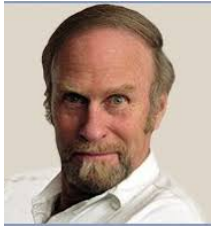


True Grit: Dave Carder Running Across America



By Frosty Wooldridge

April 13, 2023

Have you ever met a person in your life that inspired you? Did that person raise your energy for living a more creative life? Did they rouse your soul to become greater?

In my bicycle adventure across America in 2010, near Denton, Texas, a man drove up behind me. He waved at me to stop. I pulled my bicycle to the side of the road.

Seconds later, the driver walked up to me, “My name is Dave Carder.”

“Frosty Wooldridge,” I said, extending my hand.

“I couldn’t help but wonder what you are doing on a 100-degree day riding a bicycle through Texas,” said Carder.

“Sweatin’, lots of sweatin’” I said. “Just making my way coast to coast across America.”

“I’m an endurance runner,” he said. “So, I have a feel for what you’re doing.”

After some small talk, we exchanged business cards and he drove away. Over the past two years, we kept contact through Facebook. While he didn’t say very much about his life when I met him, his website activities astounded me. He moved to Yellowstone National Park shortly after I met him. Over

Facebook, I asked him why he had left his very successful life in Texas to move to a remote area in Wyoming.

“I needed to get out of the box,” he said. “I wanted to live a more minimal and happy life in the woods. Big city living may bring lots of money, but it also brings lots of stress, pressure and a feeling of being in a box.”

I said, “John Muir said something about.”

Muir said, “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”

In 2011, I bicycled down the Continental Divide through Yellowstone National Park, but Dave Carder ran in a 100-mile endurance race in another state. We just missed each other as I pedaled through Yellowstone.

On Facebook in 2012, he told his 1,600 friends that he and three women and four other men would run 2,400 miles from Chicago to Santa Monica Pier 59 in California on old Route 66. You can see the run at www.runitforward.cc . To tell you the truth, his running escapades defy my imagination, but at the same time, inspire me to my own greater potential.

All in all, I didn't think much more about his run as I bicycled across the USA in 2012. But as luck would have it, his brother moved within several blocks of me in September. Dave Carder decided to visit his brother in Golden, Colorado last week.

He called and we made a lunch date. During the discussion, he talked about his run across America. Not only did he and his companions run across our country, they stopped at dozens of schools along Route 66 to start running clubs in disadvantaged communities. They brought healthy food to kids without food.

They worked with local dentists to drill and fill as well as teach kids and parents how to brush and floss. They inspired kids to work through obesity problems toward healthiness in their lives. They created support systems to keep kids enthusiastic about health, wellness and doing well in school.

As I sat there listening to this man who is a boyhood friend of the seven time world champion of the Tour de France, Lance Armstrong, I felt my spirit move. I felt inspired by his true grit, his compassion for humanity, his sense of responsibility to others. Later, I talked about taking a backpacking trip to one of my favorite locations in the Colorado Rockies—a small pond at 11,000 feet near Vail, Colorado in the Mount Holy Cross area.

“You got time to go backpacking?” I said.

“I’m in,” Dave said.

On the weekend, my old friend Bob, Dave and I hoisted our packs over our shoulders and hiked from 8,000 feet to 11,000 feet to a little-known pond with lodge pole pines surrounding its crystal-clear waters. I call it my “Walden Pond of the Rockies.”

After a three-hour hike through the golden colors of autumn, we reached the pond and set up camp. We hiked around the pond. Stunning beauty in magnificent colors!

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“Hey, you might like this,” said Dave, as he pulled a flat smooth rock out of his pocket. “Do you see this?”

It read, “Meg Annette Rork.”

On the other side, it read, “May the force be with you.”

“Yeah,” Dave said. “I found it while I was running along the Teton Range this summer. I couldn’t figure out why anyone would leave such a beautiful flat rock with a person’s name and a quote from Star Wars. I looked up her name and found out that she was a really beautiful woman who died at the age of 41. She had lived a fantastic life. She got married a month before she died. I Googled her to find out about her life story. From now on, I am going to carry this rock with me and take Meg on many adventures in my lifetime. It seems like a good thing to do.”

