

## Meet Janet Martin

### By Danny Bernstein



I met Janet in 2001. We were both on a Smokies backpack led by Tom Sanders, where we climbed several SB6Ks (South Beyond 6000) peaks in the Smokies.

Currently, Janet is the oldest woman who comes on all-day hikes on a regular basis. Most Sundays and Wednesdays, when she's in town, she hikes with CMC.

Until Janet moved to Asheville, she was also known as having driven the furthest regularly to join CMC on hikes.

"I was in Girl Scouts in elementary school. Unfortunately, when the Girl Scouts had outdoor activities, my mom kept me at home because she felt I would get hurt." Still it didn't stop Janet from becoming an outdoor woman.

Janet was born in 1943 in Erie Pennsylvania. Until she moved to Asheville in 2008, she lived in Kentuckiana, the area where Kentucky and Indiana meet, outside of Louisville.

"I was an accountant for a few years. Then I was lucky to be able to be a stay-at-home mom for a few years. When my daughter, Crystal, was in Junior High School, I started law school. I became a civil defense lawyer, working in medical malpractice defense work."

#### **When did you start hiking?**

My daughter invited me to go to Japan and hike. This was about twenty years ago. I realized that if I was going to spend time with my daughter, it was going to be on active outdoor trips.

At the time, I had lots of sandals and stilettos. I found an old pair of my husband's combat boots in our closet. I didn't know that they made hiking boots for women. I walked in town to practice. My town in Indiana was not as flat as one might think, more like rolling hills.

When I came back from that trip, I started hiking with our local Sierra club. One year, I came down to the Smokies with the club. We aimed for Cosby campground and started up Low Gap Trail. I just couldn't climb to the A.T. That night, I slept in the van while the rest of the group

camped out off the A.T. I was bothered that I couldn't do it. I convinced a friend to come back down here so I could try it again.

I read a book, which said that Mt. Mitchell was the highest mountain in the east and that peaked my interest in the SB6K. I had been to Mt. Washington in New Hampshire and had thought that that was the highest. [She's not the only one who has this misapprehension - Ed.]

One Father's Day, I came down and hiked with CMC. Bruce Bente was the leader. That's when I learned about the SB6K and started planning to come down whenever the club planned a SB6K hike. It's about a 400-mile drive one way from Indiana.

I finished the SB6K in 2003 by climbing Sams Knob with Tom Sanders as a leader. Then I felt it was time to give back to the club so I started leading hikes. First on Memorial Day weekend, since I had a free three-day weekend.

**You refer to a pivotal hike that got you thinking about moving here**

A few years later, I found myself on a hike to Green Knob with Ashok and Danny. We climbed up Green Knob from Black Mountain Campground, a slow climb. Both Ashok and Danny worked on me to move to Asheville. They talked about all the positives of the area. They "double teamed" me.

By that time, I had given up my prestigious partnership in a Louisville law firm. I was tired of it. It was too time-consuming. I went to work for a small law firm, which almost made me feel like I was in semi-retirement. It allowed me more time to drive down here for a weekend. It was a big decision because I felt that I was a role model for young women looking to make partner in law firms.

Then in 2008, I stayed in the Bernstein's house for the summer. I had a blast in Asheville and decided almost on the spur of the moment to retire for real.

I finished the Smokies 900M and now I'm working on the *90 in 90* challenge.

**If you had to choose one hike to take visitors, regardless of difficulty, where would you take them?**

Start at Big Creek in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Take the Chestnut Branch Trail to the A.T. Follow the AT. up to Mt. Cammerer. You could do this hike every week and see different sets of flowers.

**What do you do when you're not on the trail?**

Evolving and learning. Broadening my horizons. As a hiker, you open a lot of other doors: Nature, environmental conservation. Hiking makes me grow. For example, I hiked the Dolomites in Italy and Germany. When I came back, I was inspired to read several books on the Great War.

My daughter and I hiked in the Norwegian mountains for several days on our own, meeting hikers from all countries.

**What's your next hiking project?**

Le Chemin de St. Jacques, the French section of the more famous El Camino. Why? Because Danny asked me. I'm taking two French classes and learning about the geography and culture of France.

I'd love to finish the Colorado Trail, one week at a time. A group shuttles your stuff so you're basically dayhiking.

I find that I solve problems when I hike. It's my kind of meditation.