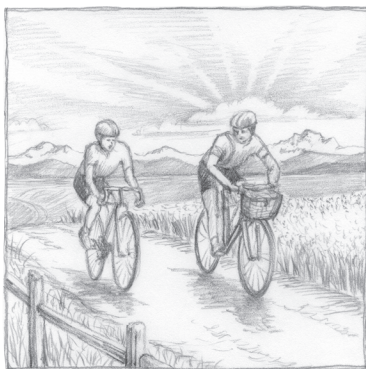


# *The King's Entryway*



by  
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[www.kingsentryway.com](http://www.kingsentryway.com)

## THE KING'S ENTRYWAY

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“He who walks across with me, will with me forever be.  
Not sure what it means, but that’s the way the story goes.”

“Sounds like a pretty good deal to me,” Josh said.

“Like I said, it’s just a story.  
Most people don’t believe it.”



A tale for Karen and for Amy and for kids of all ages.

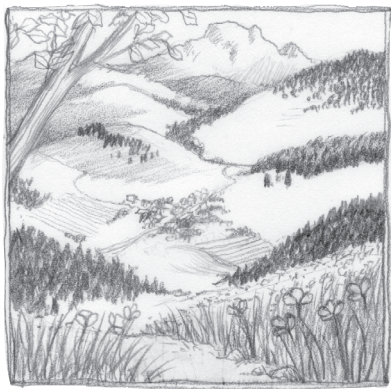


## CONTENTS

Lamb's Meadow	1
Stage 1: The Adventure Begins	8
Stage 2: Legend of Prince's Field	12
Stage 3: The Bike	18
Stage 4: Preparation	21
Stage 5: Balance	24
Stage 6: Encouragement	28
Stage 7: Perseverance	32
Stage 8: Direction	38
Stage 9: Power	43
Stage 10: Victory	49
Stage 11: The Adventure Begins	58







## LAMB'S MEADOW



Charis is very much like the country you are familiar with, but like most stories of this sort, it lies far, far away. Nestled in a valley at the foot of the Royal Mountains in the Province of Rohi is a small town named Lamb's Meadow.

Every small town has an annual event that puts them on the map, and for Lamb's Meadow, Festival is it. The week prior to Festival, everyone in Lamb's Meadow comes together to make it happen.

You and I might call Festival a small state fair. It's a weekend of barn raisings, quilting bees, furniture making,

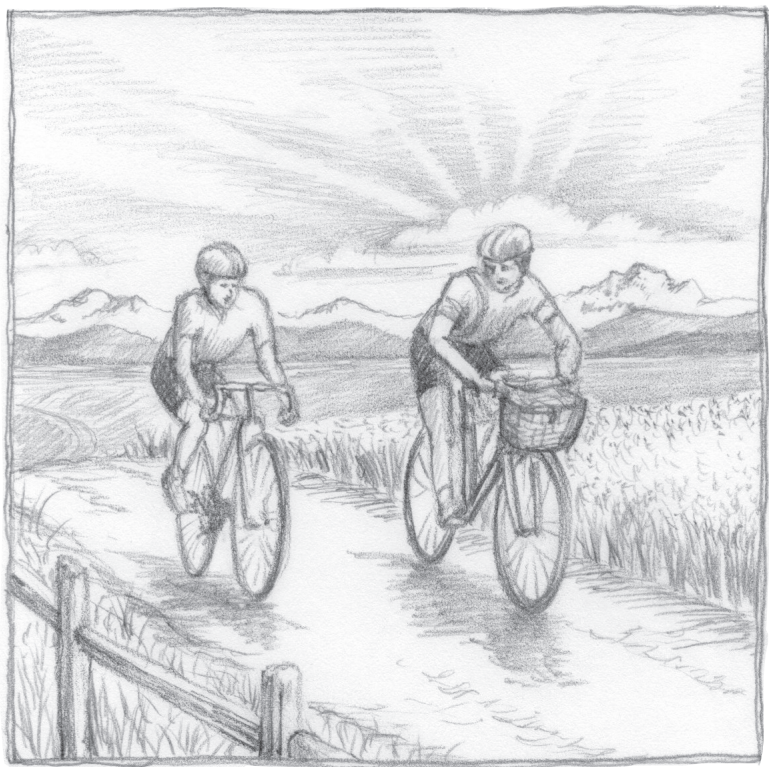
pottery making, arts and crafts demonstrations, athletic contests and of course, food. Farmers from all over Lamb's Meadow bring the best of their best for the judging, and when the judgin's done, the eatin' begins. There are more food pavilions than there are stars in the sky. All the food is free, and when the last bite is eaten what's left over is donated to the poor throughout the Province.

Locals say Festival started 50 years ago when the farmers in Lamb's Meadow were just finishing planting their spring crops. Word came to them during the night that a neighboring farmer took ill and his family was going to lose the entire crop without help. Well, the only transportation most of them had were bicycles, so early the next morning every farmer in the valley rode over to their neighbor's farm and helped finish the planting. After the planting was done, all the families in Lamb's Meadow gathered at the town square for a big celebration, and, well, things just took off from there. It's become an annual event and each year it keeps getting bigger and bigger.

The high-light of Festival is the Lamb's Meadow 50 or "The Fifty" as the locals call it. The Fifty is one of the most unique biking events you'll ever be a part of, drawing cyclists from all over Charis and a few neighboring countries.

If you've ever experienced a chili cook-off, then you'll understand what I mean when I say The Fifty is kind of like a chili cook-off on wheels. There's a competition bracket for serious riders, and then a not-so-serious competition including Father-Son, Father-Daughter, Mother-Son, Mother-Daughter, and the Generation Relay for families of three or more generations. But most who participate in The





Fifty ride in the recreational bracket. The Family Fun Ride is popular for families with kids on “trikes to bikes.” There are prizes for the best-decorated bike, best costume in individual and group category; prizes for the oldest bike, ugliest bike, most creative bike, and most ingenious bike. So whether you come for the competition or a relaxed ride through the farm land and foothills of the Royal Mountains, you come for the fun and the food.

Now if you happen to be traveling west on Highway 316 J

toward Lamb's Meadow, you'll pass Matthew Street, which is the west border of what locals call "The Rock Pile" or just "The Pile." And if you turn right onto Matthew Street and go about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile, you'll come to a small white house on the right—number 714. That's Farmer's home.

Farmer is a "Piler"—what locals call those who farm on The Pile. It's a hard life and leaves little time for leisure. But when Farmer has the chance, he takes his bike out on the road and rides through the foothills of the Royal Mountains.

Farmer rides perhaps why many of us do. Out on the roads above the valley and away from The Pile he can smell the wild flowers that grow along the roadside, and the honeysuckle that covers the fences. He can hear the silence that is broken only by the song of a meadowlark and feels the breeze as he rides through the clean mountain air. And sometimes, there seems to be this still, quiet voice whispering something to him, but he can't understand what's being said.



The morning of this year's Lamb's Meadow 50 arrived. It was a glorious morning, the kind of day you don't mind getting up out of bed for. The dew on the ground sparkled in the bright sunlight. The smell of cedar and pine hung in the air.

