

PRESS KIT: *Hiking Without Dave* by CW Spencer

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BOOK SUMMARY:

Another suicide of a close family member—this time his kid brother. The news sent CW Spencer skidding toward despair. Waves of devastating guilt washed over him, threatening to drown out any hope of future happiness. Two choices lay before him: He could either camp in that spot and give in to the despair, or he could start off on an unknown path in search of healing and redemption.

Hiking Without Dave is a true account of failure, grief, forgiveness, and healing. CW's path turned out to be over 1,400 miles and took three and a half years to travel. He and his brother had planned to hike the Appalachian Trail, but with Dave gone, CW decided to tackle the entire Buckeye Trail in Ohio. He journaled his experiences to Dave, then blended those journal pages with stories about his life with Dave over their 47 years together.

CW provides an intimate look into the pain and loss he experienced, but also shares many lighthearted moments. He takes the reader along, both on his journey on the Buckeye Trail and on his journey to hope and healing. In this case, they happened to be the same path.

MORE ABOUT THE BOOK:

Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the U.S. It takes the lives of almost 40,000 Americans each year. That's an average of 108 per day or 1 every 13 minutes. It is estimated that each suicide intimately affects 6 other people. That puts the number of suicide survivors into the millions. It is likely that you or someone you know has been affected by the tragedy of suicide.

Nearly everyone who commits or attempts suicide has given some clue as to their intention, but sometimes it is difficult to identify suicidal thinking, particularly in a loved one. Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things we can do to prevent a loved one from becoming another statistic.

CW Spencer writes from his own experience of losing two close family members to suicide. Even though he had recently attended counselor training in identifying suicide risk factors, he missed the obvious warning signs his brother displayed. He had to deal with the resulting guilt and with the feelings of shame and failure shared by so many other suicide survivors. Despite his embarrassment about his own blindness, he tells his story in the hope of beginning life-saving discussions, enlightening as to warning signs, and comforting the suicide survivor by letting him know he is not alone.

AUTHOR BIO

CW Spencer grew up in northeastern Ohio. He left Ohio for Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, and never made it back to Ohio, at least not to live. He began and finished a 27-year teaching career in the same school district in northern Kentucky where he taught middle school science and met Bonnie, his future wife. They have been married over 25 years and reside in Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

After retirement, CW owned a lawn care business for ten years. He enjoys volunteering at a local nursing home, leading church services for campers, and driving his classic truck to car shows. More recently, after his life was touched by tragedies, he began hiking and writing. He pens a blog about his hiking adventures and daily life at cwspencer.com.

In 2003, CW lost a son to suicide, and in 2008 his brother Dave completed suicide. CW and Dave had planned to hike the Appalachian Trail together. After Dave passed away, CW decided to hike the more accessible Buckeye Trail in Ohio. He journaled his experiences to Dave, and that was the beginning of *Hiking Without Dave*.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. This is your first book. Have you done any writing before?

I wrote lesson plans at school for 27 years, if you count that. Or we could go back farther to when I was in middle school and wrote "I will not throw paper wads in class" 100 times on the board. Seriously, though, I began my website to blog about my hiking and daily life. But this is my first major writing project.

2. What was your motivation for writing *Hiking Without Dave*?

My kid brother Dave and I always dreamed about hiking the AT together. Tragically, he completed suicide before that could happen. I set out on the Buckeye Trail to find healing, and part of the healing process was journaling my hiking experiences to Dave. That journal makes up part of *Hiking Without Dave*. I wish I could have done more to stop Dave, but at least my story may help somebody else in a similar situation.

3. Was it difficult for you to write this story?

Yes, it was hard reliving the suicide and the events leading up to it over and over again. Many tears flowed. I found that in order to grieve for Dave, I also had to revisit the pain of losing my son to suicide five years before. But at the same time, it was a healing experience.

4. Suicide is a heavy topic. Will the reader find *Hiking Without Dave* to be depressing?

There are a few hard chapters, naturally, but I have a belief that good can come from even the worst of circumstances. I tried to balance the sadness with an equal or greater amount of humor and hope. Besides the journal, I included stories of some of the crazy times Dave and I had together. I think the reader will be surprised at the amount of humor in this book.

5. Have you always been a hiker?

No. Not seriously until I started hiking on the Buckeye Trail. There were only short hiking trips with my kids and Dave before that. My inexperience in hiking and backpacking are very evident in the early chapters of my book and provide some of the humor.

