

# ONLY WHAT YOU CAN CARRY

One senior goes on an emotional, cross-campus journey after playing a Bobcat-made smartphone game.

BY JULIANNE MOBILIAN  
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JEFF KUHN



When people play app-based smartphone games, they don't usually carry tissue boxes around with them and duck away from people while trying to hide their tear-blotched faces. Unless they're playing "The Things We Carry." The app, developed by two Ohio University graduate students, has an unlikely objective: in short, to make the player cry.

Running on geocaching technology that guides the players on a reminiscent tour through OU's campus, the game is designed to take the player on one last emotional journey before graduation.

The creators, Jeff Kuhn and Donelle Batty, were inspired to create a game that pushes the boundaries of emotions of the players.

Tired of games that worked solely on player stimuli and "reptilian senses," as Kuhn calls them, they wanted to create something that made the player question the weight of physical and emotional baggage.

"We wanted to make an emotional story and see what we could do with mobile gaming," Kuhn says.

## HOW IT WORKS

Geocaching uses GPS receivers to guide players. "The Things We Carry" uses that geocaching technology to take players from one location-based task to another on campus.

Players must first download a free app called ARIS from the

App Store. From there, they will find "The Things We Carry" as a downloadable app in the ARIS database. Once in the game, players are taken to a main interface that shows three important options vertically staggered along the left side: "Quests," "Map" and "Suitcase." Those three components assist the player while playing the game.

Users follow the narrator, a girl named Jo, who is headed to Australia. She is about to graduate, and the player follows her footsteps using narratives in the form of audio clips, campus landmarks and special items in the player's inventory.

## PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

After creating an ARIS account and downloading the game, I was ready to roll. On a deceptively sunny, exceptionally cold Friday morning in late February, I plugged in my headphones, scrolled to "Quest," pulled up the map and headed out.

**10:08 A.M.**

I follow the directions on the map, and the first location is the post office in Baker. The directions tell me to pick up my passport and plane tickets for Australia. Upon arriving at the location, those items both appear in my inventory.

**CRY LEVEL:** Nonexistent.

**10:14 A.M.**

\*Ding\* Oh sweet, a text from Jo's mom. She tells me to hit Alden Library, Class Gateway, Jeff Hall and Emeriti Park on my goodbye tour.

**CRY LEVEL:** Lump In My Throat. I'm forced to think about life after OU. I graduate from the best place ever in May. This just got real.

**10:14 A.M.**

Next stop: Alden. Here, Jo talks about her favorite professor, Mrs. Garfield, who fostered her love for writing and even gave her a first-edition copy of *Leaves of Grass*, with a personalized note written on the inside jacket.

**CRY LEVEL:** Neutral. I've had amazing professors over the years, but that's eclipsed by the memory of a professor who said the silent 'P' in "raspberry," which drove me bonkers.

**SIDE NOTE:** Is Mrs. Garfield insane? Does she know how much a first-edition copy of *Leaves of Grass* is worth?! I just Googled it. Oh my God. It's worth anywhere between \$95,000 to \$150,000, depending on the book's condition. I could buy, like, two vacation homes with that!

**UPDATE:** Wait. No, I can't. Mrs. Garfield wrote in it, which will knock down the price considerably. It'll be worth, like, one vacation home now.

**CRY LEVEL:** Slightly Salty Because I'm Down A Vacation Home.

**10:23 A.M.**

Next stop, Class Gateway. Jo reminisces about the OU football games she attended with her dad. Her parents didn't have extra money to spend on gas and tickets, but her dad went anyway. Games were something they bonded over. Then Jo drops this bomb:

"When he passed away winter of junior year, I carried his football around for weeks."

Son of a— OK, I can handle this. I got this.

"So much has changed since you've been gone, Dad."

Oh f\*\*\*, sad music is playing in the background. If Josh Groban's "You Raise Me Up" comes on I'm ripping these headphones out and weeping in a dark closet.

"Bobby and I have drifted apart, Mom and I continue to argue over Australia."

There's no Josh Groban! I can get through this level!

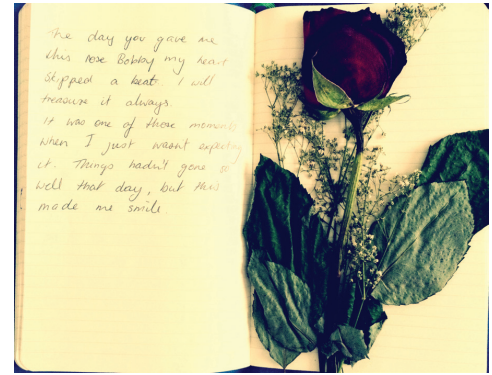
"I think she's accepted me leaving, but she's scared. You being gone doesn't make it any easier."

LOL. No I can't.

**CRY LEVEL:** Mascara Was A Bad Choice.

**10:37 A.M.**

After pulling myself together, I browse through my "Suitcase" inventory. I have to decide what to leave behind eventually, because all of the items won't fit. I'm not even done playing, but I've already grown fond of everything I've collected. As of right now, some of the things I must choose between are the copy of *Leaves of Grass*, a letter from Mrs.



Garfield, Dad's photo albums, Dad's football and, oh God, no...I can't...I can't.

**CRY LEVEL:** I Quit This Game.

## VERDICT

I didn't have the emotional balls to finish the game, but the creators told me how it continued. After a stop at Jeff Hall, you say goodbye to your soccer friends who give you an orange soccer ball and a jersey everyone signed. Your best friend, Carly, also gives you a Jackie O's glass you guys stole freshman year for your Australian walkabout adventures. After that, you're at Emeriti Park, where you reminisce about your first love, Bobby, and gain a rose and a teddy bear. Eventually, your final stop is the bus stop, but your suitcase is way too heavy to board. This is where you make the biggest sacrifice: what you'll leave behind.

"I think it has a powerful teaching moment in there about, 'What do you hold on to?' and, 'What is your emotion attached to?'" Batty says.

"What are you prepared to give up?"

The game doesn't end with an upfront outcome, the creators say. The player doesn't win points, but they're taught secondary empathy characteristics from walking in someone else's shoes for a day, which is what makes the game so distinctive.

For having such an unusual premise, "The Things We Carry" was artfully balanced with the right amount of nostalgia and relatability. Don't underestimate the strength of the sadness this game can bring; it can feel like a punch to the stomach, especially if you're a senior. In fact, if it's your last semester here or if you're an ugly crier like I am, you may not want to play this game until you've fully prepared yourself. **B**

**NOTE:** The ARIS app is constantly updated, so there are still some "buggy" bits, as Batty refers to them in the game. The game is still in its beta mode, which means it's still in development.