

Andrew's Walk

"I passed out on a couch in a garage, and woke up to a squirrel holding my hand. I freaked out because it's a squirrel, right? I just freaked out, and it kind of scurried along to a telephone poll about 10 feet away. I just stare back to the squirrel and it stares back at me for 10 minutes. I took it as a sign."

Waking up in a garage around 5AM of August 27th, 23-year-old Andrew Weaver took this as a sign to begin his long journey.

"I went from nothing, like zero dollars to my name, to everything I could ever want."

Two years into his college as a pre-medical student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Andrew found himself burdened with a huge amount of college debt and no money to pay for his tuition after his parents' divorce.

"As soon as you turn 24, if you've ever signed up for FAFSA, you can get free schooling when you turn 24."

His plan? Go for a walk until he turns 24.

"All I had was my backpack, my laptop, change of clothes, and a really old pair of shoes, about a year, year and a half year old shoes."

And of course, these amenities were not enough to protect him from the dangers of the wild. A couple days into his expedition, Andrew has developed some rules of his own.

"My first and most important: rules, I don't ask anyone for anything."

"Even if you are homeless, you can pay for it in your own way, you don't have to ask anyone for anything."

Most of the time, Andrew was lucky. A friendly guy gave him five dollars on his first day, in which he later used to purchase a sleeping bag at the Salvation Army. Occasionally, he will also get free food from the employees at local fast food restaurants. However, that's not always the case, Andrew came up with his second rule after a strange driver approached him.

"Which is I am not going to hop in a car, I am not going to hitchhike, I am not going to hop on the bus, I am going to walk every single step of the way. As long as I am progressing forward, I will walk."

So where is it, is he walking to?

"I remember thinking I am really bored, I am really really bored, it's going to get cold soon. Let's walk south."

Here is how Andrew maps out his trip:

"I am gonna walk East Coast to West Coast. So I am going to end up walking from Hilton Head South Carolina to California. I don't just want to end up in California, I

would like to see that coast, so I am going to walk up the coast to Washington. And then, I just kind thought, well heck it, might just well go back to Milwaukee then, that should take about a year."

And walking alone for about 8000 miles is not easy.

"You just being alone is probably one of the hardest things to do, because I felt like we surround by people so much, we almost figuring out through family, friend, or anyone. We kinds make ourselves based on who others think, or what they tell us, so when you are alone, you are not having anyone tell you what they're thinking, what you're acting like, so you lose yourself the first week or two. That's really scary and that's really hard. You start to craving for people. You almost crave knowing who you are."

As the days progress, what started as a journey of self discovery turned into something bigger: more of a goal Andrew tries to accomplish and inspire others.

"By the second week, I wake up and turn on my music, pack up, I just be walking down the road, I was in Indiana by this time. There were cornfields to my left and cornfields to my right. I am in the middle of nowhere. My tears were just streaming down my face. You are just so happy. It just a sense of freedom, just knowing you sets your goals, you are going to accomplish them. You are going to new town and meet new people, hopefully inspire new people, that's one of the best feelings in the world."

Is everyone on board with what he is determined to accomplish? Andrew did not tell his parents or his sister what he is doing or where he is going. He turned his phone off for three days before his departure and did not keep in touch with them. Here is what his mom told the police officer when he was stopped and questioned by the police.

"My mom was on the phone with the police station, she was like 'you need to get him to stay there, you need to do a psychiatric evaluation, because he is insane, he doesn't know what he was doing, he is basically going on a suicidal mission."

And Andrew's response?

"You can keep me here for 3 days, but I am an adult, no matter what, I will walk around the United States."

There were definitely moments, Andrew wishes he hadn't started the journey and he is back in Milwaukee with his girlfriend.

"I am walking down this dirt road, to Gainesville George. It's right off the highway, so I think it is safe. I was at 26 miles for the day, ran out food and water. I am still 5 miles out of the town. I am like I need to take a break. I am probably suffering from heat stroke, that probably happened twice a week when I don't have enough supply to starting out. I got tired, and take a break. I was just setting there on the edge, I saw this guy coming out his house. He starts walking towards me. I was like it's no big deal, I didn't see anything. He was about 100-150 yards away. All the sudden, I hear this really loud 'Bang'! I look at the guy again, he is carrying probably like a sixteen gauge shotgun in his hand, I grab

my backpack as quick I could. I just booked it down. That was the scariest moment in my life.

Despite all the danger and inconvenience, Andrews kept walking...

“Now, it’s like I almost can’t quit. There are people who donated to me. I am not letting down myself if I quit. I am letting down others. I am showing them I quit on this dream of mine. Now, it’s like a mission, that I have to do this. Otherwise, I am letting down all the people I am trying to inspire.”

Even though he is doing it himself, here is what Andrew recommends other travellers should do.

“Bring the money, I would recommend having a tent, I would recommend doing the exact opposite of what I did, and planning out your trip.”

When people compare him with Christopher McCandless from Into The Wild, Andrew declined their similarities.

“I do check GPS to make sure I am least within 50 miles from a town, because at most I can walk 50 miles a day. Anything more than that, I’ll probably die. I do try to make sure there is a town within certain distance.”

It was those moments...

“When I was in Indiana, the sunset to my right, just like pink, purple, everything is beautiful on my right. I am watching the sunset. I look over my left, there is just really cool dark blue moon. It’s just perfectly there. The moon and the sun, it’s just completely a balance. The moment right there, nothing really compares to the beauty of nature. It just so calming, I couldn’t imagine not being able to experience that.”

That kept Andrew going...

“A lot people learning their stuff from book, and others learning their it from experience, and I try to do both. I don’t want to spend my entire life in the book, I want to go out and see things too. You can read about the most beautiful sites in the U.S., or you can go see them.”

Last time I checked, Andrew was in Troy, Alabama, and he is not the only one out there...

“I am not the only one out there, you know? There are people who hitchhike, there are people who ride trains, there are other people who walk, and there are other people who bike. We are sub-cultural of the original population, we are all called travellers...”