1949 issue of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC. One of the articles in the magazine featured Earl Schaffer, the first person to ever hike the entire Appalachian Trail in one trip. The writer went on to say that, to date, only five men had ever hiked the entire trail by themselves - and no woman ever had. So, Emma, who loved a challenge, began thinking about tackling that trail.

The Appalachian Trail is about 2,178-miles long through the Appalachian Mountains, containing dense forests, rocky mountains with spectacular views and crystal clear lakes and Emma was determined to see it all. She left her home in Gallipolis, Ohio on July 7, 1954 to make her first try, but she didn't get too far when she realized she wasn't going to make it. After being rescued by some Rangers who advised her to give up her hiking dreams (she was clearly too old for such an adventure!), she headed home and began planning her next trip!

She had learned plenty about traveling lightly on the A.T. during her first effort -- mainly that she had brought too much with her! So, all she took with her for her second attempt were the essentials, including a blanket, a plastic shower sheet, a cup, a canteen and baby bottle for water, a small pot, a spoon, a Swiss Army knife, a first aid kit, pins, flashlight, a piece of rope, a raincoat, a warm coat and a change of clothes. She didn't take a compass, a guidebook of the trail, a tent, a sleeping bag, or a backpack. Emma wore plain old tennis shoes that she'd bought at Carl's Shoe Store in Gallipolis. For food, Emma took along dried beef, cheese and nuts - and she planned to find fruits growing wild along

the way to supplement her meals. She used a walking stick of sassafras and carried candied mints in case she got an upset stomach. Emma set off on May 2, 1955 -- and this time she hiked the entire length!

Two thousand and fifty miles, 145 days and 30 pounds ago, Emma had left Mt. Oglethorpe, Georgia and on September 25, 1955 she stood at the top of Mt. Katahdin, Maine singing, "Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain!"

According to her son Nelson, Emma said the hardest part of hiking the Appalachian Trail was simply making up your mind to do it - and that's a lesson that we can all take to heart, no matter what we want to achieve.

In 1979, the Buckeye Trail Association named part of their trail the Grandma Gatewood Trail and Congress certified this section as a National Recreational Trail. In 1999, the 1,400-mile Buckeye Trail was named Ohio's Millennium Legacy Trail by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Only one trail can receive this award per state. Surely this would have pleased Emma Gatewood, a woman who loved nature and the beauty of the earth, a woman with courage, determination and fortitude, a woman who knew her own mind and acted upon it, whether or not it was the typical thing for a woman of her age to do. The next time that you go on a walk and see glorious trees, streams and wildlife and you take in a lungful of fresh clean air; think about Emma Rowena "Grandma" Gatewood and how she left this world a better place.



This story is an excerpt of Eden Valley's e-book, *Grandma Gatewood: Ohio's Legendary Hiker*. Emma's story is the topic of Eden Valley's newest project which includes a storytelling program, one act play and a PBS Documentary created with FilmAffects and WGTE/PBS. Find complete information Emma and her accomplishments and this project at <http://edenvalleyenterprises.org/progdesc/gatewood/gtwdinf.htm> and view our documentary trailer at <http://tinyurl.com/gatewoodtrl3> To purchase a complete copy of the book, visit our website at: <http://edenvalleyenterprises.org/booksoh.html#grandma>

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