The route begins at the town square and makes its way east through the town on Main Street. Once out of Lamb's Meadow proper, Main Street becomes Highway 316 J and meanders through the farm land, and then turns north and

heads up into the foothills of the Royal Mountains. At the half-way point, the route heads west, following West Ridge Rd. that runs above the valley along King's Ridge. The route then turns southeast and heads back toward town. It's about 50 miles—give or take a mile—but no one particularly cares, even those riding in the competition bracket.

What makes The Fifty unique is what happens along the route. Farmers from all over Lamb's Meadow set up stands along the course. You can get fresh squeezed lemonade along "Lemonade Lane;" Watermelon along "Melon Mile;" and Fresh roasted peanuts at "The Peanut Party." And at the half-way point, most everybody stops at the "Water Hole," for some cold water and encouraging words from a local farmer named Fred.

Farmer rode his bike from number 714 Matthew Street through the center of town, toward the sounds and smells of The Fifty. Matthew Street is a wide, well-traveled road—it's flat and straight and easy to ride on. It didn't take him too long before he came to the Festival grounds, where riders were enjoying a farm-fresh breakfast of biscuits and gravy, scrambled eggs, bacon, and fresh juices, courtesy of a group of local farmer's daughters who call themselves "The Ram's Lambs."

It was 20 minutes before the start of The Fifty. As the bikers were mingling about, Farmer found himself sandwiched between two competition racers discussing the virtues of being aero (aerodynamically efficient). Their discussion was a little too intense for him, and as he maneuvered away from them, he came up alongside a man straddling a bike that could only be described as "unique."

The man spoke first, extending his hand. "Hi! I'm Josh."

Farmer was aware Josh had said something, but he could only focus on Josh's bike. He had never seen one like it. It appeared to be made of some kind of wood, although not like any tree he had seen in the Province, and the wood was all nicked up, like it had been through some kind of a battle. No fancy derailleurs or twist shifters; no hand-brakes. Just a very simple bike, much like the kind you had when you were young and just had the training wheels taken off. Farmer also noticed a wicker basket attached to the handlebars of the bike. Farmer figured Josh's bike must be extremely heavy and awkward. How was he going to get up hills on that thing?

Farmer finally took Josh's hand. "Excuse me," Farmer started in, "I couldn't help but notice your bike. It's—ah—it's unusual."

"I've gotta agree with you there," replied Josh, smiling. "But it does start a lot of conversations. I'm a craftsman, among other things. I mostly work with wood, and stone, and jewels. I built this bike for a very special event, but I ride it every now and then for an occasional cycling event—like today."

"It looks heavy. Isn't it kind of difficult to ride—especially climbing hills?"

"It's difficult sometimes, but it gets the job done. Lots of adventures on this bike."

"What are all those nicks on your bike from?"

"From those adventures. If I may ask...are you riding with anyone today?"

"Um...no," Farmer replied hesitantly.

“Are you a local?”

Farmer stood up straight from leaning over his handle bars, swelling with pride. “Yeah, fourth generation.”

“Well then, how about riding with me today? Or at least part-way. I’d like to hear about the area.”

“Why not?” Farmer agreed, happy that someone had taken an interest in him, and unaware he was grinning like a kid in a candy store.





STAGE 1:

## **THE ADVENTURE BEGINS**



The riders were arranged in order. The competition riders were positioned in the first group, their titanium alloy bikes glistening in the sun, heads down, gear shifters at the ready—poised for the starter’s gun. Next group was the parade of club riders: The Farmers’ Daughters, The Biking Vikings, a group of traveling salesmen calling themselves the Peddler’s Pedalers, and three blind riders known as the Three Blind Mice. Next was the recreation bracket, followed by the Family Fun Ride that circles the town square until the

kids—or the parents—get tired.

After the Charis National Anthem and a prayer, the report of the starter's gun cracked through the still morning air, and The Spring Festival Lamb's Meadow 50 was on! Once out of town, the riders spread out along the course, and Farmer and Josh established an easy pace which allowed them to enjoy the ride and talk easily.

"So what brought you to Lamb's Meadow today?"

Farmer asked.

"You did."

"I did!? I gotta tell you Josh—what you just said kinda creeps me out! You don't even know me!" Farmer *was* creeped out but also a little intrigued.

"I suppose that did sound a bit creepy, but I mean that sincerely. You asked me what brought me to Lamb's Meadow today and I told you—you did. I ride for the adventure. And for me, adventure is found within relationships.

"I think I can best tell you what I mean through a story. Once there was a young prince who lived in a palace. Like all princes, he had everything money could buy. But like most princes, he was lonely. What the prince wanted most of all was to play with the town kids his own age. So when his tutor wasn't teaching him how to sword fight or sail ships, or ride horses or learn one of five languages spoken in the kingdom, he would get on his bike and ride for hours around the countryside and through the town surrounding the palace grounds.

"Now, this was no ordinary bike—it was made of precious metals and jewels that sparkled in the sunlight. The handlebars had holes placed into them with an opening

on the top near the end, so that while he rode, the breeze created went through the opening and out came music, kind of like how a flute sounds. And so the prince learned to play tunes as he rode along.

“The village kids could hear the prince coming down the street, and they would run out to see his bike, much like you and I sprint after the ice cream truck when we hear it coming down the street in the summertime. The prince enjoyed being with all the kids, and he would let them all have a turn riding his magical, musical bike.

“One day, the prince decided to invite all the kids in the kingdom to the palace to play. He had cake and ice cream and had planned out all sorts of games to play. But when the kids arrived, all they wanted to do was ride his bike. In fact, no one even talked to the prince. The prince politely allowed every child there to have a turn on the bike. And after the last guest left, he closed the palace gates and cried.

“You see, it wasn’t the prince they wanted to see, it was his bike they wanted.”

When Josh had finished his story, he looked at Farmer and said, “You know, most of us are like the kids in the kingdom. The prince wanted someone he could hang out with and talk with and play with; someone with whom he could share all of his riches and treasures. What the kids didn’t think stop to think about was that the riches and treasures were within the prince, not the bike.

“Sometimes, I think about what I would have done if I had been one of the kids at the party. Would I have wanted the prince, or would I have wanted what I could get from him?

“I’ve ridden in a lot of these tours, Farmer, and the one



thing I value over everything else are the relationships I've built over the years with people I ride with and who ride with me. I've found that the adventure is within the relationships. So, I'm here today because of you."





STAGE 2:

## **THE LEGEND OF PRINCE'S FIELD**



As the course led them out of town and into the farmlands they rode on for a bit, not saying much. Farmer was thinking about the story Josh had just told him about the prince and his magical bike. Soon, Farmer pointed to the left and said, "That's my house over there and this is my farm we're riding past. Comes right up to the road we're on. That big acacia tree line over there is the north border. This small road we're comin' up to runs north into the foothills. It's the east border. When the route takes us along the ridge above the valley we'll be able to see the whole thing."

“Tell me about this part of the valley, Farmer.”

Farmer found himself enjoying the ride with his new friend. At least that’s how Farmer felt about Josh. Josh seemed genuinely interested in what he had to say and Farmer liked that.

“This part of the valley is called The Rock Pile ‘cause the soil is so rocky. Not many things grow too well in this kind of soil except olives and barley—that’s mostly what I grow. I’ve lived here all my life, just like my daddy and grand-daddy and great-grand-daddy did. I’m the fourth generation to farm this land.

