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As in many journeys, the story lies within the steps and not within the destination. John Higgins, dressed in a Rio West Mall T-shirt and a Buffalo Bills cap, left Gallup June 9 determined to accomplish his goal.

This was day 100 on the road and about 250 miles was all that was between him and his destination.

But, before he left Gallup he shared what prompted him to walk across the country.

Higgins, 34, started his journey in Tampa, FL, and will finish at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon after walking more than 2,500 miles through 11 states. Higgins said he has traveled to other countries but has never seen the United States.

“I wanted to see America at three miles per hour,” he said.

As he moved through Florida and Georgia he felt it was urban and less personable, but once we started to cross through Arkansas he began to see a positive change.

“People are more caring than the world would perceive,” Higgins said.

He has been helped along the way by truly, nice people. One of the most caring places he found is Gallup.

A few days before reaching Gallup, Higgins met David Addington, owner of the Rio West Mall at a Pit Stop outside of Albuquerque. Addington asked Higgins about his story and finished the conversation by telling Higgins if he needed anything while in Gallup to look him up at the Rio West Mall.

Higgins uses a stroller to store and transport his necessities. When he made it to Gallup, the stroller's wheels were bald and thin and Higgins was hungry and tired.

Office Manager Anita Artelejo said each of the office staff had something to offer. Leasing/Marketing Manager Ida Mangum and Administrative Assistant Shawna Norton made arrangements for him to eat at the Food Court, and Jerrold Kirk from maintenance replaced the tires on his stroller.

Artelejo put him up in a hotel for the evening, giving him much needed piece of mind for his rest.

"We were very touched by his story. We felt it in our hearts to help him," Artelejo said.

Higgins voice became shaky while telling this part of his story, referring to the staff at the mall as the Rio West angels.

At the beginning of his journey Higgins said it was unsettling to sleep in a strange places. He said that one night he set up camp next to a railroad and was awakened at 3:30 am when a train screamed by. That was one the scariest moments he experienced.

From this experience he chose campsites wisely.

When possible, he stayed at campgrounds. His second choice was behind churches. Some people offered him shelter and others offered him food. Mission Possible in Thoreau, NM was

one of the places that opened their doors for him.

“Their hospitality was amazing,” he said.

So, why would a young man take leave from his job, son and fiancé to make a trip like this?

His answer: he wanted to see America and to connect with people. In addition, he was extremely overweight and tied to his job. It was also important to set an example for his son so he will know that nothing is impossible.

He talked about his faith and how this trek has strengthened his relationship with God.

“The spirit is like a muscle, the more you use it, the stronger it gets,” he said.

Outside of Gallup, Higgins saw a woman on the side of the road with a sign on her truck that read “free puppies.”

Higgins stopped and talked with the woman and examined the puppies. He decided to take one of the German Shepherd mixes to keep him company on the last stretch of his journey.

“He definitely brightens things up.”

Durvan, the puppy, also hears people and notices things in the brush before Higgins does.

Before getting the dog, Higgins was talking to his stroller, Allen.

Now Durban the dog is the object of Higgins conversations. Higgins son, Calvin, named the dog.

“Now I think the dog is more popular than me,” he quipped.

Higgins is scheduled to reach the Grand Canyon June 19.