

Author beats suicidal depression by hiking the entire Appalachian Trail.

Dead Men Hike No Trails

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/books/2310.html>

DEAD MEN

HIKE NO TRAILS

ZERO

Zero is when a 150-foot-tall cannon shaped liked a clenched fist blasts the ashes of your mentor into the Colorado night sky with you one of the lucky few there and close enough to feel the fallout.

Ground Zero. This is where it ends, a man's life, his legacy, and all the fear and the loathing that made of him an icon. With the cannon smoke still wafting, I grab Stevie's cell phone and dial my cousin in New Hampshire as promised. The signal is poor, but just enough. The small crowd gathered at the entrance to Owl Farm is singing now. "Justin? Justin can you hear me? This is it!" I hold the phone high above my head and join in as Bob Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man* is broadcast through the canyon, a weird funeral dirge for a man whose journalistic legacy will always carry with it visions of violence, drugs, insanity. But hey, it was his favorite song.

I came a long way to be here, some 500 miles over the Continental Divide. As my mentor had in his youth traveled to Hemingway's home in Idaho to pay his respects in the wake of the man's suicide, so, too, did I come to bid Hunter Thompson farewell. But I came not by car, but on foot. And I did it for more than just an eyewitness account of the cannon blast. I attached meaning to my journey, garnering media attention with a hike sometimes reaching heights of 14,000 feet to raise public awareness of the stigma of depression as one of the chief triggers of suicide. Though I believe that Thompson's suicide was more of what Karl Menninger called an organic suicide, one in response to a physical illness or infirmity, I seized upon the occasion of his memorial to call attention to all suicide, a cause of death statistically epidemic in America.

"Justin! You still there?"

"Yeah, I'm still here. That was great, cuz. You made it! You really DID IT! I'm proud of you, man."

I thanked Stevie as I handed her back her phone. The buzz in the air was intoxicating. Earlier, before sunset when several of my fellow non-VIPs had begun chanting, "Hunter this sucks!" I'd been quick to remind them in an authoritative voice that surprised even me that outside the gate was the right place to be; that we had the best seats in the house. "Hunter isn't in *there*!" I shouted. "He's out here with us, with his kind of people." It felt right. Besides, as per the view, the cannon was 150-feet tall, and we couldn't have

RICK McKINNEY

been more than a football field away. Now as we walk down the hill back toward the Woody Creek Tavern with the shadow of the Gonzo fist projected by giant spotlights against the low-lying clouds above us, I've no doubt in my mind. Hunter was with us. It felt so good to be with him, on his turf, in his town on that night. To try and describe it better would be moot. Hunter himself said it best:

...no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant...

It was only much later as I bade my fellow Gonzo Junkies farewell that I began to ponder just what *had* it meant. I took Justin's words and, as a chronic depressive will do, turned them against myself. What had I accomplished, really? Thanks primarily to Denver's Westword, The Aspen Times and the Steamboat Chronicle, I'd gotten my 15 minutes out of this one. With help from the Internet, my name would be forever folded into the footnotes of Thompson's farewell. But what had I accomplished for the 30,000 annual suicides? Had I done anything to help them? How many had I saved?

Walking away from the Woody Creek Tavern and down the dark road, my brain answered, "Zero." I began going into a tailspin when somehow I stopped the spiraling sinkhole of my mind and shouted, "No! You're not going there! You've helped somebody, somewhere. You may never know their names or how many or how much, but you did something GOOD!"

I had tried. After nearly a decade of oft-crippling depression, I had reached inside myself and pulled out not the usual woes but a strength I hardly thought possible. And with it I had come along way. A long, long way. Further than just the 500 miles to Aspen from the north.

In fact, I had walked a lot further in the past year and a half than most people will walk in their lifetime. And I had written a book, this book.

Zero is how many miles of long-distance hiking I had ever done before this story began. Zero then, is not only the end but also the beginning.

It was to be a struggle, a battle of wits between my full-of-life self and that part of me that would just as soon have been dead. For death, it could be said, is what started it all. As with many a battle, it all began with one gunshot.

Zero is the beginning of this story, the story of the greatest journey of my life.

Author beats suicidal depression by hiking the entire Appalachian Trail.

Dead Men Hike No Trails

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/books/2310.html>