

When I turned 33, I had a “Same Age as Jesus and Alexander the Great” party at Fox & Hound with a group of friends. We played pool, we drank, we had a great time. The next February, I started my first hiking book and a massive change in my life.

I could tell you that I turned 33 and took stock of my life and decided that I needed a change of direction. I could tell the story that I had too many nights spent in a bar, too many nights in smoked filled rooms playing poker in games of dubious legality. I could tell you that I wanted to start exploring and learn more about the state I call home. I could tell you I wanted to become outdoorsy. I could tell you that I decided I wanted more experiences with friends under the stars and around the glow up a campfire over that of a closing sign. I could tell a story of growing up and settling down.

I could tell you those things, but they wouldn't be true.

The truth is I had always thought one got lice from trees and I finally realized that wasn't true. At the same time, I happened to have a student who constantly talked about her hiking trips and I asked her to recommend a hiking book. She did, and I just started doing hikes. After six years, in a month or so, I will finish my second hiking book covering all of Alabama.

I think a lot about the story of my life, and what story I would tell. I really want to give myself credit for personal accomplishments, credit for who I have become, but much of that would be undeserved. Whatever control I have over my life is often for the better less than I believe. When I was 33, I didn't plan to spend the next 6 years developing memories with friends and learning more about the backroads of Alabama. I didn't do this knowing that over the next six years I would gain new friends, and discover new places. I didn't plan this so that one day I could say “I've done that” about hikes from Walls of Jericho in the northeast corner to Pine Beach Trail in the southwest corner of the state. And although I didn't plan these things, a path is formed by walking on it. Instead of setting out with these goals, I have simply continued to pursue a course of action that continued to integrate many goals I had in my life, and over time I have reached some personal accomplishments. When I tell the story of my life, I have to remember the happenstance as much as the deliberate. You may not end up where you had planned, but find an activity that integrates many goals in your life, and stay with that as long as it has heart, and you will be surprised at how much you can accomplish making small choices in a consistent direction.

Who knows where the next six years will take me.

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