“It’s hard work, farmin’ on The Pile. And we’ve had this drought goin’ on for ‘bout a year now that’s made things real bad. Lately, what with this drought and all, I’ve been thinkin’ about whether this is all life has to offer—sweat...hard work...and then what? Seems like there ought to be more to it.

“Another thing about The Pile—it’s kind of lonely out here. There’s not too many folks from other parts of town come over this way. I guess I’m kinda like that prince in your story. Not many friends growin’ up. Don’t have many now.”

After a moment, Farmer realized that he had been doing all the talking. He looked at Josh apologetically and said, “Guess I had a lot on my mind ‘cause it just all kinda came out. Sorry if I bored you.”

“Oh I’m not bored at all. I’m glad you told me about your life on The Pile. I told you I was interested in the area, and I’m interested in you. I know a lot of guys who farm for a living. I know a farmer who went to plant his field,” Josh said, launching into another story, “and as he scattered the seeds across his field, some of them fell on soil that was

shallow and rocky, like yours here on The Pile. The plants sprang up quickly, but the roots had no nourishment in that shallow soil, and the crop soon died. But some of the seeds fell on good, rich soil and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted.”

“Man—I’d like to have me some of that 30-60-100 harvest,” said Farmer.

“I’d like for you to have some of that too,” said Josh. “You can, if you’re interested.”

“You figure out a way for that to happen and I’m all ears.”

“Let’s talk about it later.” Josh grinned, “I just wanted to plant a seed.”



After a couple more minutes of riding, Farmer said, “Comin’ up now is what we call Prince’s Field. There’s a legend about this field—you ever hear of it?”

“I’m all ears,” said Josh smiling.

“Well, a long time ago, there was a King in Rohi whose castle was way up in these Royal Mountains. He was a good king and was kind to all his people. One day he looked out from the castle and saw sheep grazing in the valley, and named the valley Lamb’s Meadow.

“Story goes that there was a river that flowed from a fountain in the King’s castle down into Lamb’s Meadow. The water in that river made sick people well and the cattle and sheep that drank that water were the biggest and strongest around. And the land by that river was the best in Rohi.

“The King had a son and he planted a vineyard by the river in honor of his son, and named it Prince’s Field. He hired some local farmers to take care of the vineyard, and Prince’s Field produced the biggest and best grapes in the country. Still does.

“One day, the King went away to visit his land on the other side of the mountains. While he was away, it came time for harvestin.’ But one farmer took some of the harvest and sold ’em for himself rather than give to the King what was rightfully his.

“Like I said, the King was good and kind, but the farmer broke the law and had to pay for his crime. In those days, the penalty for stealing from the King meant death.

“When the Prince heard about what happened he went to his dad and said, “I know what this man did, but it’s too big a debt for him to pay. I’ll die in his place,” for he was good, like His Father, and he loved the people.

“Well, the law was the law and couldn’t be broken, so the King sadly accepted his son’s offer, ‘cause he knew how much the prince loved his people. So the prince ended up dyin’ for the thief.

“After the prince was dead, the King took his body back to his palace and put the prince’s body into that fountain. Bathed in the fountain’s waters, the prince came back to life. After that the King stopped the river from flowing into the valley to remind the people of what the prince had done for the thief. You’ll see the dried up river bed when we get up onto the ridge. Accordin’ to the legend, the prince is still alive and the fountain still flows within the palace. And anyone the prince invites to live with him in his palace can drink the

water from the fountain, and if he does he'll live forever."

"Who gets invited?" asked Josh.

"He who walks across with me, will with me forever be. Not sure what it means, but that's the way the story goes."

"Sounds like a pretty good deal to me," Josh said.

"Like I said, it's just a story. Most people don't believe it."

"What do you believe?" Josh asked.

"I don't know. Some people say they've met the prince, but I don't know if there's any truth to it. It's never been proven and don't know if there'll ever be any proof—unless the guy just walked into town. And even then, how would you know? You'd just have to take his word for it."

"But, what if the legend is true—that there really is a prince?"

"Yeah, I suppose it could be true, but like I said, no one's ever found anythin' that proves it. I think it's just a story."

"Is that bike you're riding real?"

Farmer looked at Josh. "Course its real!"

"Well, what if 100 years from now, your great-great-great grandkids heard stories about you riding in the Lamb's Meadow 50, but there were no pictures or official race results they could find—just hearsay. How would they know the story is true?"

"There would probably be some people still livin' then that would remember seein' me there and would tell 'em! Folks live a long time 'round here!"

"Well then...what if it was 1,000 years later? Would that make it any less true?" asked Josh.

“No—guess not. But it’s a whole lot easier to believe I was in a bike race than some story ‘bout a prince livin’ and comin’ back to life.”

“Well...there’s the field. And the dried up riverbed. And someone planted that vineyard. And some do believe.”

“Well...I’d have to see proof before I’d believe,” said Farmer.

“That vineyard you mentioned. Are the grapes really good?”

“Yeah—like I said—the best! You gotta get some before you leave. Where you from anyway?”

“Not too far away—a little beyond those hills,” Josh said, nodding his head toward the north.





STAGE 3:

## **THE BIKE**



Presently, Josh and Farmer came to the first stop on the tour course—Lemonade Lane. The climate around the valley is such that just about anything grows here, including lemon trees. After being served fresh-squeezed lemonade by “The Lemon-Aides,” Josh and Farmer continued on their ride. As they came around a bend in the road they saw a young lady kneeling on the ground beside her bike. Josh and Farmer stopped, introduced themselves, and asked her if there was anything they could help her with.



“Had a bit of a spill coming round the curve back there. I hit a sharp rock in the road and I went down with the bike. My rear tire is flat and I think *my* rear is flattened a bit as well—which,” she said with a grin, “would actually be a good thing! Lotta padding back there if you know what I mean!”

Josh hopped off his bike and inspected the flat tire on her bike. He then walked back to his bike, took a small tool bag out from underneath the back of the seat, pulled out a piece of bubble gum and a bottle that had something very sweet-smelling in it and began to work on the tire.

“What’s in that bottle?” Farmer asked.

“Sugar Tree sap,” said Josh. “Works as good as anything on the market. Costs less too, and tastes great!”

Farmer noted that for a guy with such big hands, he was amazingly dexterous.

Josh said, “When you have a bike as old as mine and you’ve ridden in as many events as I have, you learn how to do this kind of thing.”

Pretty soon, he had the tire patched, pumped and popped back onto the bike. After making sure the damsel in distress was ok, and assured that she was, Josh and Farmer hopped back onto their bikes and continued on.

“I wonder,” Josh mused, “If you had to pick just one, which part of the bike might be the most important?”

“Well,” Farmer answered, “I guess each could lay claim.”

“Maybe,” Josh proposed. “Suppose your bike had a conversation with itself. The brakes might say, ‘Without us you couldn’t stop. And then you’d be in trouble.’ Hearing that, the wheels might say, ‘But without us, you couldn’t get going in the first place. And we’re the ones who move us

along the road. Without us, there's no need for y'all.'

"Then the pedals might say to the wheels, 'But we're the ones that get y'all turning.'

" 'That may be true, my good friends,' interrupted the chain, 'but without me, it wouldn't matter how fast you spun or pushed. I'm the one who ties you two together.'

" 'Well, we might not be the most important,' the gears said, 'But we sure can make the going a lot easier. Try climbing some of those hills without us and see how you feel.'

