

Meet Kathy Kyle - April 2012

By Danny Bernstein



Kathy Kyle came on her first CMC hike on New Year's Day 2007 where she met many hikers including Michael Cornn. They were married less than a year later and became one of many CMC couples. Now they hike regularly with the club.

"I'm not a Southerner, though I spent most of my life in the South. My family is from Kansas City, Missouri. So I consider myself a Midwesterner," Kathy says.

Kathy was born in Independence Missouri in 1962, but she moved with her family to Goldsboro, North Carolina in 1969 when she was seven years old and going into the first grade. Her father, Ken Kyle, became the city manager. The family lived there until Kathy finished the 10th grade.

"In the school system, I recall that whites were the minority. Black teachers were the best but the over quality of the school wasn't good. Goldsboro was too small for segregated schools. White kids who wanted to go to a white school went

to either county schools or private school." As a child, she remembers seeing Klu Klux Klan ads on billboards in other small towns in the Coastal Plains.

"In Goldsboro, the neighborhoods were segregated and there was no socialization outside of school between whites and blacks. When the miniseries *Roots* came out in 1977, there was a lot of Black Pride"

Kathy, her sister and two brothers, seemed to have a small town idyllic childhood that inner city children could only dream about. Tobacco barns and horse stables were all around where they lived.

They lived in the city in a brick house on the outskirts of town surrounded by fields and woods so they played outside a lot. They even had a horse, a palomino, Ramus, which the kids shared. Only Stony Creek separated them from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base.

In the open property, her brother, John, who must have been 9 or 10 years old found a napalm bomb in the woods. He told their mother who contacted the Air Force Base. John took them on a little hike to show them the bomb and they removed it. "It makes you wonder how many others there are," Kathy says. "John liked to dress in camouflage when he was a child but that didn't inspire him to join the military."

Goldsboro annexed the Air Force Base while Ken Kyle, her father, was city manager. That was quite an accomplishment since it brought in a lot of extra tax revenues to the city.

Kathy also mentioned a story which seemed improbable until I checked it out. In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, two hydrogen bombs fell in nearby Faro, a tiny village close to the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. No explosion occurred, so that's why this potential tragedy never made it into the history books. It turns out that a B-52 bomber disintegrated and the plane exploded as it fell. Three of the eight crew members died while parachuting.

One bomb parachuted with little damage but the other is still buried in a boggy field full of quick sand. Since it contained uranium, the Air Force was concerned. They bought an easement so no one can dig on the site where the bomb fell. The state still conducts yearly testing of the groundwater.

"My family had moved to Goldsboro from upper New York State. I always felt like an outsider. Goldsboro almost seemed like a third world country then. People in the town had land, and lots of family tradition. They fished and hunted but didn't mingle with others," Kathy said. Her father didn't fish or hunt. Her mother was involved in the Arts Council and also took art and design courses in Raleigh.

At the end of Kathy's sophomore year, the family left moved back to Overland Park, a suburb of Kansas City. "I went to Shawnee Mission High School, which was so different from Goldsboro," Kathy remembers. "My new school had an indoor swimming pool and kids drove Corvettes. It was an upscale school and I had a hard time academically after Goldsboro. On the other hand, my older brothers had found it so easy at Goldsboro High that they felt they were done with school."

Kathy went to NC State and majored in English because her brother was at UNC-Chapel Hill at the time. "My parents had a beach house in Beaufort. I remember field trips at the Maritime Museum. I have good memories of Coastal North Carolina."

When she graduated, she started at the Transylvania Times in Brevard as a reporter. "I married a man who seemed obsessed with hunting and fishing. We have a daughter, Rose."

Do you go back to Goldsboro?

My parents live in Morehead City. When we visit them, we stop at Wilbur, a great barbeque place in Goldsboro. It's shredded pork in a bun with a vinegar based hot pepper sauce.

Kathy works as a Basic Literacy Coordinator for the Blue Ridge Literary Council. "I help people boost their skills to pass their GEDs and citizenship tests. We have ESL classes. I do intakes, and testing. We follow up and test our clients once a year. I work with volunteer tutors and teach a computer skills class as well," Kathy explains. Before that, she taught at Bruce Drysdale Elementary School in Hendersonville.

Tell me about your hiking life?

I joined CMC five years ago and met Michael. Then I moved to Hendersonville. I've always enjoyed hiking and did a lot on my own. My sister would come down in the summer and we'd hike together. We found a map on the CMC website. We backpacked a section of the MST from the Folk Art Center to Mt. Mitchell. At the time, we didn't know that camping was not allowed on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

With CMC, hikes are planned. It allows you to go places where you usually wouldn't go. Before I joined CMC, I only did a couple of trails in the Smokies. I hiked mostly in Pisgah Forest and Lake Jocassee. With CMC, I've explored a lot more.

Where would you take a visitor, if they had one day to hike, independent of difficulty?

I did take people on hikes regardless of ability and it backfired.

I'd take them on the Art Loeb Trail in Shining Rock Wilderness. Also to the Middle Prong Wilderness, going up to Sunburst and on the MST to Mt. Mitchell. I like high altitude hikes.

And other hiking?

We hike on our two-week vacation. I feel lucky that Michael likes to do the same thing. Last year, we went to Olympic National Park. We backpacked in three different forest types.

We also went to Vancouver, stayed in the hostel, and hiked with their group. This year, Michael wants to go to his 30th High School reunion in Los Angeles. We might go to the Channel Islands. Rose is in her second year of college, so I have more time now.

Mike and I lead hikes for CMC. I admire the work the club had done with maintenance and getting people out. I like the depth of what is available. CMC is well run.