

AT THEIR PEAK

Ellie Zartman and Suzy Maroon started hiking together 20 years ago—and never stopped

BY CHRISTINE KOUBEK

OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, Ellie Zartman and Suzy Maroon have learned some valuable lessons about hiking. Among them: traveling with a deck of playing cards is a good way to meet new people, don't waste your money on bear spray, and spend lots of time breaking in new hiking boots before going on a trip. On their aptly-named blog, "Up (But Not Over!) The Hill" (up-thehill.org), they wrote: "Wearing them on totally inappropriate social occasions is likely to give you the desired segue into telling people where you are headed next."

Ellie, who lives in Bethesda, and Suzy, who lives in Georgetown, met in the mid-1980s, when each had a fourth-grader at St. Albans School in Northwest D.C. By 1996, the children had grown and the two women were looking for something fun, challenging and, as they wrote later on their blog, a hobby that could help correct "a few unwelcome changes in our personal contours."

That year, when Ellie was 61 and Suzy was 58, they walked the Tour du Mont Blanc, a roughly 100-mile circuit of the Mont Blanc massif mountain range that began and ended in Chamonix, France. The adventure hooked them on hiking and the opportunity it affords to test their mettle, try local beers, and discover people and cultures they didn't know existed. In the years since, they've gone on 18 group hiking trips in 21 countries, including Australia, Bhutan, Morocco and South America's Patagonia region. In 2013, they walked Suzy's home country, England, coast to coast. *Bethesda*



Hiking buddies Ellie Zartman, left, and Suzy Maroon have taken 18 trips together, including climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania (below).

Magazine spoke to the friends about their adventures.

FAVORITE HIKE: "It is like a favorite child in that each of your children have a different attribute you like," Ellie says. She says hiking Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania felt like the biggest accomplishment, while their trip to Patagonia had the best group. "Everyone had a great sense of humor, and the conversations along the trail and at meals were as if we had known each other for years," Ellie says. The women agree that having a good guide is important. "The guides that give free beer are the ones I like best," Ellie says.

ON BEING IN SHAPE FOR A HIKE: After the women's first hike together, Ellie hired a personal trainer and started working out in a gym three times a week. As they wrote on their blog, Suzy takes a



different approach: "A few weeks before leaving, she slings several volumes of *Yellow Pages* into a backpack and walks up and down three flights of stairs whenever she has nothing else to do."

ENCOUNTERING THE UNEXPECTED: "We came across a woman yodeling one day when we were walking in the Swiss Alps," Ellie says. "She yodeled so beautifully, and it echoed throughout the mountains. I almost have tears thinking about it." On their trip up Mount Kilimanjaro, one of the group members was a professional percussionist. "While we were resting, the percussionist and the porters got every tin pot they could find and, with spoons banging on them, proceeded to entertain us with a mixture of

Tanzanian melodies and philharmonic drum beats,” Suzy says. “It made you realize how universal music is.”

MEMORY THAT MAKES THEM

LAUGH: “We got upgraded to business class one time,” Suzy says. “The seats were like beds—you sink back and there’s all that black leather, and I was wearing all black, and Ellie woke up and glanced over and saw all black.” Says Ellie: “I couldn’t find her. So I went to the bathroom and she wasn’t there. I said to the flight attendant: ‘I think she *left*,’ and the flight attendant said, ‘What do you mean *‘left*?’ ”

WORST TRIP: Their 2002 trip to Morocco, where they encountered scorching heat, swarming flies and holes in the ground for bathrooms. “It was so much fun writing it up,” Ellie says. “Suzy does the writing, and I sit and kibitz and throw in thoughts. It was so much fun to relive that horrible trip.”

THE GROUPS: Many of the hikers are in their 50s, 60s and 70s. “I always get to be the oldest, which is a designation I could live without,” says Ellie, who is 80. “I think people are scared off sometimes,” she adds about hiking as you age. “But it really is putting one foot in front of the other.”

WHAT THEY’VE LEARNED ABOUT

THEMSELVES: “That I like creature comforts,” Suzy says. “I like bathrooms. I like porcelain. I don’t like outdoor loos.” Most importantly, they say they’ve learned determination. Says Ellie: “Being able to do something you don’t think you can possibly do—it’s a wonderful feeling.”

WHAT’S NEXT: “The wet, wild, west coast of Ireland,” Suzy says of this fall’s trip. Next year they’re planning to go to Portugal. As they wrote on their blog: “There’s nothing we can do about the passage of time, but we do have some control over the goals we set ourselves, and we have only ourselves to blame if we let them all go the way of our youth.” ■

MONICA G. HARMS
Principal
Family Law Attorney

PRIVATE SCHOOL AFTER DIVORCE: WHO PAYS?

The primary focus during a divorce is maintaining stability for the children. Ensuring that a child continues to enjoy the familiarity rooted in his or her school community can be an important benefit. Hopefully divorcing parents can agree on whether or not their kids will remain in or attend private school and how those costs will be allocated. However, if they cannot agree, it is a component of child support (until age 18 in most cases), and therefore is a question the court can decide for them.

The court considers the following factors:

- The child’s educational history;
- The child’s performance while in private school;
- Family history of attending private or public school;
- Any factor impacting the child’s best interest; and, perhaps most importantly,
- The parents’ ability to pay.

Even if the first four factors weigh heavily in favor of private school, the court will not likely order it if the divorcing parents don’t have the resources to pay for it. The court may also decide that the expenses should be paid in proportion to the parents’ income. By contrast, payment of college education expenses must be negotiated, and cannot be ordered by the court unless already agreed upon by the divorcing parties.

Monica Garcia Harms is a family law principal at Stein Sperling, representing clients in complex matters including, but not limited to, divorce, contested custody and child support. Stein Sperling’s family law department includes (L to R below) Kathryn Deckert, Julie Christopher, Casey Florance, Paul Stein, Aron Benjamin, Monica Garcia Harms, David Driscoll and Emily Gelmann.



STEIN SPERLING

BENNETT • DE JONG • DRISCOLL PC

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

301-340-2020 • www.steinsperling.com