

Katrina Serwe 1,000-miler Application Essay

A back injury inspired my hiking journey. In 2020, I had the kind of nerve pain that makes it hard to sit, stand, lay down, eat, sleep—be alive. I found nature, walking, and poetry to be vital parts of my healing journey. By 2021 I was hiking frequently on Ice Age Trail Segments around my home in the Northern Kettle Moraine. I would carry a notebook and write down poems as they came to me. I called it *poemwalking* and it became my favorite pastime.

After a hike, I noticed a flyer for a hiking awards program, Meander the Mid-Moraine. I thought it would be fun to hike all the segments listed and write a poem for each one. So, I did. I enjoyed it so much I decided to hike the full trail, poemwalking every segment.

Poemwalking was so joyful, I wanted to share that joy with others. In addition to writing a full-length poem, I started posting a haiku on social media for every segment. I also created poetry postcards I gave away to people I met along with way. Even with sharing my poems, I thought my 1,000-miler journey would be mostly solitary.

Not long after completing the Washington and Ozaukee County hiking awards program I joined the Ice Age Trail Alliance. I went to local chapter meetings and started volunteering. I discovered trail events like hike-a-thons. I joined the Thousand Miler WannaBes group on Facebook and worked up the courage to meet up with other hikers. My solitary journey became full of trail friends.

I was surprised to discover new things about the state I've lived in my whole life. I loved being immersed in the various ecosystems from prairie to wetland, to the diverse forest types we are so lucky to have across the state. As my drives got longer I started camping in state parks and discovered beautiful little county parks I probably never would have seen otherwise.

I was sad to have my journey come to an end, but I learned how to deal with it from my friends Kris and Jared who have completed the trail multiple times—just keep hiking. Eventually I would like to hike every segment in every season. Winter shows you the bones of the glacial landscape, spring offers ephemeral flowers, summer is lush with aliveness, and fall's colorful views are breathtaking. The trail just keeps giving!