

Thirty Years Minus Two

By Cathy Henn (Kate)

Unfortunately, I missed the very first Barkley in 1986 and the most recent Barkley in 2016. Other than that, I believe I have been to every single one. I do have some excuses for missing two of them. In 1986 I was home tending to rambunctious two-year old Danger Dave and being about to pop with Kyle in utero. I told my husband Karl (Rawdog) to go on and have fun, but really, what I meant was: stay here and help me. He went, and I got over it. This year, 2016, I was very ill and could not go. Karl went every day and then came home dutifully at night to check on me. I was grateful, but I think laz kind of missed him, considering he fell off a stump Saturday night almost into the fire and hurt his shoulder. Rawdog's job has always been to keep laz awake on Saturday night, and I guess he is just irreplaceable. Several of you asked about me, and I appreciated your concern. I did keep up with the goings on at Frozen Head via Keith Dunn's twitter, texts from Karl and our two guys, and Karl's reports every evening. I almost felt like I was there with all the information available. But not quite. I missed the stories around the fire. I missed the friendly faces. I missed seeing the start and the finishes and non-finishes. I missed hearing Taps. I missed the woods, and the hike up to the top of Rat Jaw to see runners picking their way up. And I missed our family and friends.

At thirty years minus two, I may be one of the Barkley fixtures. Laz and Rawdog have me beat, though. And Kyle has been to every one except the first when he was not quite born yet. The year after that, we took a playpen and caged him in. Davy also missed the first one, but has been there ever since. Once he hit about fourteen, he started blowing that bugle, and has tapped out a steady stream of dnf-ers ever since. I like his bugle blowing ever so much better than laz's, but I am partial. And he does have teeth.

I made some observations while I have been sick, and I thought I would share some of them with you.

The first thing I must point out is that the Barkley regulars keep getting older. Everyone except Rawdog, of course. Laz is looking kind of long in the jowl and wrinkled. Some of the other regulars, Stu, Dobies, Buttslide, Mahoney, Mr. Twitter, Chef Limacher, Joe K., Hiram, David Hughes, and Frozen Ed are showing

their years too. (But Gail Furtaw has not changed one bit over the years.) Even sons Danger Dave and Kyle are getting into their thirties now, and don't look like the little kids I remember. And myself, I have white hair and wrinkles now and can't even run any more. One day we'll have to pass on the torch of taking care of the Barkley to the younger generation. But for now we are still out there putting out those dang books all winter long, putting out the water jugs, finding the firewood and building the fire, cooking the chicken, helping laz come up with another inspiring t shirt, and sitting around waiting for you all to come on home to the campfire and tell your stories.

I'm always inspired by everyone's hopes and dreams, and that you get out there and even start the thing. Having been out there myself twice, and since then helping put out the books (although not as much as I used to), I sort of think I know what you are up against, but not quite, as each person's journey is different. Some runners are friendly and some are not. It's just the nature of the beast. Some come in on Friday and are all business, wanting to be super prepared, no time for chit chat. I understand that, as that is how I was the two years I ran it. I remember being very scared and nervous. Some runners are friendly, though, and I've always appreciated it when they take the time to talk to me and Karl. We are both kind of quiet, background people, so some runners may not even notice us. But a few use some of their time and energy to greet us and see how we are doing. These are truly nice gestures. I've noticed that the five loopers tend to be very focused, but even some of them take a few moments to speak to us. Some of the five loopers are all into their heads, and don't even notice us. That is okay too. Mostly I can't pick out who is going to be a five looper and who isn't. It's only after the fact that I think about how friendly or how distant they seemed before the race. Everyone has a different personality after all, introvert or extrovert. I have noticed that the people who do the best are usually the people I know the least, but this is probably because I am hanging out at camp, and they are out there in the woods!

Some of the old regulars have stopped coming to the Barkley. I miss them. Doyle Carpenter, where are you? And Animal Herr, Craig Wilson, and Milan Milanovich have not been back in a long time. We miss you all. Some of them made such an impression on me, such as Kerry Trammell, a wonderful human being who was delightful to talk with every year. Sadly, he has passed on, as have Chip Tuthill, another super nice person I remember laughing with around the fire, and John DeWalt who would always hand me something to hold for him at the start of the race. I guess I looked honest. It was good to hear that A.T. made a comeback this

year, and I was sorry to miss seeing him, as he practically grew up at the Barkley. J.B. needs to come back too. I also miss those Arkansas people with their razorback pig calls, and ol' Gristle Lou Peyton, a nicer lady God never made. We also miss Sandra Cantrell (although she made it this year and I didn't), and the Cantrell trio, Case, Amy, and Chrys, who used to come every year and play with our two sons on the big rock.

I know I left some people out, and I'm sorry if it was you. The Barkley crowd is one big family, no matter who is there any one particular year. I think that is a big attraction about it. And that is one reason our two sons refuse to miss a Barkley, no matter how busy their young lives are.

My hardest year at the Barkley was the year that laz called me and said there was a crew of about 13 Russian runners arriving by bus in Knoxville the next day and could I take care of them. Why didn't he send them to Nashville so he could take care of them?? I think he was playing on my compassionate nature kicking in. So, of course, I rounded up some friends and we met the runners at the bus station. No one could understand each other, and we didn't know what we were going to do with them, as it was a week until the race. My church people took them into their homes and showed them America. They fed them, washed their clothes, gave them tours, and supplied them for the race as best they could. It was really an amazing thing. When it was time to head to Frozen Head, I had to bring all the cooking gear from our house to loan to them, and borrow camping gear and sleeping bags, and buy a van load of groceries for them. On top of all that, I was entered in the race that year. I found a Russian interpreter, a student at U.T. who came and helped us out at the race to understand these people. Somehow we all survived, and I even finished a loop in the time limit! One of the Russians decided he liked America so much that he showed up at the bus stop about a month later and called me. We took him in for a week or two, and found some work for him to do. Eventually he missed his family and went on home. Thank goodness. There were other years with other foreign runners that we kept in our home, but the year with the Russians was the most memorable of all.

I have also noticed the way that fiction and real life meet and intertwine. The little fictional book I wrote about Barkley, The Virgin and The Veteran, is really my attempt to portray the long-standing relationship between laz and Rawdog. In the book, they are the two guards chasing down the first Barkley runner, an escaped convict from Brushy Mountain. The head guard is John Rankin (laz), and he is totally dependent upon his right-hand man, Harry Stockstill (Rawdog), to handle

all the details, even to the point of needing him to fold up his wet poncho into his pack. Come to find out, at the Barkley this year, laz had to get Rawdog to fold up his tarp, as he just couldn't do it. And laz was so upset about our family not camping up above campsite 12 this year, and losing Rawdog as he came home at night to check on me. He just really depends on Rawdog for so many things. I completely understand, as I depend on him too.

Concerning camera crews at the Barkley, they come in a box of many colors, just like the runners. Some are friendly, and some are not. The two I remember fondly are Tim and Annika, the ones who produced the Barkley documentary. Tim took a hike and got lost and experienced a little bit of the Barkley for himself. Annika found a dog running loose, and wanted to keep it, but ended up finding a local home for it. She has a big heart. They are both really good people, just like most Barkley-ans. They really cared about the Barkley and all the people running it, and did a great job portraying the race, without being overly intrusive.

There will be other years at the Barkley, and I intend to not miss any more. I hope to see you all out there next year. Come by and sit a spell with us before you take off running all day and night.

God bless all of you for the memories,

Kate