“Man,” I exclaimed, “that’s heavy-duty profound. You have touched me deeply with that story. Good grief, what a terrible early death, but she lives on through her friends and that rock that you will carry on your adventures. Deeply touching my friend.”

“No telling what life brings to us or how fast it will end,” said Bob. “Nice to see you’re advancing Meg’s life a thousand-fold.”

As usual around any campfire, mountaineers tell stories. We laughed as we sipped more hot chocolate. I told of my love affair with Henry David Thoreau.

“Well, I’ve got a surprise for you,” said Dave.

“Yeah, what’s that?” I asked.

Henry David Thoreau said, “If you advance confidently toward your dreams, and endeavor to live the life which you have imagined, you will meet with success unexpectedly in common hours. You will pass through invisible boundaries and you will live with the license of a higher order of beings.”

“Since you’re a Thoreau admirer,” he said. “You might like this.”

At that moment, Dave pulled out his smart phone and turned on the audio from the book *Walden*. In a split second, Henry David Thoreau began talking about his experiences on Walden Pond. He spoke quietly and simply. He spoke to us as we sat around the campfire. He spoke about life and the pursuit of living. He spoke to us from 150 years ago—through the amazing technology of a smart phone with an audio book download.

“Good grief!” I said. “This is fantastic! This is incredible.”

“Pretty neat,” said Dave.

For the next half hour, we listened to Thoreau espouse his wisdom, his ideas, his thoughts on life. He described everything about living on Walden Pond.

“I can’t thank you enough,” I said to Dave. “Just amazing!”

“I thought you might like this as a special treat in the wilderness on your special pond that you have shared with us,” said Dave.

A few moments in life stand out. Somehow, those moments cement

themselves into your memory banks—never to be forgotten. That night, as I sat there with my college roommate Bob and my new friend Dave whom I had met on my bicycle ride across America in Texas in 2010, I knew that I would remember the magic of Walden Pond at 11,000 feet, the campfire and the amazing voice of Thoreau reaching out to all of us over the endless tracks of time. Dave showed us the rock with Megan Annette Rork that he would carry to further her life adventure.



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Bob sat back with a sense of peace and tranquility for his own remembrances in the woods. All three of us gathered for a photo flash near the campfire. It turned out fantastically with three dudes enjoying a singular moment in time.

“I went into the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...to put to rout all that was not life; and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” ~Henry David Thoreau

“Rise and shine dudes,” I said next morning, slapping their tent nylon. “The sun is coming up over the mountains and will soon be upon the lake. Get out your cameras.”

We stood on the shoreline to watch the sun first hit the mountain tops, then work its way into the tree line, and finally, with slow moving drama, it reached the glass still waters of Walden Pond. The tall pines reflected off the water

followed by the jagged rocks from the mountains above—they created a sublime tapestry of nature's artwork. The combination of huge rocks along the shoreline, criss-crossing logs, dragon flies, water bugs and sunbeams—gave Thoreau's musings a special accent on the transcendent.

We watched the magic unfold. Slow moving, changing colors. Certain evolving of sunbeams on the still waters. A slight breeze kicked up to create ripples on the far end. The pine needles seemed to spin on their own with the water ripples.

After the lake filled with sunshine, we filtered some fresh water, ate some breakfast and loaded our backpacks.

We stood on the edge of the water for a group shot. Three smiling faces. Three exultant spirits. Three souls plus Megan Annette Rork smiled into the camera. Seconds later, we headed into the deep woods too silent to be real. Walden Pond would continue shimmering throughout the day while we made our way along the mountain riches and pure golden memories.

Down the mountain, we walked on golden gilded trail replete with endless fallen golden leaves raining down from branches above. Golden ribbons hemmed the slopes and traced the streams that meandered down the valley—orange to red, saffron to copper and yellow to gold. They rained down on us like gentle golden butterflies. They decorated pine trees like Christmas lights. They caught in the purple asters and snagged themselves in the heavy under brush.

Next summer, Dave Carder and his team will run from El Paso, Texas to Orlando, Florida to help establish running clubs in cities along the way. I urge you to donate your money and time to their efforts to make America a better, healthier and kinder place. You will be inspired and happy to be a part of his legacy to serve the youth of America. His work will inspire you to create something good in your own community.

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