

# Legal Baggage

*Backpacking the United States  
With a Strong Appreciation for the Law*

**Avalanche & Gorilla Jim:  
Appalachian Trail Adventures  
and Other Tales**

*Written by Albert Dragon*

*306 pages*

*\$21.95, Morgan James Publishing*

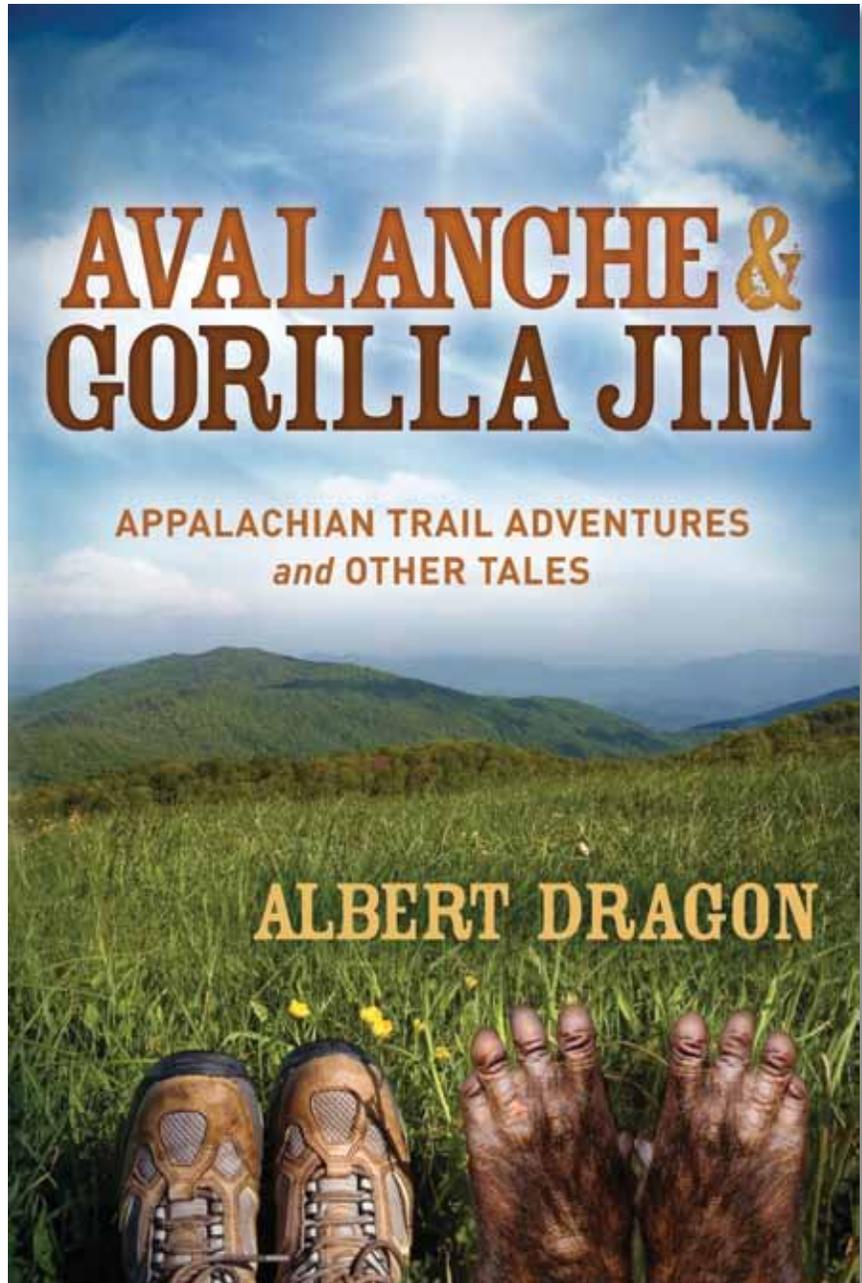
**W**hile most lawyers approaching retirement head to Florida, Al Dragon went south to Georgia, climbed a mountain and started walking north toward Maine on the Appalachian Trail. Along the way he was rescued from a mountain snowstorm in Tennessee, hiked in the same woods where the FBI was pursuing the terrorist who blew up the Atlanta Olympic Games, and introduces us to interesting characters and people who restore your faith in humanity.

Al's memoir "Avalanche & Gorilla Jim, Appalachian Trail Adventures and Other Tales" is filled with exciting exploits, belly laughs and shocking surprises such as brutal attacks and murders that happened on the trail up the Eastern spine of the U.S.

Mostly, there are laugh-out-loud moments: Trying to get out of an outhouse when the doorknob falls apart. The attempt to quiet a berserk night bird that was screaming for the thousandth time. His goofy encounter with a rattlesnake – and, a tarantula named Rosie.

Al's hiking partner is a former Army drill sergeant and combat veteran whose war memories occasionally cause poignant episodes of flashbacks and confrontations. The bond between this odd couple – a many-medalled war hero from Oklahoma and a pinstriped lawyer from Philadelphia – blossoms into a bond where each helps the other.

The former drill sergeant is nicknamed Gorilla Jim because of a roaring stuffed gorilla attached to his hiking



stick, a present from Jim's fifth wife. Al was dubbed with the trail name of Avalanche when he started a landslide of mud and water while slipping down a mountainside. Gorilla Jim uses his

training and experience as an Army Ranger to help Avalanche learn how to live in the backwoods.

There are many acts of kindness from strangers such as the woman who cared

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for Gorilla Jim when he broke a number of ribs while climbing the stone face of a mountain. A rock ledge broke, dropping Jim the equivalent of two stories. Another time, after hiking several days in a sleet storm they needed to use a phone to call a friend to pick them up in a remote forest; they knock on the door of a lone house on a back country road and the older woman who answers insists on making them a hot breakfast while they use her phone to call for help.

This easy read entertains, makes you laugh, sometimes shocks, and you feel what it's like to backpack the length of the U.S.

In one reference Al makes to his profession as a lawyer, he recalls a case in which his client was rendered quadriplegic and incontinent as a result of a brutal attack in a county jail. The effects of this condition are similar to difficulties and a potentially severe medical situation Gorilla Jim finds himself in while in deep remote backwoods.

In another reference to the legal profession, Al amusingly explains to a hiker how a lawyer should react to a cantankerous judge.

The rest of the book is pure enjoyment. It shows you can live the prime of your

life at any age.

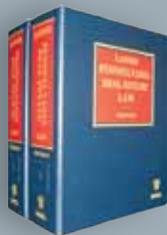
Al Dragon has been a Philadelphia lawyer for more than 50 years. He handled catastrophic injury cases with his own firm of A Dragon Associates, and with the firms of Litvin, Blumberg, Matusow and Young, and Kline & Spector. Al is presently of counsel to the McEldrew Law firm. When he is not in the backwoods, Al lives in Cherry Hill and Brigantine, N.J. with his wife Barbara and their dog, Winston. ■

*Judge Sandra Mazer Moss is a judge with the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.*

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