

# Oregon mother, infant bond on trails to 50 waterfalls

Baby has been everywhere before he learned to walk

By **SHERRI BURI MCDONALD**  
*The Register-Guard*

EUGENE — As he nears his first birthday, Rowdy Briggs, a brown-eyed, chubby-cheeked towhead from Cottage Grove, is making good progress on all his milestones.

He's babbling, he's waving, and he's standing with support, gearing up to take his first tentative steps.

By his birthday on July 28, Rowdy and his mom, Alivea Binder, will reach another important milestone — one that's all their own.

They will have hiked to 50 northwest waterfalls, from Cedar Creek Falls, near Dorena Lake, southeast of Cottage Grove, to Palouse Falls in eastern Washington, which they plan to visit next month.

Rowdy and his mom have averaged at least a hike a week since he was 5 months old, logging more than 150 miles on the trail in wind, rain and even snow.

Binder set the goal of hiking with her son to 50 waterfalls in his first year when she was at a low point in her life.

Rowdy was 3 months old when his dad, Binder's former partner, Kyle Briggs, left his young family, returning to Washington state, Binder said.

"The hardest thing about all of this was becoming a single mom," she said. "I was at home so miserable, depressed and sad and lonely."

"I was going to counseling and that didn't seem to be going anywhere. I needed some motive to do something."

Hiking to waterfalls provided the incentive Binder needed to get up and going.

"Waterfall hikes are so rewarding," Binder said, as she carried 22-pound Rowdy in a baby backpack along the forested trail to shimmering South Falls at Silver Falls State Park, east of Salem.

"You have a destination, something to see, so all the sweat and hating it is worth it in the end," said the trim, energetic 24-year-old.

For Binder, hiking is a way to get outdoors, stay fit, lift her mood and strengthen her bond with her son.

It's also a positive way to cope with all that life throws your way, the single mom said.

"This has been incredible to get out," she said. "It's like the second you're hiking and outdoors, it clears your mind."

"I tell my family, hiking is my therapy. It's the best therapy ever."

The oldest of seven children, Binder grew up in the Olympia area of Washington.

She and Briggs, her former partner, moved to Oregon from Washington in September 2015 to be closer to her family. Binder's dad, Steven Vann, lives in Dorena.

Two months later, she found out she was pregnant.

Nearly all new parents struggle to adjust to the routine of night feedings, sleep deprivation and being on call around the clock. But Binder had some additional challenges.

Rowdy was nine pounds at



Alivea Binder and her son, Rowdy Briggs, hike in Silver Falls State Park east of Salem on May 31 as they close in on their goal of completing 50 hikes to Northwest waterfalls in Rowdy's first year of life.

Brian Davies/The Register-Guard

birth, and "I'm a small person," Binder said, adding that it was an all-natural birth.

Rowdy was born with jaundice. His coloring was so yellow and his hair so platinum blond, that she and Rowdy's pediatrician, Dr. Todd Huffman, both immediately saw the resemblance to then-presidential candidate Donald Trump. They jokingly called Rowdy "Baby Trump" until his jaundice cleared, Binder said.

Then just three months after giving birth, Binder suddenly found herself a single mom.

Now within one hike of her audacious 50 waterfalls goal, Binder advises other new moms who may be struggling with relationships or other troubles, to "get out and hike, and get your mind off things. Get out in nature."

"Just focus on being a good mom and put all your effort into that."

Pediatrician Huffman said he found Binder's story "inspiring from the get-go."

"It's young parents like Alivea who give me hope for the future," he said. "She is energetic and curious and articulate. She is a very involved, loving mom and is very eager to show her child the world and teach her child to live big and love nature and explore everywhere."

"It's wonderful that Alivea is teaching her child right from the start that there should be no rain or any other weather to slow you down," Huffman said.

Setting and sticking to such an ambitious goal is "something kind of new for (Alivea)," said Vann, Binder's dad.

"We're really proud of her," he said. "She packed a lot of miles with a baby in a pack, which isn't easy, and she did it in the time of year when the weather isn't all that nice, either."

Vann said it's amazing how comfortable and contented Rowdy is on the trail.

"We've gone on a few hikes with Alivea and offered to take Rowdy, so she could get a break," Vann said.

"The little guy just sits in the pack with a big smile on his face. He's just like, 'No problem,



In this May 31 photo, Rowdy Briggs rides in a pack on the back of his mother, Alivea Binder, as they visit Silver Falls State Park east of Salem.

Brian Davies/The Register-Guard via AP

let's go for another hike," Vann said.

He said the hikes his daughter and grandson have taken together have brought mother and son closer together.

"I think any time you share an experience, regardless of the age, you're going to build a closer bond with each other. I spent thousands of hours with my kids. When you share an experience you create a bond."

Binder said many people, including those she has just met, have said, "(Rowdy) loves you so much."

"We're all each other has," Binder said. "I'm sure all babies love their moms, but there's a special bond between us."

