

# Hiker plans five-month trek to keep sister's memory alive

By John Johnston

*The Cincinnati Enquirer*

Last fall, Denise Hill was returning to her Indian Hill home from her sister's grave in Tennessee when the idea came to her: She would hike the 2,160-mile Appalachian Trail, alone.

And so 13 days from now the 47-year-old married mother of three will set out from Georgia's Springer Mountain on a five-month trek that will take her along ridge crests and across major valleys of the Appalachian Mountains. She plans to reach Katahdin in Maine by mid-September.

Several thousand people attempt to "thru-hike" the trail each year. About 15 percent succeed, according to the Appalachian Trail Conference.

"It's time for me to do something noble," says Hill. "It's going to be a great spiritual adventure for me, and it's going to offer so much personal growth. I can't wait."

She hopes the hike draws attention to

her quest to raise money for people suffering from breast cancer, and their families. The disease claimed her sister, Cheryl Rose Walden, who died six years ago at age 44. Walden was a nursing home caregiver who worked with cancer patients.

"Her biggest fear," Hill says, "was that people would forget her. I promised her that would never happen."

Hill also promised her sister, who was a woman of strong faith, that she would work to develop a stronger relationship with God.

Those promises were on Hill's mind last fall when she visited her sister's grave in the picturesque Great Smoky Mountains.

Once home, Hill first approached her husband with the hike idea. Bruce Hill, who

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**Denise Hill**, 47, has been training for her trek wearing a nearly 50-pound backpack.



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owns an insurance agency, was supportive. Reactions from their three children have been mixed. Brittany, a junior at Indian Hill High, has been encouraging from the start. Bruce, a Miami University student, "thinks I'm just totally crazy," Hill chuckles, "although he's very supportive and excited now." And daughter Christina, a student at Southern Methodist University, at first opposed the idea, but has since had a change of heart.

As a Christmas gift to her sister's side of the family, Hill unveiled a Web site, [www.walkingforwalden.com](http://www.walkingforwalden.com). One link describes the non-profit Cheryl Rose Walden Foundation, which Hill founded to keep her sister's memory alive and raise money to fight breast cancer.

The Web site also offers a detailed look at how Hill has prepared herself physically.

Although an exerciser all her life, she's never attempted a feat of this magnitude. Her training began in November at TriHealth Fitness & Health Pavilion, where fitness specialists Jay Myers and Todd Willke helped her build her strength and endurance using weight machines and free weights, and devised a series of grueling cardiovascular workouts.

It became a common sight at TriHealth: Hill, lugging a backpack loaded with nearly 50 pounds.

"It was so hard, I'd have to come home and take a nap just so I could recover," Hill says. She's added 12 pounds of muscle to her 5-foot-5 frame.

And now she's ready. Her support team is, too. Family members will ship food to 20 predetermined mail drops at towns along the way. They've given her a trail name for good luck: Ladybug.

"I know it'll change me," Hill says. "I can't imagine going on a trip like this and not being personally transformed."

The long trek begins April 4, her sister Cheryl's birthday.

*Hill will post periodic updates on [www.walkingforwalden.com](http://www.walkingforwalden.com). Donations to the Cheryl Rose Walden Foundation are tax-deductible. Money raised from the hike will go to help breast cancer patients and families served by Hospice of Cincinnati. Mail donations to: Cheryl Rose Walden Foundation Inc., in care of Fifth Third Bank, 7101 Miami Road, Cincinnati, 45243.*



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**Denise Hill** will leave April 4 for a 2,160 mile trek on the Appalachian Trail to raise money for people suffering from breast cancer. Hill's sister, Cheryl, died from the disease six years ago.