

"500 Miles of Meaning"

By Kenton Bailey, Kentucky, USA



My name is Kenton. I am a person. I have interests, hobbies, duties, responsibilities, likes, and dislikes, loves and hates. I have pain, discomfort, problems, and imperfections. I have flares, swelling, holes, bruising, sores, and scars. And yet, I am not my body. I do not feel ashamed of my body, but it remains my burden to bear. I am a person. I am a soul.

When I first decided, in what will now be called an "attempt" to walk across America, I had become consumed with the idea, driven by a need to run away, and the dream fueled by the online journals of walkers past. When I watched videos and read articles of people who had travelled the 2000+ miles, I saw free souls who had found a way to escape the day to day monotony of life. In many cases, the walkers felt unfulfilled in their ordinary lives. In many cases, they were merely adventurous and lead otherwise happy lives.

One tip I had consistently heard was to walk for a cause. A good reason being for the additional motivation and to do something good with your time. To not waste the exposure. To take something good and make it great. At first the thought of walking for an ailment that I myself suffer from seemed selfish to me. After all, there are so many great people that need help with their struggles.

Not too long before the walk, I had started frequenting Facebook groups for people that suffer from Hidradenitis Suppurativa. Although it was great to have a community that made me feel not so alone, it was obvious that HS was a black hole, with little treatment options and even less awareness. It only felt right to choose HS for my awareness campaign. It allowed me to form a bond with friends I didn't know I had. Friends that I could share an intimate issue with and be understood.

Depression wasn't going to stop me, my flares weren't going to stop me. Nothing was going to stop me. But then I stopped. In Panama City Beach, I had finally decided to give in to what my body was telling me. I had developed an umbilical hernia from pushing the heavy cart so long away, and it was only getting worse and I would need to keep the cart and load it down even heavier with water for crossing the desert. Not only that, but it turned out being with myself 24 hours a day seemed to only bring out some of my worst thoughts.

While I didn't complete the walk, and I didn't find in myself what I was looking for, I did make it over 500 miles and crossed two and a half states. Georgia, Alabama, and the panhandle of Florida. Along the way I was guided by irreplaceable friends in the HS community, who volunteered their time to find me food, shelter, and safety along the way. So in the end, I found more than I was looking for, though it was something unexpected altogether. Something better.

Despite it's quick end, the awareness campaign was a massive success, and the spirit I saw in the HS community was like none which I have ever seen. So remember, life is a walk. A long and hard walk. But you are not your body... You are a person, you are a soul, and your soul can walk forever.

If you would like to learn more about my journey across America then please see my Facebookpage Kenton's Walk for HS and my Youtube Channel Kenton Bailey https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdkbabDJqYHz3_SJXUzKF5Q