

REMEMBERING ED JOHNSON

I have known Ed since Chris and I started attending Cane Creek Church, almost 30 years ago, but I think we began to discover our mutual interests as members of the finance committee, on which we served for many years. We both were comfortable with budgets and balance sheets, but we also developed (I hope) a mutual respect for each other's vision of where church priorities needed to be. Inevitably, we learned about our common interest in trails and hiking – mine in ambitious backpacking expeditions, and Ed's more in local journeys of discovery – and I enjoyed several hikes together with Ed's "crew". Hiking with Ed was a lot more about connecting the trail and landscape with its history, geography, scenic points, stories and past hikes than how many miles the day would chalk up – my main focus during those years when I was trying to finish the whole AT. He and his buddies also ate a lot better than I was accustomed to.

Trails pervade a lot of my thinking. My writings are riddled with trail analogies and insights learned out there. You get to know a lot about people if you hike with them, not all of it good, but in Ed's case, I shared his quiet, thoughtful, purposeful enjoyment of just walking across God's creation. I appreciated his quiet, thoughtful, productive participation on the finance committee. I loved hearing him describe the work he put in to restore the mill race and dam at his home. As a fellow homesteader, we could usefully discuss electrical work, plumbing, and carpentry; politics, math, science, and music were mutual interests; and for me, history and psychology were always learning experiences. In the last several years, the Mountains to the Sea Trail was our biggest shared interest, particularly since an easement over Ed's land is an important local section. I admired – and learned from – Ed's quiet, thoughtful, and considerate response to the many frustrations and delays the OC section has experienced for the last 10 years, particularly since he had a lot more skin in the game than I have.

I have been privileged to spend time with a number of men in their final weeks. I have supposed that those can be lonely times when friends are welcomed – I know they will be when my time comes, which is likely to follow a path similar to Ed's. So I spent as much time as practical with Ed since he left UNC Rex, and as usual with him, he taught me something. Making the decision to leave the excellent care of our hospitals for hospice home care takes courage, clarity of thought, and trust – in our families, in ourselves, and ultimately, in God to see us safely home at the end. Dying is not something any of us likes to talk about, much less confront, but my friend Ed was not afraid at all of the trail ahead that I could see. We might have been discussing the climbs and descents he would be traversing the next day, how to keep his pack light, his family re-supply network, trail angels who might visit. We didn't talk much about trails end – we both knew it was going to be soon for him. The last time I spoke to Ed was Monday afternoon. He was pretty breathless, but he managed to thank me for coming, and added, "I might not be here tomorrow". I gripped his hand and said, "You're a good man, Ed. You've lived a great life. We all love you". I would like to have embraced him, but he was very frail and in his bed, and after all, we are just friends.

So long, my Friend. I'll miss you on the rest of the trail, but I'll be sure to see you at Journey's End.

- Allan Green
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