

Blind Courage

by Bill Irwin (1992)

He was born into an alcoholic family in 1940. He was a successful businessman (at the expense of his family) & he was an alcoholic. He lost his sight at 36. Blindness accentuated the problems he tried to run away from with alcohol. At 47 his dad died, and then he lost his life savings in a foolish business venture. His son went into drug rehab, Bill found God & was delivered from his addiction (drinking & smoking).

Someone told him: "when you take your shoes off at night kick them under the bed so you have to get on your knees to get them. And when you're there ask God to help you thru the day." He realized he manipulated people & wanted to change. Two-thirds of the people in the US live within a day's drive to the Appalachian Trail (AT).

In 1990 he & his dog hiked the AT. You would have thought he would have had a seeing person with him, but most of the way they did not. At first the dog stopped at every rock or root in the way, but that would take too long. He fell a lot (especially in PA). Seeing-eye dogs were trained for the city, not the woods. Since he couldn't see the trail markers (2"x6" white paint on trees) & the dog didn't know what they were, he relied on his trail guide on tape & his dog would stop at every trail sign to stay on course.

The dog's name was Orient & they named themselves the Orient Express. A dog's keen sense of smell & hearing lead him to water, but one night he set down his pack to camp for the night, but then went to get water, but couldn't find camp again. They hiked to the nearest road & blew his whistle for help. Each day on the trail was a promise kept (to himself & God). God orchestrated many miracles along the trail. He had to modify the dog's pack to keep it from rubbing him wrong.

A lady from church agreed to coordinate his mail drops & update the website. This became a full-time job when the media got a hold of the story. One time his dog ran off & didn't come back for hours. The sun helped stay going north. He came upon a bear, but the bear left. They came into a store, when he was asked to get the dog out. He said no & they called the sheriff, who said it was OK.

Inch worms (gypsy moth larva) would completely eat the leaves off the trees. At least 20 times in PA he would have to lift Orient over his head to get to the next rock. He learned it is the journey, not the destination, is the important thing. He got snowed in at a cabin for 3 days. He was taken downstream by the current of a river crossing. A trail angel met him several times to resupply in the 100-mile wilderness. Winter was closing in fast. He had to climb Mt Katahdin before they closed for the winter, then complete the trail. He boldly speaks out for God.

Movie: 5 million steps