With that, the pair continued down the trail to South Falls. Rowdy's diaper and jeans-clad bottom was suspended in the seat harness of the baby backpack his mom wore, and his baby Nikes bounced against her lower back.

Rowdy reached out, gently stroking a handful of his mom's long blond hair.

Binder said she carried Rowdy in a front pack until he was 7 months old, and liked having him so close. She switched to the backpack when his weight in the front pack put too much strain on her back.

Binder said she usually changes

Rowdy's diaper in the car before they set off to hike and changes it again when they return to the car a couple of hours later.

Thankfully, he hasn't had any major blow-outs on the trail, she said.

Binder said before they set out, usually leaving Cottage Grove at about 6 a.m., she researches their destination and checks comments from recent hikers on her AllTrails app.

They're not always accurate, she said, recalling a comment last month from a hiker who had been to Salt Creek Falls in the Willamette National Forest near Oakridge, the day before Binder planned to take Rowdy.

The hiker said there was only a bit of snow, but when Binder pulled her car toward the trailhead, the parking lot sign was nearly buried in snow.

Binder said she counts that among their worst hikes.

"It was snowing while we were there," she said.

"(Rowdy) didn't want to do it. He was miserable; I was miserable." But those experiences have been the exception, Binder said.

One of their most memorable hikes was last month to 113-foot Toketee Falls on the North Umpqua River in Douglas County.

"It was amazing," she said.

## BLOOMIN' BLUES

### Eastern Oregon's only figwort out in bloom

By **BRUCE BARNES**  
*For the East Oregonian*

**Common Name:** Lanceleaf Figwort  
**Scientific Name:** *Scrophularia lanceolata*

This perennial plant is somewhat common but seldom noticed. *Scrophularia* is the type genus for the family Scrophulariaceae, meaning that the basic flower characteristics of the plants in the genus set the standard for which plants should be included in the family.

This member of the genus is found across southern Canada and most of the U.S. except the southeastern states. About a dozen species are found in the western U.S. and another 90 or so in Europe and Asia. The figwort in this article is the only one in Eastern Oregon and generally grows at middle elevations.

The family and genus names are from the Latin *scrophula*, which is a disease of the neck tissues that was once believed to be cured by the plants of this genus.

Lanceolate refers to the lance-shaped leaves. Figwort is a name applied to plants in this genus many centuries ago. Wort, the latter part of the name figwort, was often tacked



Photo courtesy Bruce Barnes

#### Lanceleaf Figwort

onto the end of plant names, to simply indicate it was the name of a plant, so I suppose one could substitute the name figplant, though it has nothing to do with figs.

Lanceleaf Figwort is usually about three feet tall with one to several stems per plant. The stems are square, and the lance-shaped leaves are in opposite

pairs on the stem, with jagged edges.

The flowers set this plant apart from any other plant in the Blues, though they are a dark, dull purplish to green or brownish color guaranteed to avoid being noticed.

The flowers are also rather odd-shaped, kind of like some sort of deformed guppy. More specifically, they are the size and shape of a large vitamin capsule with a little baseball cap sun-visor sticking out at one end. The flowers are later replaced by cone-shaped seed capsules.

European and Asian species of *Scrophularia* were used for a variety of skin ailments including sores and cuts in addition to scrophula. *Scrophularia lanceolata* was used by many American Indian tribes across North America.

The primary use appears to have been for skin ailments including infections, sunburn and frostbite. Several tribes also used a decoction of the roots to treat bleeding following childbirth. The similar medicinal uses for plants of the genus were used in both eastern and western hemispheres long before any contact between people of the east and west.

**Where to find:** This plant is currently blooming in a few places along Highway 204 west of Spout Springs in the vicinity of Andes Prairie.

## Whitman Mission receives EPA award

*East Oregonian*

WALLA WALLA — Whitman Mission National Historic Site has been selected to receive an award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for water conservation after the park lowered its water usage by 36 percent in 2016.

The award comes from the Federal Green Challenge, part of the EPA's Sustainable Materials Management Program, which challenges government offices throughout the country to reduce their environmental impact.

The program is broken down into six categories: energy, electronics, purchasing, transportation, waste and water. Awards are given by the EPA to encourage efforts that save money, reduce carbon footprint and protect the

environment.

Out of all agencies that participated in the Federal Green Challenge, Whitman Mission yielded the most water conservation across the Pacific Northwest Region by reducing the number of irrigated lawns in favor of planting native grasses. The vegetation also requires less mowing, which reduces gas emissions and fuel consumption.

Other Pacific Northwest winners include:

- Innovation and transportation — Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park, Skagway, Alaska (Department of the Interior).
- Electronics and leadership — Bonneville Power Administration, Portland (Department of Energy).
- Energy — Cadillac Hotel, Seattle (National Park Service).

Have a photo of your luncker of a fish?  
Email it to [ttrainor@eastoregonian.com](mailto:ttrainor@eastoregonian.com)