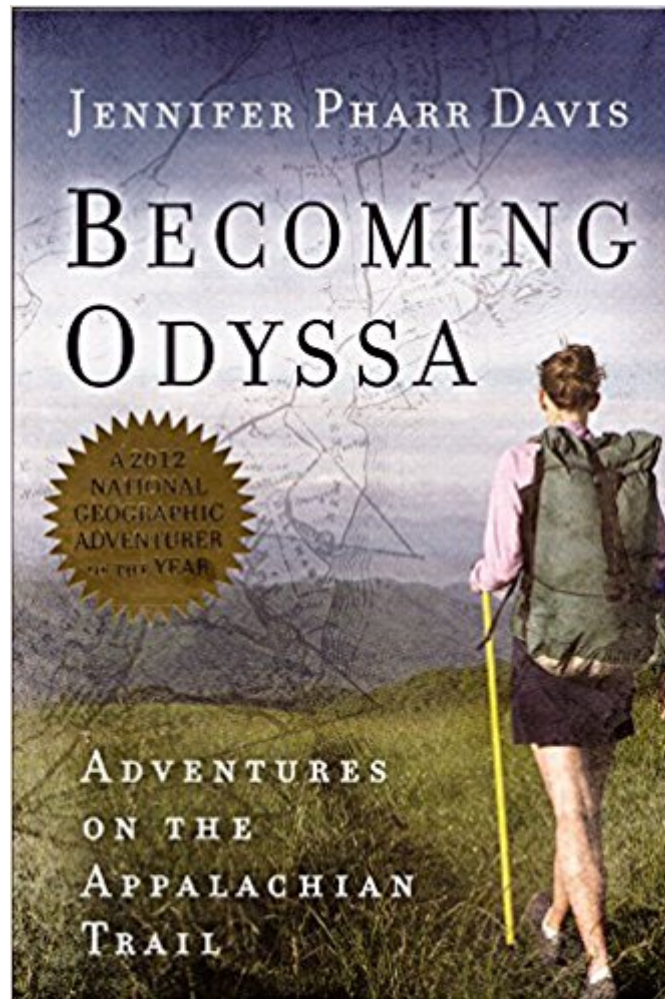


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Becoming Odysa: Adventures On The Appalachian Trail



Synopsis

After graduating from college, Jennifer isn't sure what she wants to do with her life. She is drawn to the Appalachian Trail, a 2175-mile footpath that stretches from Georgia to Maine. Though her friends and family think she's crazy, she sets out alone to hike the trail, hoping it will give her time to think about what she wants to do next. The next four months are the most physically and emotionally challenging of her life. She quickly discovers that thru-hiking is harder than she had imagined: coping with blisters and aching shoulders from the 30-pound pack she carries; sleeping on the hard wooden floors of trail shelters; hiking through endless torrents of rain and even a blizzard. With every step she takes, Jennifer transitions from an over-confident college graduate to a student of the trail, braving situations she never imagined before her thru-hike. The trail is full of unexpected kindness, generosity, and humor. And when tragedy strikes, she learns that she can depend on other people to help her in times of need.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who attempts to take on the Appalachian Trail in one shot is of interest to me, so I pay attention to all of these stories and have enjoyed the individual perspectives of many a thru-hiker. Generally speaking, most approach the trail with an open mind and heart, while naturally being concerned about their own ability to respond to the trials the AT might present. Jennifer Pharr Davis' story starts off well, buoyed by the charm of a young hiker fresh out of college who doesn't even know how to wash her pans properly in the wild, someone who's decided to hike with an old pack she dug out of her parent's basement. She is not "tech-savvy" about her gear as so many hikers are

these days, and has to learn almost everything through trial-and-error. In many ways it's the early-on-the-trail, day-to-day inanities like these that are so appealing about tales of thru-hikers. But there is an odd lack of joy in her perception of the glorious world through which she passes, and it doesn't take long for a sort of sourness to creep into her narrative. She is sympathetic to those who seem most like her (a woman she perceives to be in distress, for example, or a fellow Christian hiker) but is shockingly judgmental about everyone else, calling other hikers "left-wing anti-fundamentalist squirrels." She claims such people are everywhere on the trail, and the impression is that she has been subjected to some sort of persecution at their hands; yet she never relays a single incident of any intolerance towards her own religious views. And when she stumbles upon a suicide at a New Jersey shelter, she manages to interpret it as specifically having something to do with her. Eventually her own pontification becomes the central, overwhelming element the story, bumping the tale of The Trail off to the side of the road. After a time, the pattern becomes obvious and the details of the hike cease to matter. All told, it's a strange way to pass through the universe, if you ask me. If you can get past all of this unnerving inner demon stuff there might be a decent thru-hiker story in here somewhere, but I haven't found it. Good luck with that. Between her gray, soulless view of the world around her and her constant need brandish her religion like a knife in a dark alley, the book, like her hike, is not a pleasant trip. I'm surprised that more reviewers haven't commented on this. I've seen that Ms. Davis has since moved on to become the AT speed champion, thru-hiking the trail faster than anyone else. This makes perfect sense, given her treatment of the AT here; that it and its various denizens--both human and otherwise--are simply annoyances to be both endured and overcome as fast as possible, not natural wonders to be savored.

I really enjoyed this account of a young woman hiking the Appalachian Trail, especially since so many trail narratives are written by men. (But that is understandable, since men seem to outnumber women as thru-hikers.) The writing was clear and concise, the narrative well-paced and detailed. I found the author to be authentic and likable, even after I found out that she was a devout Christian. In the interest of full disclosure, I admit I sometimes find Christians to write in a way that is unnecessarily preachy and patronizing, but Jennifer Davis fell into neither of these traps. Instead she talks about her faith as it pertains to her own spiritual growth, neither apologizing for it or making it an agenda. I was grateful for her refreshing candid attitude. At one point she even compares herself as a Christian to a bear on the trail--rare and frightening--while non-Christians are like squirrels, numerous and non-threatening. I found this analogy to be both humorous and

accurate. I especially liked her admittance of early mistakes on the trail, amusing thoughts about other hikers, and the details about various towns and the strange or normal people populating them. She made me very excited about my future thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail.

I loved *Becoming Odyssa*. It is such a wonderful story that keeps you captivated through the miles covered on the Appalachian Trail. For someone who has not hiked the Trail, it really brought the experience to life. Instead of being a mere guide book, it details the ups and downs of hiking through Davis' flowing prose. I have a friend who plans to hike the AT this spring, and this would be the first book I would recommend. It provides a realistic picture of what to expect. While reading this book, I found myself laughing out loud through many parts, as Davis recounted unseemly rashes, the "women googles" the men on the AT seem to possess after going for some time without seeing the opposite sex, and the funny couples encountered throughout the wilderness. I would recommend this book to just about anyone. It is a must read for potential through-hikers, but it is so much more than that. I am giving it to my mom, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and a co-worker for Christmas. Despite being in different stages in their lives, they all will appreciate the coming-of-age story of a woman as she dares to encounter new adventures. It makes me want to go out and do something! Buy this book - you won't be sorry.

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