



Something very good

By MIKE RICHESON

Bigfork Eagle

Barry Adkins believes he is about to do something very good.

After 1,450 miles with his 12-pound burden, Barry Adkins will walk to, through and beyond Bigfork - his stopping point somewhere in the Flathead Valley.

Next July, Adkins will arrive after walking from Gilbert, Ariz., to Montana, briefly pausing at schools along the route to teach young people the dangers of alcohol abuse.

"Everybody knows someone affected by alcohol abuse," Adkins said. "I hope to raise more attention about this."

And he'll have an irrefutable example that one careless night can snuff out the life of any promising young adult - his own son Kevin. Adkins, who grew up in the Flathead, will carry his son's ashes with him on the journey in order to bring Kevin to his favorite place - Montana.

The idea to bring Kevin's ashes to Montana sprang from "Lonesome Dove," one of Kevin's favorite movies. The film portrays a pair of former Texas Rangers moving cattle to the Big Sky state. But before dying, one of the Rangers asks his friend to take his remains back to Texas, where he was the happiest.

"Kevin's Last Walk" is the name of the tribute his family has put together to honor Kevin and attempt to save lives from the same fate.

Kevin graduated from high school in May 2005, bought a new truck and moved in to his own place. Everyone thought something very good was beginning for Kevin.

On July 10, his friends threw him a house-warming party.

The group started with beer, but the party quickly became a binge of hard alcohol. Kevin down six double-shots of Jack Daniels. His last words were recorded on the voicemail of his sister's cell phone. He spoke of his beloved nephew, how much fun the party was and how much he had had to drink that night.

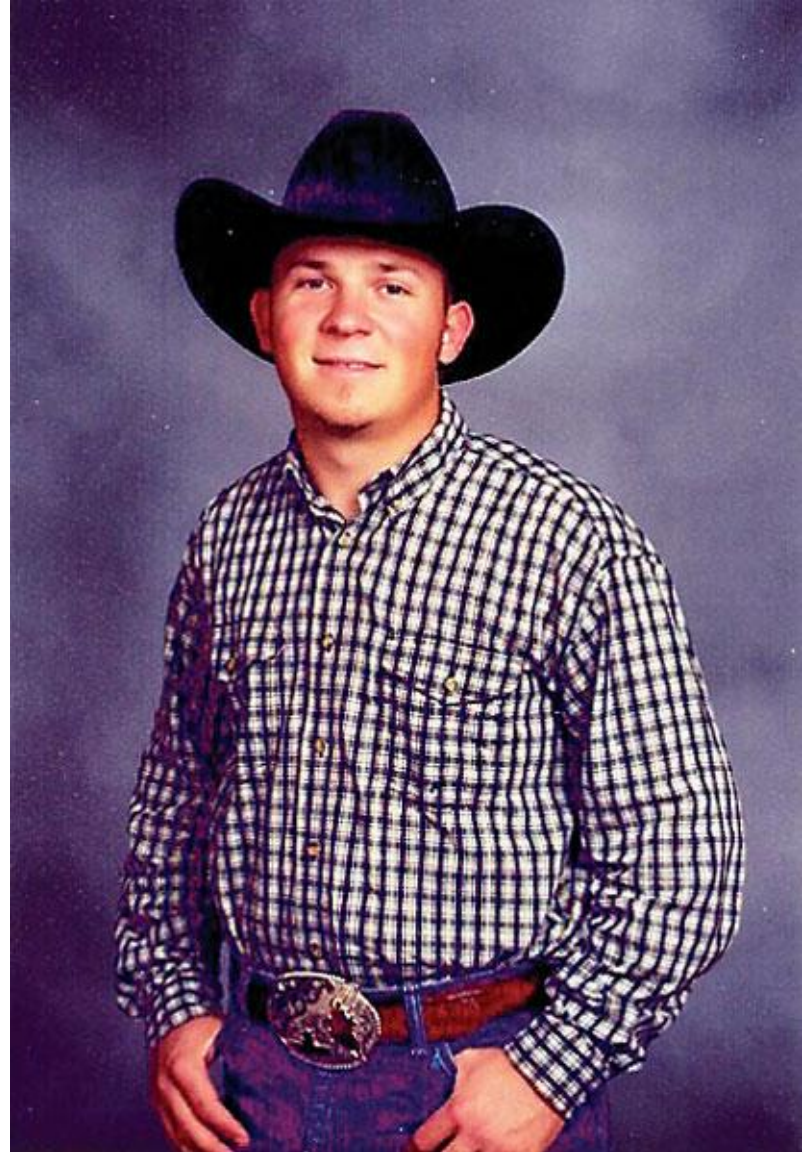
Kevin passed out with a blood alcohol level of 0.36. His friends weren't that concerned. In fact, they shaved his head and legs as a practical joke before propping him up on his side in case he vomited.