" 'My job stinks,' the seat mourned.

" 'Excuse me,' hollered the frame, 'But just where do you think we'd be without each other? In a bike shop somewhere with absolutely nothing to do except look shiny. Look. We're not just one big part—we're made up of many different parts. Brake, if you say, "I'm not a part of this bike because I'm not a gear," that doesn't make you any less a part of the bike. Suppose we all were just one big brake, how could we go anywhere? Each of us is just where it should be. So, wheels, you can never say to the pedals, "We don't need you." And chain, you can't say to seat, "I don't need you." In fact, we're put together so that all of us can care for each other equally. If one part of us is in good working order, we should all be glad. If one of us is damaged, we all suffer. Each one of us is a separate but necessary part of the bike.' "

"So, Josh," said Farmer, "you still haven't answered your own question. If you had to pick one, which one would it be?"

"I think," said Josh with a wink, "Without the rider—who the bike is made for—it would go nowhere."





STAGE 4:

## **PREPARATION**



After stopping and being served a couple of slices of watermelon by the Melon Missies along Melon Mile, they came upon the Biking Vikings, four refrigerator repairmen from Norseland, which lies to the north of Charis. The Vikings, who dressed and looked the part, are well known among the regulars on the riding circuit. Their goal was to eat as much as possible during the weekend. If they made it through the entire ride they considered it a bonus.

Farmer sidled up to one of the Vikings. "You're looking a bit more serious about ridin' today than in past years."

Norge, the chief Viking, took a couple of deep breaths so he could speak. “We bet that group of washer/dryer repairmen—The Cycle Cyclers—we’d beat them in the pie eating contest tonight, so we’re all trying to work up as big an appetite as we can!”

Farmer and Josh wished them well and rode past the Vikings, noticing the groans and creaks emanating from their bike frames. “Wonder what their bike seats would say if they could talk,” laughed Farmer.

“The Vikings remind me of a relay team in the Charis 500 a couple of years ago,” said Josh.

“That’s a big-time event,” said Farmer. “You weren’t competing on this bike were you?”

“This bike and I do pretty well together, Farmer. But, to answer your question, no, I rode with some friends in the rec bracket. Anyway, the night before the race, two guys on one of the relay teams went into town and partied well into the early morning hours. They were good riders, physically the best on their team, and their team was the favorite to win the relay race—four legs of 125 miles each. Their other two teammates, however, took it easy the night before. They ate well, rested, and went over strategy as they knew they would need to be at their best to compete well.

“Later that morning the two revelers showed up just minutes before the race began. Needless to say, those two members of the team were in less than top form and their team finished 2 places off the medal stand.”

“I guess the two guys who did it right were pretty steamed at their other two teammates, weren’t they?” asked Farmer.

“At first, yes. But after the race, two men representing Continental, a new bicycle manufacturer, approached them. The guys from Continental knew what their other two teammates had done to themselves before the race. They were that much more impressed at how hard the guys who did it right had ridden to try and make up for their teammates’ poor performance.

“The teammates who did it right knew that they were not the most physically gifted on their team, and knew they needed to do the most with the abilities they were given. They prepared and maintained themselves well at all times. The guys from Continental were impressed with their work ethic, their attitude, their self-control and their discipline. Continental offered those two a spot to ride for a team they were putting together. The other two riders were left behind in the dust.”

Josh thought for a moment before he continued, “What those two had figured out, is that you can’t treat your body or your mind or your spirit like dirt and expect the others to be unaffected. You have to train and maintain all of you. Let one of the three go neglected or abused, and the rest of you doesn’t work so well.





STAGE 5:  
**BALANCE**



As Farmer and Josh were leaving Melon Mile, the Stephen family rode by. The Stephens were the only four generation family in the Generation Relay: Great-Granddad—84, Granddad—57, Dad—32, and young Timmy—7.

Timmy was going as far as The Peanut Party, a couple of miles ahead, and then Granddad would continue on to the Water Hole. From there, Dad would ride the rest of the course until the downhill part where Great-Granddad would coast down to the finish line.

As Farmer and Josh passed Timmy, the young boy

proudly announced, “I just got my training wheels off!” Just as he said it, he wobbled and toppled over into a pile of watermelons on the side of the road. Granddad, who was riding beside him stopped to help him up. Timmy came up with a big chunk of watermelon in his mouth. He spat out a couple of seeds and hopped up to his feet. “Funnest fall I ever had,” he said with a grin twice as wide as the slice.

“I remember fallin’ over a few times when I was learnin’ to ride,” said Farmer.

“It’s hard to ride when you’re out of balance,” said Josh. “Seeing Timmy fall off his bike reminds me of two very good friends of mine.

“Jen was a great cyclist. She put a lot of time and effort into training. But when an injury kept her out of cycling for awhile, here’s what she told me: ‘When I was healthy I figured if I worked hard enough I could make anything happen. But when I got hurt and couldn’t ride, that was something I couldn’t control. It left me feeling wobbly—out of balance. I didn’t know what to do.’

“What I found out was that I was trying to get my value as a person from what I did rather than who I was created to be. I was caught in the “good job, good person—bad job, bad person” trap. I was physically and mentally tired from trying to feel good about myself from how I performed.’ ”

“I know that feeling,” said Farmer. “Ever since the farm hasn’t done so well lately I haven’t felt too good about myself. Did she ever get out of that trap?”

“It was a bad place for her to be, but yes, she found there’s a way out,” Josh replied.

“How’d she find her way out?”



“She found there was someone who loved her not because of what she did but for who she was,” Josh replied. “He helped her find the balance she needed in her life.”

“Where’d she find him?”

“Over the hills and beyond them.”

“What’s that mean?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute. My other friend was a three-time Olympian. He was one of the most successful and recognized athletes in the world. But he was empty on the



inside. He said, 'In the midst of the glory, I became aware of a gnawing emptiness in my heart. If I'm so successful, why am I so dissatisfied?' "

"Did he ever fill that empty spot in him?"

"He did," replied Josh.

"How?"

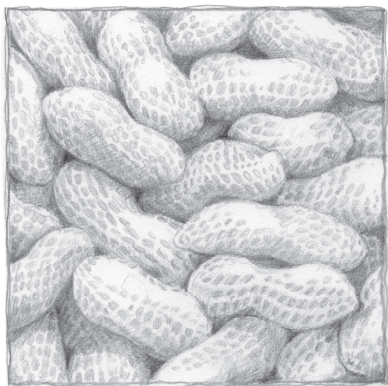
"He lifted his eyes to the hills—and beyond."

"You said that earlier. What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said. Look to the hills and then beyond them."

"All I see are the hills," Farmer pouted.





STAGE 6:

## **ENCOURAGEMENT**



Charis is well known for its peanut crop which comes from an area of the valley the locals call “Peanut Pass.” It was formed when a great flood thousands of years ago deposited sandy soil to that part of the valley. From Peanut Pass come the peanuts that make the “Peanut Party” one of the favorite stops along The Fifty.

At the Peanut Party you can get fresh roasted, salted, or plain peanuts served with a smile by “The Peanut Princesses.” It’s also the one day of the year when moms tell their kids that it’s ok to toss their shells on the ground.

That said, shell tossing does make navigating the road along the Peanut Party a bit hazardous and several riders opt to walk their bikes across the Party grounds. Josh and Farmer watched one gallant husband walk his wife's bike across the Peanut Party for her and then go back for his.

