

Kennasack
5/24/02

Dear Nathaniel,

It was good to hear your voice on the telephone last night. I think of you and your brother and sisters very often. In the early afternoon I picture you trudging home under that heavy green pack and then sitting down at the kitchen table as soon as you come home, not to rest, but to do your homework. You have developed what is called the "work ethic".

I also see you, in my mind's eye, sitting in your favorite chair, absorbed in another long book or drawing a detailed picture.

I can't begin to make the sort of drawing that I would like to make, but I'll give you a word sketch of something that I remember from our walk yesterday afternoon along the Virginia Creeper Trail. Do you remember that trail? When Klemens was little there was still a railroad train that ran along the single track from Abingdon through the small town of Damascus and then up through the mountains.

To Nathaniel

Once shortly before Klemens's Sixth birthday he and I spent a day riding the "Creper" train from the Damascus Station all the way up to the end of the line at West Jefferson, North Carolina, then back to Damascus. A couple of months later we moved from our home in Damascus to Belmont. Some time later, in the 1970's, the train stopped running. Eventually the rails were taken up, and the railroad bed was converted into a trail. When Jochen and I walk along the trail, I remember our ride in 1962, and I can almost hear the train hooting ~~and~~ through the echoing mountain gorges. Probably very few of the people who use the Creper Trail now remember that train. Perhaps there are a few old fishermen standing in the rushing water who can think back to those old days.

As we walked on Wednesday several herds of cyclists rushed past, ~~and~~ overtaking us from behind as they rode from White Top Station down to Damascus. Only one man at the end of his group said politely, "Excuse us, Ma'am". Jochen was far ahead of me around a curve, looking for signs of beaver activity. After a while a lone bicyclist stopped beside me. He was dressed

neatly in grasshopper green shirt and shorts.
He asked me, "Are you enjoying your walk?"
Then he told me that he worked for
The Forest Service, that he was staying
in the old stone schoolhouse next
to The Valley Grocery Store. He
said that his name was John, that
he had been here just two weeks.
had come from the State of Washington.
He excused himself from further
conversation by saying he had to
hurry on because there was a large
group of cyclists on the trail ahead.
I guess he thought that they seemed
a little rowdy, or perhaps that
a few of them did not have good
control of their bikes. I had noticed
a couple of wobbly riders and had
placed myself well off the trail as
they rushed by me. Afterwards I realized
that he must have been quite surprised to
see me, an old lady with two walking sticks
slowly walking on a trail where he had only seen
bicyclists or horseback riders. I'll tell you
another time about what John found
as he searched for signs of the beaver.
I can't walk to the post office, must place
my letter in the cobwebby mailbox.

Love, M. M. St.