

Meet Danny Bernstein - July 2012

By Bobbi Powers



Meet Danny Bernstein. Well, maybe meet is the wrong word. We all know Danny, at least the public Danny who has been the subject of many interviews and has written two hiking books with a third under way.

I set out to learn some behind-the-scenes, personal stories about a woman we already know - publically at least. During an enlightening hike/lunch/chat time at the NC Arboretum, Danny shared anecdotes ranging from the hardest hike she's ever done (You'll be surprised!) to whether a fourth book is in her future. Let's begin at the beginning.

Danny was born in France and lived there until she was 10 years old. She's not French but was named Danielle for a French actress. Danielle was not the popular name it is today, and teachers continually mispronounced it, so in 7th grade, when the teacher called the roll on the first day of school, she said, "My name is Danny," and it stuck. She sped through high school and college in Brooklyn, NY, graduating from Brooklyn College at age 20 with a major in math and economics. Upperclassmen were allowed to take one computer class (remember, this was 1966); that class was an "Aha Moment." Danny had found her career niche!

And about the same time, she found her man. Danny's friend set her up on a blind date in Brooklyn. It was Lenny.

Danny says, "He was an older and sophisticated man and he had a car. As a New Yorker, that was important." (He was in graduate school at Purdue University in Indiana.) After six months of writing letters back and forth and Lenny's coming to Brooklyn during each school break, they got engaged. Danny graduated from college; they got married and moved to West Lafayette where Danny earned a Master's Degree in statistics and a minor in computer science while Lenny finished his PhD in chemical engineering.

Danny's hiking lifestyle began back in 1967 when she and Lenny drove their VW Bug around the West as Lenny interviewed for jobs. Their Grand Tour took them to Yellowstone, San Francisco, and the Grand Canyon. Here they took their first hike, "the hardest hike we've ever done." They wanted to see the bottom of the canyon, but mule trips are booked months in advance. So at 6 am, with Lenny wearing street shoes and Danny in sneakers, they began



their descent carrying a water bottle. Of course, the water was gone by the time they got to the bottom, and the hot August sun was beating down on them. The only way out was UP. There were water stations or telephones at half-mile intervals.

At mile 4.5 Lenny had had it. He lay on the ground under the water spigot and announced he could go no further. Danny trudged onward and upward and at mile 3 found a telephone and two other hikers. She phoned, saying, "I need an emergency mule!" The guy said, "That mule will cost you \$25." Danny ordered the mule and trekked the rest of the way out with the other two hikers for moral support. Danny's day ended at the top at 6 pm. Lenny arrived astride a mule two hours later. Yep, that is the hike that hooked them on hiking! They began joining hiking clubs as soon as they got their first jobs in New Jersey and are still hiking together 46 years later.

Danny worked at Bell Labs in New Jersey for more than a decade. In the 1980's she moved into academia, teaching Computer Science at Kean University in Union, NJ, and earned her PhD in Information Systems. I asked Danny what her students thought of her, and she answered, "I was entertaining. I knew many of them were first or second-generation Americans and they were stuck with me for 50 minutes."

Danny has been a teacher ever since. She said, "I want people to reap the benefits, both physically and emotionally, of an outdoor life style. The family that hikes together stays together!" She is unrelentingly optimistic about the benefits of hiking and firmly believes anyone can become a hiker. She just completed her third annual Family Nature Summit at Rocky Mountain National Park with her 9- year-old granddaughter. She is passing on the joys of being outdoors. No doubt when her 3-year-old granddaughter is old enough, she will be included in these yearly outings.

Danny's first book, *Hiking the Carolina Mountains*, is in its fourth or fifth printing. She followed it with *Hiking North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains* and is working hard to meet a November deadline for her third book, *Walking the Mountains to Sea Trail: 1000 Miles through North Carolina*. (A working title at this point) She enjoys the marketing part of selling her books, even though the books are not money-makers. However, she loves educating the public about the outdoors. When I asked if there is a fourth book rolling around in her head, she laughed and answered, "That's like asking a pregnant woman when she is going to have another child!"

In the 11 years Danny has been a CMC member, she has organized the Wilderness First Aid Class and the Hike Leaders Dinner, both while serving as the first chairperson of the CMC Education Committee. She is currently secretary of the CMC. Danny recently retired from seven years as editor of the *eNews*. She is proud that she consistently included "hard-core news" in this online newsletter. Danny also leads lots of hikes for CMC (as well as for Friends of the Smokies), saying, "I like watching regular folks start hiking and progress to doing things they never thought they could do." Peering into the future for the club, Danny "would love to see more **active** members and more publicity for CMC."

Danny is well-known in the CMC for her prodigious accomplishments. She's hiked all 800 miles of trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. She has completed the entire A.T. (2000+miles), the entire Mountains to Sea Trail (1000 miles), and the South Beyond 6000 Challenge. Physically, she said doing the A.T. was the hardest, but logistically, being the 21st finisher of the MST was most difficult because of the lack of camping and other facilities. She has dreams of hiking the French part of the El Camino, perhaps starting the DuPont Challenge with hiking buddy Sawako Jager, and she admits to being "a national parks geek" and visits as many parks as possible and then writes about her experiences for nationalparkstraveler.com.

Danny's busy, highly-organized "punch the clock" lifestyle did not end with retirement from her work career. This Super Woman makes time to do it all - hiking, writing, educating, travelling, grandmothering, and yes, she even **reads** books and attends cultural events. She crams a lotta livin' into each day!

I wish her a long, vigorous, and happy life and look forward to more of her amazing feats.