"Watching him reminds me of a couple of memories that are still so vivid in my mind that I can see them like they happened yesterday," said Josh. "A few years ago I witnessed an amazing finish to the Race of Champions in Anolia. Eight champions from eight countries were invited to race. Hundreds of thousands of spectators lined the course. The last 400 meters of the race came off a curve and opened into a flat, straight-away to the finish line. The three leading riders came off the curve in a virtual tie. It was an all-out sprint to the finish.

"Two hundred meters from the finish, one of the cyclists suddenly jerked straight-up, lost his balance and fell. His hamstring had given way under the strain of the sprint. Lying there in pain, his race over, all he could do was watch the other champions go by. He was determined to finish his race though. So, holding onto his bike, he pulled himself up and began to hobble toward the finish line. But his injured leg couldn't bear his weight and he fell back down onto the pavement.

"When his father, who was watching the race near the finish-line, saw him go down he jumped out of the stands and made his way toward his son. When security stopped him, he yelled, 'That's my son!' He was allowed to pass, and ran to him.

"When he reached his son, the young man was in so

much pain that he didn't recognize his dad and pushed him away. Then his dad said, 'Son...' When his son recognized his voice, he tried to get up. The father looked at his son and said, 'You don't have to do this.'

" 'Yes I do,' was his reply.

" 'Then,' his father said, 'We will do it together.'

"His dad helped him onto the seat of his bike; his son's injured leg dangling uselessly. Balancing his son upon the bike, father and son slowly began to make their way to the finish line, while an amazed crowd rose to their feet and roared.

"The official results of the race showed his performance as "race abandoned." It was anything but that. While there was a winner to that race of champions, I have no idea who it was. What I do remember, is how a father loved and encouraged his son not because he was a great rider, but because he was his son."

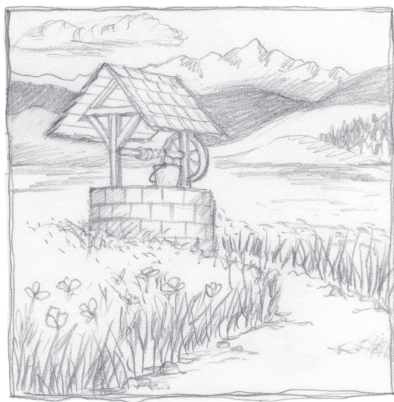


"Another year, I watched a race where three quarters of the way through, the riders came to a part of the course known as "Heartbreak Hill." I was sitting half-way up the hill, and cheered as the first of the racers began their tortuous climb. One of the leaders was a young man, who had spent so much energy on the first part of the race that he was almost completely exhausted. I didn't think he would make it up the hill. An older, more experienced racer passed the younger man, and then to the crowd's amazement, slowed down and came alongside him. As other riders surged by them, he stayed right beside that young man, constantly

encouraging him as they slowly made their way up the hill together. I noted their numbers and quickly made my way to the finish line. I arrived there, just after the race ended, and found them, still together.

“I asked the older man why he took himself out of the race to help the younger man. Here’s what he told me: ‘I’ve won a lot of races, but I’ve found that the things we’re chasing after while we’re in this world will one day go away. One minute people are hollering your name, and the next minute they won’t know who you are. But true success is when you produce that which remains. This young man needed encouragement far more than I needed winning.’ ”





STAGE 7:

## **PERSEVERANCE**



After a few more miles Farmer and Josh came to the Water Hole—the half-way point of The Fifty.

As far back as anyone could remember, Fred was always at the Water Hole giving out bottles of cold water to the riders. The most anyone knows about him is that he lives somewhere near Prince's Field and keeps to himself. But he's always gracious and has a kind word for everyone. Some of the locals say that there's a well somewhere on Fred's land and the water that comes from that well has amazing properties. No one knows for sure if that's true, but

most everyone who's stopped at the Water Hole will tell you they feel stronger after drinking it. 'Course it might have something to do with the fact that they've just ridden 25 miles on a warm day. Or...just maybe...

"So this is the famous Water Hole," Josh remarked looking around at several groups of riders standing astride their bikes, each with a bottle labeled "Fred's Water—2012 Lamb's Meadow 50" in their hand.

"Yeah," replied Farmer, "Hang out here for awhile and you'll hear some good stories yourself. Hey, there's Fred over there, talkin' to that girl. Maybe he's tryin' to get a date for the hoe down tonight!"

Josh and Farmer dismounted and made their way over to where Fred was kneeling beside a young woman resting against a tree. Her right shoe was off and there was an ice bag wrapped around her foot. She looked as if she was in some pain.

"Fred, I know you're trying to make me feel better, but you don't understand. I've trained for months for this race. The Olympic trials are in just a few months. It's just not fair."

"Tell me again what happened, Despondence." Any doctor I know would give a lot for Fred's bedside manner.

"I was passing a cyclist on her right, when she swerved in front of me to go around a pothole in the road. I had to do a hard right turn to avoid colliding with her. I put my foot down to keep from falling over, but I came down hard on it, and oh, I think my toe's broken. I mean...why me? I didn't do anything to deserve this. I'm just so mad! I don't know what I'm going to do."

"I'll tell you what you need to do," Fred stated, now speaking more like a coach. "Let me tell you a story about a pickle some folks got into. Over 25 centuries ago, a king from the Middle East destroyed what was known as The Shining City and the protective wall surrounding it. This king took many of those living in the Shining City back to his country to serve his needs. Businesses in that once glorious city failed. Homes were quiet and dark. The city became a wasteland.

"Years later, with that part of the world under a different rule, descendants of those taken from the Shining City began to make their way back there. One particularly brave man asked permission from the reigning king to travel back to rebuild the wall so that once again The Shining City could regain her glory."

By that time quite a crowd had gathered around Fred and the fallen rider. Someone in the crowd asked, "Did they do it? Did they ever get the wall rebuilt?"

"Yes...they did," replied Fred. "It was an enormous undertaking, but the people living in the city bought into the rebuilding and they were willing to put the work into it. But there was opposition. There were some who didn't want the walls rebuilt. The surrounding cities had taken over the trade routes and political power in the Shining City's absence. When the rebuilding began, these other cities sent delegates to persuade them not to rebuild. They didn't want to lose what they had gained in her absence. But the people continued rebuilding, working even harder than before. They pressed on and saw it through to completion. They overcame their opposition."



“So, what’s your point, Fred? What does that have to do with me?” Despondence asked.

“My point is this: The people doing the rebuilding faced a pretty tough job. Some would have said impossible. But those doing the rebuilding pressed on. You have the same choice to make Despondence. You can lie there and feel sorry for yourself, or you can buy into doing what it takes to realize your dream of competing in the Olympic Trials. You’ll have opposition—fear, doubt, pain, maybe discouragement from those who don’t share your vision. Don’t be afraid of them. I know that you can, with help, start the rebuilding.”

“Help?” inquired Despondence. “Who is going to help me?”

“Look up into the hills, Despondence, and then beyond them. That’s where your help will come from.”

As they were talking, a local farmer had arrived in his truck to drive Despondence back into town for medical help. Fred and the farmer helped Despondence into the back of his truck and as they were ready to leave, Fred leaned over and whispered something in her ear. Despondence smiled and gave him as big a hug as one can when propped up in the bed of a truck.