6. What made you choose the Buckeye Trail for your hike?

The Buckeye Trail is a circular trail that goes around Ohio. The southern terminus is within just a few miles of my home in northern Kentucky, so the trail was relatively accessible for my many trips. I'm originally a Buckeye, so many of the places it winds through have special meaning for me. And at two-thirds the length of the Appalachian Trail, I knew that if I could finish it, it would be an accomplishment to be proud of, maybe to even brag about—in a humble way, of course.

7. Who might be interested in reading *Hiking Without Dave*?

There are enough hiking stories in the book to interest anyone from the wannabe to the avid hiker. Those who have been touched by suicide will find a story they can relate to and maybe gain some insight from. Also folks who just like to read about everyday people working their way through relational issues and real life struggles, in a sometimes humorous manner.

8. What do you hope the reader will take away from reading *Hiking Without Dave*?

I hope reading *Hiking Without Dave* might increase the awareness of suicide warning signs and the importance of intervention. Also I would want the suicide survivor (a person who has been affected by the loss of someone to suicide) to come away with the realization that life can and does go on and that hope exists. On the lighter side, just maybe the reader will come away with a desire to begin exploring the Buckeye Trail or another trail in his or her own neck of the woods.

9. Are you working on any other writing projects?

Yes, two things and they both deal with my childhood. One is about my middle school years in Tippecanoe when we weren't as safety conscious as we are now. The other is about the yearly trips to Rice Lake in Canada that the men in my family took together. It's early yet, but right now it looks like they might both deal with life lessons told by way of my family's and my crazy antics.

REVIEWS

Many people find solace and healing in nature. Life is full of sorrowful, painful and confusing moments, as well as happiness, comfort and clarity. Sometimes the hard parts of life are especially piercing and require a departure from daily routines.

CW Spencer, with the support of his loving wife Bonnie, made a lot of choices in dealing with the loss of his brother Dave. CW chose to hike Ohio's 1,400+ mile Buckeye Trail, not as an escape but as a purposeful departure from daily life, to find healing in connecting to nature on the trail. CW chose to open himself up to the sorrow and happiness, pain and comfort, confusion and clarity, and the company of other characters along his journey. CW's greatest choice is to share his heartfelt experience with all of us, with a sense of humor that lifts us up.

I have also hit the trail to deal with loss. Perhaps you have found solace in nature, and joy and humor in sharing that experience with others when you needed it. As the Executive Director of the Buckeye Trail Association, and a volunteer Trail Adopter, I am humbled to know that the trail helps to create personal experiences even deeper than a fun weekend backpacking. CW shares an important and entertaining story of a life full of sorrows and joys, each moment another step forward. The trail provided CW with an opportunity for deeper understanding and he's invited us along for the journey. I hope his story touches you and lifts you up when you need it.

—Andrew Bashaw, *Executive Director, Buckeye Trail Association*

CW creatively and successfully blends each event-filled journal entry with memories of his close, but sometimes turbulent, relationship with his deceased brother. The people he encountered and the events he experienced as he hiked segments of the Buckeye Trail trigger memories of time spent with his brother. I know after reading this insightful book, I will be looking for the "blue blaze" whenever I travel in Ohio. I will also be more observant of signs of severe depression in those around me.

CW's journey through the Buckeye Trail might be meant as a tribute to [Dave]. It is so much more. As a reader, I learned just enough about the Buckeye Trail. As a friend and former colleague, I gained an appreciation for the strength and determination of a man I've known for over 35 years. If I didn't already know [CW], I'd want to meet [him] after reading [*Hiking Without Dave*].

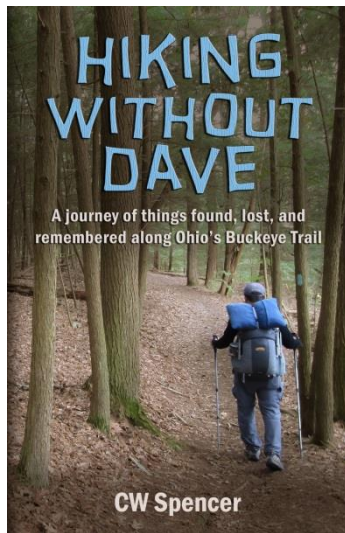
This book should be read by anyone dealing with the devastation of losing a loved one to suicide. Survivors can learn from CW's healing journey. You don't have to be a hiker to be inspired by this memoir.

—Debbie Yeager, *English Program Consultant, 1999 Fellow of NKy Writing Project XIV*

PHOTOS OF BOOK COVER AND AUTHOR: [located in separate file]

SAMPLE CHAPTERS: [located in separate file]

PRESS RELEASE: [located in separate file]



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