

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

## BILL BUCKLEW (AK '89)

In 2005 while running with colleagues, in a group he started, Bill Bucklew (AK '89) felt a tightness in his right leg. This tightening persisted and would continually show up when he ran and began to get worse as time progressed. After seeing an orthopedist and consulting numerous sports medicine specialists, Bill was routinely thought to have sciatica. "Strengthen the Core" was the short-term solution, with back surgery as the long-term answer.

Meanwhile, the symptoms were worsening, to the point that Bill was catching his foot on the floor and having diminished handwriting. In early 2012, Bill was at dinner with a friend who was going back to school to get a PhD in statistics and then perform research into Parkinson's disease, which both his mother and brother had. On his suggestion, Bill saw a neurologist and was ultimately diagnosed with Parkinson's. While it was great to have an answer, it still was like a "punch in the stomach." In a strange twist of fate, Bill's father was also diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2015.

Ever since his diagnosis, Bill has been on a mission to raise awareness for the disease, help people live better with it and find a cure. Bill has also been an adventure athlete his whole life, completing 12 marathons, 9 triathlons and a full Ironman, as well as climbing mountains like Kilimanjaro and competing in a Nordic skate

skiing race. So it wasn't a surprise when he told his friends he was forming a board of directors and planned to walk across the country to meet others affected by Parkinson's in record breaking time.

Bill formed a 501(c)(3) charitable organization UnCorked Adventures NFP in 2017 with a mission of finding a cure for Parkinson's disease, inspiring those affected while educating those who aren't. Bill, with help from the UnCorked board, began detailed planning for Bill to walk across America. He would leave Tybee Island, GA, on November 24, connecting each day with someone affected by the disease and raise \$100k for the Michael J. Fox foundation (the sole beneficiary). The goal was to finish the walk in San Diego in January.

On November 24th, Bill left the pier, as planned, at 8 A.M. and averaged 53 miles a day for the first three days. From the very first day, it was clear this was going to be a special trip when Bill walked up to a McDonalds at 2:30 A.M. and met the night manager who proceeded to tell him that it was drive thru only. After talking about his trip, the night manager gave Bill some food and coffee on her. The next morning at around 10 A.M., Bill had been walking for about 3 hours when a truck pulled off the road right behind him, and the night manager emerged from the passenger seat with a care package containing socks. She had been driving



Bill walked a total of 2,594 miles starting at Tybee Island, Georgia and finishing in San Diego, California.



around with her boyfriend looking for Bill all morning. Bill later found an inspirational note in the socks that said how inspired she was by what he was doing. Pretty much every day after that, Bill had similar moments.

The first few weeks were incredible from the media coverage he received, Bill did numerous local television and newspaper interviews as well as spending two days with the Today Show production team who filmed Bill and the team in action for 19 hours. But, problems were looming, the Team confronted Bill on day 4 that they were not getting enough sleep and requested he finish each night no later than 10-11 P.M. At the same time, Bill was experiencing severe blisters on his feet and a significant abrasion to his leftmost toe, due to walking on an angle and the intensity of walking 17 hours a day, with no breaks.

So, Bill set a goal of completing 1.5 marathons a day without a break and due to advanced planning, met with a team of sports medicine professionals who gave him everything he needed to keep himself going, from advanced performance foot care bandages to a TENS unit that sends electrical pulses to supersede the pain receptors. This, plus additional shoe experimentation, helped significantly with the blisters and toe problems. Although the victory was not long, the reengineered shoe was putting pressure on the top of his foot and a stress fracture



TOP: On the trek, Bill went through 26 pairs of shoes in only 67 days.  
LOWER: Bill and his family pose with Megyn Kelly after their appearance on Megyn Kelly Today

formed, which again necessitated some creative shoe engineering, which later resulted in a severe stretching of the Achilles tendon. This also became a central theme of the trip, solving one problem, only to encounter another; plus the emotional landscapes associated with taking one step forward, only to take a step back continually

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Pure happiness on the shores of San Diego, California.

took its toll. Only the motivation and inspiration derived from all the support Bill received from the community kept him going.

The team was somehow able to keep the goal in check despite additional physical problems like a major back problem but Bill still powered on. It turned out that finding someone each day, organically, that has a connection to Parkinson's disease, was not a problem. In fact, we sort of lost track and talked to, walked with, etc, over 160 people along the way. Most of these were great stories in their own right, one man, Neal Levin, didn't know that Bill was real-time trackable via google, but that didn't stop him from tracking Bill down after returning from the Mayo Clinic after double knee surgery and driving hundreds of miles after reading about Bill's walk in the Roswell paper.

From the pecan farmer to the 50 or so people that walked with Bill to the finish line in San Diego, the people were the real story. Bill developed a theme of "we can all do more" based on his experiences and the fact that he continues to push his own boundaries and every attempt has really resulted in real growth for Bill.

Bill encountered a number of significant obstacles outside his own physical problems, that challenged him and the team as well. There were dog attacks, some of them vicious, but fortunately with his three point protection system, that included an air-horn and trekking poles, the team avoided injury. The weather tried its best to stop him, with

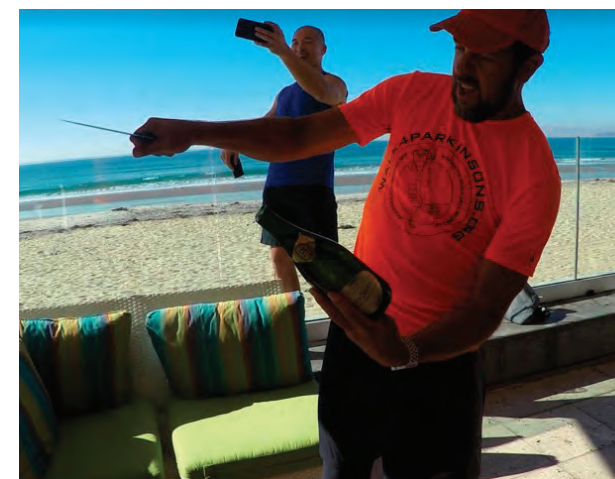
a 5 inch snow storm in Mississippi, horrific 33 degree rain storms in Texas and a 50 MPH wind storm in Roswell that sent a mailbox over Bill's head. Bill kept going, and finished his journey on January 31st, 2018 with friends, board members, Pampered Chef consultants and strangers affected by the disease that were inspired by the adventure. The night before the finish, the donation total crossed the \$100k mark, reaching his goal and was still going in March, currently at ~\$125k.

The team raised incredible awareness, from the +160 people that walked/talked with Bill, to the 32+ interviews, to the second appearance on Megyn Kelly Today the week after the finish, with his family.

As of this writing, Bill has been asked to do a TED Talk and is heading Washington DC to speak to Congress about funding for Parkinson's research.

Bill and UnCorked Adventures NFP are just getting started with their mission and are already planning their next event, so stay tuned, much, much more to come. Web— [www.uncorkedadventures.org](http://www.uncorkedadventures.org) Facebook and Instagram—Uncorked Adventures NFP

Bill is the Vice President of Product Development for the Berkshire Hathaway company, The Pampered Chef, and lives with his wife of 20 years, Heidi, and two children Madeleine and Evan, in Wilmette Illinois.



TOP: Bill met and walked with many other Parkinson's patients on his journey.

LEFT: Bill pops open a bottle of champagne to celebrate his marvellous achievement.

RIGHT: The weather didn't always cooperate, but Bill had no choice but to embrace the challenge.