After watching the truck pull away, Farmer noticed that Josh had stepped over to talk with Fred. A couple of minutes later, Josh and Fred began walking toward Farmer. As they approached him, Josh said, “Farmer, I believe you know Fred.”

“Well, we’ve never met formal like. It’s nice to meet you sir.”

“Nice to meet you, son. It’s going to be hot today,” said

Fred as he held out a couple of water bottles. Why don't you take these—on the house! Remember—if you get tired, look to the hills and then beyond them.”

“Thank you,” replied Farmer. “Um...look to the hills and then beyond them. That's what Josh told me earlier,” said Farmer, looking at Josh suspiciously.

“Listen to him, son. They're good words,” said Fred as he turned to walk back to his water stand.

“Yessir. I'll remember them. Thanks again for the water, Mr. Fred...uh...Fred...uh, sir!”

Farmer felt sort of like a celebrity, being on a first name basis with the famous Fred. It was the first time Fred had actually spoken to him—or it's the first time Farmer had stopped to listen.

Josh straddled his bike. “Well, Farmer, I asked you to ride half-way with me, and here we are. Would you like to continue on?”

“Yeah,” said Farmer, “I've enjoyed ridin' with you and listening to all your stories,” Farmer said grinning. “Let's keep going.”

As they took off from the Watering Hole, Farmer asked Josh, “So what were you and Fred talking about?”

“Oh, I've known Fred for a long time. He's at a lot of these events—always with a bottle of water and a good word for anyone who will listen.”

“Speaking of words, Fred just said the same thing to me you did a while back—about lookin' to the hills and beyond. And it's the same thing he said to Despondence. And look here—it's written on my water bottle label. Is this some kind of code or somethin' you guys use?”

“It means, Farmer, don’t put your confidence in things or people, but look to the one through whose power and goodness help can and will come.”





STAGE 8:  
**DIRECTION**



About a half-mile past the Water Hole the Fifty climbs into the foothills of the Royal Mountains until you come to a fork in the road. Take the left fork and you're on West Ridge Road. West Ridge is the wider, easier road to ride on. It takes you above the valley along King's Ridge, and then takes you downhill and back toward town. This is the official second half of the Lamb's Meadow Fifty.

If you take the right fork, you'll find yourself on North Ridge Road. North Ridge used to be the only road along King's Ridge until West Ridge was built to accommodate the

increased traffic as Lamb's Meadow grew. When West Ridge was built, The Fifty was re-routed along the new road.

North Ridge heads higher up into the foothills, and then parallels West Ridge, eventually merging with West Ridge before heading back toward town. North Ridge is a one lane road—well, really more of a trail than a road—narrower and bumpier than West Ridge. Cars hug the outsides of the road to get by each other. During the Fifty only a few riders go “old school”—go North Ridge—but those that do say it's worth the view.

Farmer always chose the West Ridge route. He had never taken North Ridge, but always sensed that there was something kind of noble—almost sacred—about taking that road. As Farmer and Josh came to the fork, Josh said, “Let's go North Ridge today—I'd like to see it again.”

“See it again? You've been here before?”

“These are my old stomping grounds. I grew up in and around these hills. Used to call these parts of the hills ‘The King's Entryway.’ ”

“No kiddin'! But from the looks of these hills, you're going to have a hard time getting that big old, creaky bike up this trail. I've heard it's a long way up and pretty hard climbing—let's go West Ridge.”

“Trust me...the view from North Ridge will be worth it...” said Josh.

Truth be told, Farmer didn't want Josh to think he was a wimp, so reluctantly, he agreed to follow Josh. Just before heading up North Ridge, Farmer noticed some apple trees along the side of the road. He stopped beside one of the trees, picked a couple of apples and put them away for later.



Just as they began heading up North Ridge, a man came speeding down the road toward them and stopped right in the middle of the intersection, facing West Ridge, calling, “Wander-Off...Wander-Off...”

Farmer recognized the man from being at the Festival the night before, and again milling about at the start of The Fifty. Both times he remembered there was a young boy with him.

Farmer looked at Josh, who didn’t seem at all surprised, but very interested. “Why do you suppose he’s saying that?” asked Farmer.

“I think we’re about to find out.”

About a minute later, they heard a high pitched voice yelling, “Dad, Dad, I’m coming, I’m coming, wait up, wait up.” When the boy—he looked about 12—arrived at the crossroads, he was visibly upset and you could tell he had been crying. When his dad saw him, he ran toward the boy and hugged him—as well as you can hug someone smaller than you who is sitting on a bike—and when he did, the boy and the bike fell over on top of him. They lay there for a minute, laughing and hugging.

The dad managed to untangle himself from underneath the boy and the bike, got up, picked up his son and dusted the dirt off them both. He then went to his bike and pulled out of a small bag attached behind the seat, a shirt. The color was unlike any Farmer had ever seen before—sunlight is the only way to describe it. His dad gave it to him and after the boy put it on, the two started up North Ridge.

Josh looked at the two, beaming. "There'll be some dancing tonight," he sang out.

"What do you mean by that?" Josh asked.

Josh, without taking his eyes off the two, and still beaming, said, "As they approached the fork, the dad had told his son to follow him onto North Ridge. But Wander-Off wanted to explore West Ridge and took off on his own. When the boy got down the road a ways, he realized those things along the road that at first looked attractive to him were only leading him farther and farther away from where he knew he should be, and why his dad told him to go North Ridge. As he turned around to go back and catch up to his dad, he saw that the intersection of West Ridge and North Ridge had vanished and realized he didn't know how to get back to his dad—he couldn't see or hear him and he began to panic."

"How do you know that?" asked Farmer.

"I've seen it happen many times."

Then Josh looked at Farmer and said, "Ever get separated from your mom or dad at Festival when you were young?"

"Yeah," Farmer said. A far-away look in Farmers' eyes told Josh that Farmer was remembering just such a time and how that panicky feeling that starts at your toes and works its way up was still a vivid memory for him.

"You know the feeling then. It's the worst feeling in the world...for you...*and* for your dad."

Farmer came out of his thoughts and looked at Josh. For a moment, Farmer saw that Josh's countenance reflected his own, as if Josh could feel what he was feeling.

Then a twinkle came into Josh's eyes and he continued,

“But did you happen to notice that Wander-Off’s dad was up on North Ridge right above him? He could see Wander-Off the whole time, but Wander-Off couldn’t see him. When the boy stopped and turned around, and started calling out for his dad, what he didn’t know and couldn’t see was that his dad was already on the way down to meet him at the crossroads. Whoo—Hoo! There’ll be some dancin’ tonight!”

It appeared to Farmer that Josh seemed to be watching something that he couldn’t see but wished he could.

“Why do you keep saying there’ll be dancin’ tonight?” Farmer skunked, a little agitated because he felt like Josh was keeping a really good secret from him.

“There always is when a child who was lost is found,” Josh said with a wink.







STAGE 9:  
**POWER**



Once Farmer and Josh were up aways on North Ridge, Farmer found himself enjoying this new view. Farmer noticed that he was seeing things more clearly on North Ridge. As he saw riders cruise along below on West Ridge, the road seemed dim in comparison, almost as if it were in shadows. He then saw the things along the road that he once wanted and for a time enjoyed, weren't so attractive to him now.

