

Commentary... Trekking with 'Tall Socks Tanya'

By **Becky Aylor** AKA 'Short Sock Suntan'
Guest Columnist

Dirt.
There's something about it. As kids, we "experience" it. We dig in it, sniff it and taste it. We add water to make mud-pies, throw it and watch it splatter, hop in it and kick it and watch it blow away in the wind. Together we build and insulate our forts with it, build jumps for our bikes out of it, and then we grow up and dirt seems to lose its wonder. At some point, it's just "dirty" and downright filthy. I'm constantly sweeping it out of my house, out of my car, and washing it out of my clothing.

...and then I turned 50.
...and then the pandemic.
...then the pandemic didn't end.

But it was summer!
Educators are some of the hardest workers on the planet. I've worked a zillion jobs (hardware store, pizzeria, toy store, pre-schools, summer day camps, telemarketer, sales, juvie-corrections, server, banker *and* a teacher, to name a few). It's been almost a decade that I've brushed shoulders with teacher peeps day in and day out. *But* it wasn't until the summer of '20 that I really got to know the strength of a local middle school teacher.

Celebrating the early summer birthday dinner of a colleague ended with some sidewalk chatter; "Hey, we should get together again! How about a hike? On Tuesday?" We even kicked around some names: Sole Sisters; The Young and the Rest of Us; Blister Sisters; etc. In the end, we didn't really have a group name that stuck...we had something better. We had "Tall Socks Tanya."

Tanya Young defines petite. She's itty bitty. Delicate, with blond hair and perfect skin. She has the most caring and compassionate heart of a teacher with a perfect voice to match. If you know her at all you'll know she's wicked smart and witty too. She is also one of the most amazing mothers that I've ever met. Teaching science full time is just her side gig.

Then there's "Tall Socks Tanya." I'm convinced her well-traveled insulated hiking boots match her overall body weight. Her weighty backpack is complete with bear spray, a satellite locator, water filter, nutrition supplies (cinnamon candy bears are essential gear), water, etc. Her phone is well-charged

with all of her research — hidden under well-loved icons.

We hiked every Tuesday this summer after that day. Tall Socks Tanya, true to form, would wear socks pulled up to her knees and rather-worn Nike capri hiking pants. I, on the other hand, wore shorts and short socks and am quite sure I will have a solid tan line on my ankle... forever (and yes, Dr. Bachtold, I started wearing sunscreen this year too).

We often rallied at Tollgate. Masked up, car-pooled, picked up other teachers along the way, and followed our fierce wilderness guide up the next dusty trail of awesomeness. Beautiful hidden trails that wove in and out of old-growth pines and skipped over creeks and meadows displaying the most vibrant wildflowers one could imagine. Some hikes were four to five miles and others were over 10. Several hikes had elevation gains of 2,500 feet!



Every single step was worth the stunning views at the top overlooking the snow-covered mountain peaks, buttes, and valleys. I was awestruck with Tanya's confidence and strength. I was also awestruck at how much dirt seemed to come home on me.

Like Forest Gump walking...

Tanya Young started hiking two years ago. I don't know the why, but I know she's addicted. She has a goal of walking 1,200 miles (miles) in 2020. I'm sure she's at 900-plus miles by now. She hiked almost every day of the summer (and often overnight weekend backpacking trips).

This tiny, meek, seemingly shy teacher is a complete beast. The tallest mountains have met their match. The scorching heat of the summer sun and the "flocks" of mosquitos did not deter. Often she would trek solo on 15-plus-mile hikes. I feel privileged and grateful that she shared herself with me and others on Tuesdays so that we, too, could experience the awe and wonder that Central Oregon holds to those that seek it out — not to mention the laughs of just being together and talking story.

Tall Socks Tanya and I are opposite in many of our personal beliefs



PHOTOS COURTESY BECKY AYLOR

Author Becky Aylor got out into the back country this summer with ardent hiker and teaching colleague Tanya Young.

— but in the end, just like all of us, we truly are more similar than different.

I worked alongside these wonderful souls for years, even shared a wall and hall with Tall Socks Tanya. My point? Don't let the pandemic strip you of continuing to build friendships. Get out there and enjoy the beauty that lies in our backyard, not

to mention it is probably the best medicine for our mental and physical health.

Take a hike.
Take your family.
Take just yourself.
Sucking wind, won't kill ya (at least I don't think so), but the views might just take your breath away.

Dirt.
It still bonds.

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