When his friends checked on him again at around 4 a.m., they found he wasn't breathing. The call for help went out too late.

At just 18 years old, on his first day of independence, Kevin became a statistic.

"He had just graduated, had a job, bought a new truck," Barry recalled. "He hadn't even made the first payment on it yet."

Gilbert, Ariz., police showed up at the Adkins' resident on Sunday morning. They handed over Kevin's driver's license and told the shocked parents their son was dead. The entire family sank into a shocked despair. No one had seen this coming.



Kevin Adkins

Kevin had never been in trouble with the law or at school. He had never been caught drinking before, either.

In spite of the grief, Barry and his wife Beverly determined to make Kevin's death count for something. Barry set up the Web site www.somethingverygood.com as a place for people to record good things they do or how they changed as a tribute to Kevin.

Adkins even wrote a poem, titled "Something very good," a piece that he reads during his presentations.

"Something very good will come from this

Part of me died that morning when I got the news

His job here on earth was through

None of us here know what to do...

I never heard him say it,

but something very good will come from this

He was there, I know it and I felt it

He was there in the room

When my heart was filled with gloom

And now that part that died is growing back

Something very good will come from this."

Barry said he has already told Kevin's story to more than 2,500 people. And beginning on Feb. 26, 2007 (Kevin's birthday), thousands more will hear. By sharing this family tragedy, Barry hopes to educate others on the dangers of alcohol abuse and prevent future deaths.

Adkins has teamed up with an organization called "notMYkid," which is on a mission to raise awareness about binge drinking and alcohol poisoning.

Adkins, who works as an applications engineer, will take four months off of work to complete his journey. Kevin's sisters, Cassandra, 23, and Sarah, 21, will also take turns walking while Bev drives the support vehicle ahead. Adkins' employer has pledged to keep him on the payroll during his absence, but the two girls may sacrifice their jobs to help the cause.

Barry said he chose to walk because of the extra attention for his mission. A car tour doesn't pack the same punch or require the same commitment.

Nearly a year of planning has gone into the project. In spite of the doubts and massive demands the walk places on the whole family, one nagging question keeps prodding Barry along:

"I just ask myself how I'd feel in 10 years if I didn't do it."

By walking 15-20 miles per day, the Adkins family should reach the yet-to-be-determined spot in the Flathead Valley on July 10, the anniversary of Kevin's death. Kevin dreamed of moving to Montana someday and becoming a ranch owner.

Most of Kevin's dream died with him on the fateful night, and Barry Adkins is determined to show students that by making good decisions, they don't have to share Kevin's fate.

"Kevin is the one person who could have prevented his death," Barry said.

After Kevin's death, Barry wrote a letter using words he thought his son would say if he could:

"We were just out having a good time," the letter reads. "I didn't think anyone would get hurt. It seemed so fun. Everyone was doing it.

"One minute we were drinking and having a good time ... and the next minute I was dead. I want you to know how hard I tried to

live, how much I wanted to go back to the beginning of that night and change it all.

"I never believed it could ever happen to me ... I had so much left to do ... I know what I did caused great sadness. Something very good will come from this dad, I just wish I was there to share it with you."

Anyone interested in helping do something very good may contact Ryan Helton, Kevin's Last Walk coordinator, at ryan@notmykid.org, or by phone, 602-652-0163. Individual and corporate sponsorships are available.