As Josh and Farmer continued to follow North Ridge they came upon a man who, to Farmer's astonishment, was riding a bike that was very similar to Josh's! It appeared to

be made out of the same kind of wood and sported the same kind of nicks and cuts in the wood.

Farmer's attention then focused on the man riding the bike. He wasn't physically imposing at all—in fact he was rather slight—yet he was having no trouble getting that big, heavy, awkward bike up the hill they were currently climbing. Farmer, on the other hand, was laboring to get up the hill and keep up with Josh.

Josh hailed the man: "Petros! Hello friend!" They both came to a stop at a flat, open spot off the road, and embraced, obviously happy to see each other. Farmer tried not to breath too hard as he rode up toward Josh and Petros, and glad for a bit of rest.

"Farmer, this is my good friend, Petros. I met him many years ago, and he asked me to make him a bike like mine. He rides in events all over the world. Let's stop for awhile. I want to catch up with this good man."



Josh and Petros picked up as if time had not passed since they last saw each other, the way it is with all good friends who haven't seen each other for a long time. But they didn't leave Farmer out of the conversation, and Farmer was very much enjoying the stories the two friends were telling.

At one point in the conversation, Farmer asked Petros, "Why do you like riding this big ol' clunky bike you got? Wouldn't it be much easier riding if you had a bike with gears—you know—a little more modern?"

Petros was quiet for a moment, looking for the right words with which to begin his answer. When he spoke, he

spoke with confidence. "This is a hard bike to ride, Farmer, but a good bike. I wouldn't ride another. Riding this bike develops my strength and endurance."

"So how do you pedal that heavy thing? I was having trouble getting up the hill on *my* bike."

"That's because you're riding on *your* strength. You're relying on *yourself*. My strength comes from another.

"From another?" asked Farmer.

"I was not always this strong and I didn't always ride this bike. For many years I was a member of the Ammos National Cycling Team."

Farmer was impressed. Cycling was the national sport of Ammos, and Ammos always fielded strong teams. Petros had a captive audience.

"I built my life around cycling and cycling brought me fame and fortune. Those are not bad things by themselves, but I let them become more important to me than anything or anyone. Riding was always there for me; and I put my trust and confidence in it, like some trust in their money or their work to always be there for them.

"Twenty years ago, all the sacrifices I made, all the hard work and persistence I put into cycling paid off. I qualified to represent Ammos in The World Championships. But a month before the Championships, a knee injury put me on the sidelines. All I could do was sit and watch my team struggle throughout the whole competition. We came in dead last. I was helpless to do anything about it.

"It was after my injury that I realized I was trying to live life the way I wanted to. Farmer...I built my life upon sand, something that could easily be washed away. What I

needed was to build my life on something solid, something... someone permanent. Soon after I realized this, a teammate of mine introduced me to the one beyond the hills. He became and he remains my help and my strength."

"Josh said the same thing to me earlier. Who is this beyond the hills guy I'm supposed to look for?"

"The Prince of Rohi."

"The Prince of Rohi?" Farmer was wide-eyed.

"Yes. And here's what he told me: 'I am the Solid Rock to build your life upon. And if you're going to build your life upon me, then you can't remain the same. You'll have to leave some things behind. Having more of me means less of you.'

"So that's why I ride this bike—to point others to the 'beyond the hills guy.' Every nick and cut in this bike is a reminder of the struggle of leaving my old life behind and living my new one the way he wants me to. At times it's very difficult leaving my old, comfortable life and following my new one. But there's no better place to be than on the road that leads you to The Prince. Once my life was built on sand. Now it's on solid rock. But I can't live the way he wants me to by myself. I need his strength to help me do it.

"You've actually met him?!" Farmer was still wide-eyed. "But the Prince...he's just a legend."

"Is he now? Well, you know best!"

"But, how did you *know* he was the Prince?"

"Because he changed me—changed me on the inside. And he continues to help me become the person I was designed to be."

"How did he change you?"

“Come over here—I want to show you something.”

Petros led Farmer over to a side of the trail where a huge vine with large red berries on its enormous branches were growing out from the vine. A little ways from there was a branch that had been cut off from the vine. Being cut off from the vine, it was dry, of course, with no life in it.

“Farmer,” Petros began, “The vine is the source of life and strength for all these branches. Without the vine, its branches can’t do what they’re supposed to do, which is produce these berries—it’s fruit. The Prince, Farmer, is the vine and I am one of his branches. Those who are not one of his branches go through life on their own strength—His strength and power are not in them.

Farmer then noticed something about the vine. The branches appeared to be the same kind of wood that Josh’s and Petros’ bikes were made from. Then Farmer’s attention was drawn to the baskets on their bikes—their baskets were full of the same berries that grew on the vine. Petros had two baskets on his bike.

Petros walked back to his bike, took one of his baskets off, walked over to Farmer’s bike and fastened the basket onto it, and Farmer was content to let him do so. Right then, Josh suggested that they continue riding as it was getting later into the day. Josh and Petros rode together, with Farmer lagging behind. The trail was getting steeper and he was getting tired. But Josh and Petros were having no trouble with the climb and they slowed down to allow Farmer to catch up.

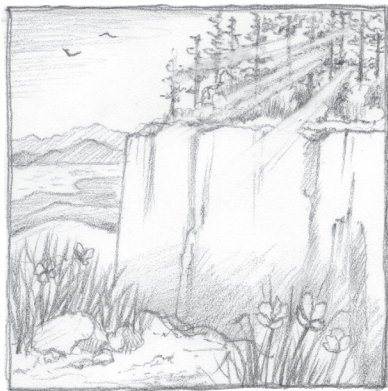


Soon they came to a curve in the trail where an older man was sitting on the ground with his head between his knees. As they approached, he lifted his head. He looked pale and weak. Farmer looked at the man, then looked at Petros. Petros gave Farmer a look that said, "So do something already." Farmer got off his bike and reached into the bag attached behind the seat and pulled out one of the apples he had picked earlier in the day, right before he and Josh started up North Ridge, and one of the bottles of water Fred had given him at the Water Hole. He walked over to him and said, "Here you go sir—looks like you could use a little pick me up."

"Thank you so much," the man wearily replied. "I was riding faster than an old guy like me should be in this heat, and didn't bring enough water. I think this will help me get going again. Thank you son."

After a few minutes of conversation, Petros bade farewell to Josh and Farmer. He was staying with the man to make sure he was o.k. As Farmer returned to his bike, feeling rather virtuous, he took the remaining apple and bottle of water out of his bag to put them into the basket Petros had attached to his bike. When he lifted the lid, to his amazement, there was a cluster of red berries in the basket!





STAGE 10:

## VICTORY



As Josh and Farmer continued on the Fifty, they soon came to a trail that turned sharply right and went higher into the mountains. Josh turned to go up the trail, but Farmer hesitated. Farmer didn't know where this trail would take him. Josh noticed Farmer's hesitation and said, "You can go back to West Ridge and rejoin The Fifty but trust me, this will be worth the view."

Farmer had no real reason to think that Josh would intentionally mislead him and following Josh had been o.k. so far, so reluctantly, he went along.

As they climbed the trail it became narrower, steeper, and rockier. The trees became denser and began to shut out the light. The trail narrowed so much that Farmer and Josh had to go single file. A couple of times, Josh was far enough ahead of Farmer that Farmer couldn't see him. It was during those times that Farmer heard whispers telling him to go back to West Ridge where it was easier, more familiar, and more comfortable. Farmer began listening to those whispers. He was getting *tired*.

Farmer stopped, turned his bike around, and called out to Josh, "Hey Josh—this is as far as I'm goin.' I'm headin' back down."

Josh turned around and came back down the trail. He looked at Farmer and said, "You've made it this far. Just keep going with me." And then Josh did a curious thing—at least Farmer thought so—he began to sing. Farmer didn't know the words, but vaguely remembered the tune, and as he listened he started to feel better—stronger. So he turned his bike around and pressed on up the trail with Josh riding more slowly so Farmer could keep up with him.

A little farther up the trail, the front tire on Farmer's bike hit a loose rock. He lost his balance, and went down hard, twisting his ankle a bit. He most certainly couldn't ride now, he reasoned to himself, and began to figure out how he was going to walk with his bike down such a steep trail. It certainly wouldn't be easy.

Josh stopped immediately when he heard Farmer go down, and ran to help him. After feeling his ankle, Josh could tell it wasn't as bad as Farmer claimed and told him so. Josh helped Farmer to his feet, and began to help him



walk up the trail. Farmer began to protest, wanting to go back down to West Ridge. “Others will pass by and they’ll call for help. I’ll be ok.”

Josh looked at Farmer, and his eyes told Farmer he could trust him. “We’re almost to the top. And trust me—the view is worth it.”

“What about my bike?” Farmer whined.

“You won’t need that bike any more,” Josh said.

Josh helped Farmer hobble to where he had left his bike—his big, awkward, clunky old bike, and then helped Farmer sit down on the ground. What happened next was very unusual, even if you’re accustomed to seeing unusual things happen. Josh extended the seat on his bike toward the rear so that it became a kind of ledge. He then picked Farmer up like he was a child, and straddled him atop the ledge.

Josh mounted the bike, glanced back toward Farmer and said, “Hang on!”

Josh started pedaling them up the trail on his big, awkward, clunky old bike. “No way. Whoa—yes way! How are you doing this?!” Farmer asked, in disbelief.

“Clean living.”

Slowly but steadily, Josh moved them up the trail. After one last sharp turn, they reached the top of the trail. “Farmer,” said Josh, “This is why I chose to ride with you today...so I could bring you here!”

“Here,” was the edge of a cliff overlooking a great chasm, hundreds of yards across. It was as deep as it was wide and its walls on either side were vertical and smooth as glass. The view was breathtaking. Farmer had never seen anything

quite like this before. Across the gorge they could see the Great Sea that lay beyond. Eagles flew high in the air, and the scent of cedar and pine was all around them. And on the other side of the gorge, to their right, Farmer saw something shining through the trees, but couldn't make out what was.

After a couple of minutes of taking in the view, Farmer looked at Josh and said, "You're right Josh—the view is worth it. Really...it's awesome—it really is. I'm glad you brought me here to see it. But this is the end of the line. Now you be careful with us going back down!"

"It doesn't have to be the end of the line..." Josh said.

"What do you mean?" asked Farmer.

"We can go on...I can take us across. Will you go across with me? Not something you get to do everyday!"

"I suppose this bike of yours flies, right?"

"No. But I need to know—will you trust me to take us across? I promise..."

"I know, I know," said Farmer, "The view will be worth it!"

Farmer knew that it was impossible to get across that chasm by himself, but everything he had seen and heard from Josh told him that he could trust him. More than believing *what* Josh said, Farmer believed *in* him.

"Oh man...o.k....yeah...yes...I trust you. I'll go across with you"

"Then," Josh said, "Let's go!" With those words, Josh laid his bike down on the ground at the edge of the chasm. To Farmer's amazement, the bike began to lengthen and extend across the ravine. And the handlebars began to extend as well—which only stands to reason—so that what

was once a bike now was a giant cross. When the cross had reached the other side of the chasm, Josh took Farmer's hand and stepped onto it. In an instant they were on the other side of the canyon.

Farmer didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Actually he did a little of both at the same time and Josh was perfectly content to let him. Farmer wasn't quite sure what had just happened, but he knew that something about him had changed. Somehow, the world seemed to make more sense now. He knew the way things ought to be.

When Farmer regained his composure he looked around and saw that they were standing in a meadow full of brightly colored flowers, flowers that Farmer had never seen, with wonderful scents that changed every few seconds. Josh looked at Farmer and said, "Now for that view I promised you. Look over there, to your right."

"Oh my stars," was all Farmer could say. "Oh my stars."

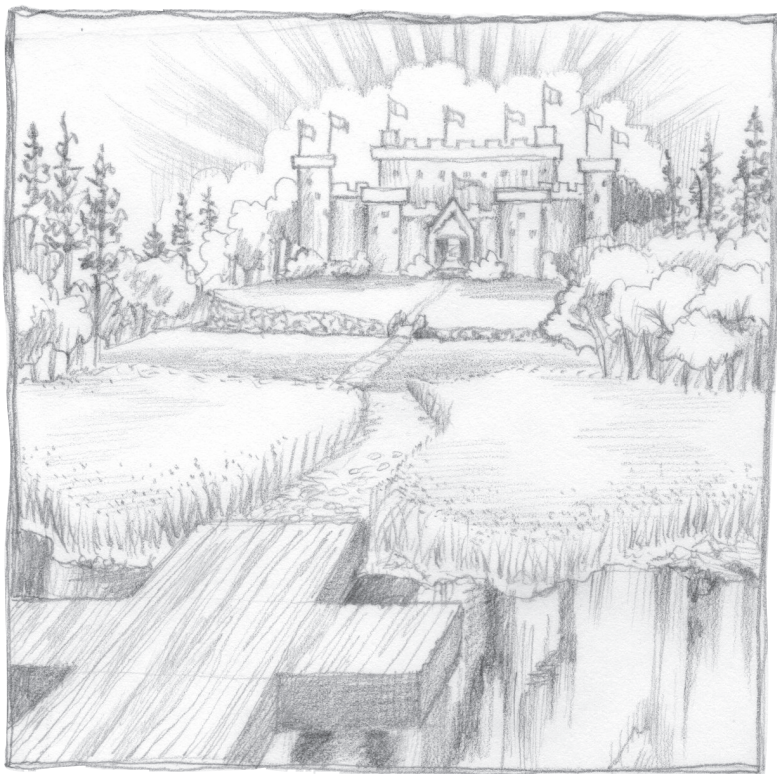
A trail of gold stones cut a path through the meadow. And at the end of the path there rose from terraced lawns a magnificent castle whose walls shone in the sunlight reflecting all the colors of the rainbow.

Circling the castle flew the flags of every nation on earth, with one flag that Farmer sensed was the most important one of all. All the other flags flew toward it, and seemed to bow down before it. On the castle grounds were every kind of tree on the earth. And through the massive open castle doors Farmer saw a fountain from which streams of sparkling clear water flowed becoming waterfalls that disappeared underground. Colors he had never seen, smells he had never smelled, and music sweeter than any he

had ever heard spilled out from within the palace across the grounds. And to their left, way, way off in the distance, he could see Lamb's Meadow valley.

"Told you the view would be worth it."

Farmer's legs couldn't bear his weight and he dropped to his knees and bowed his head. When he looked up, he said, "He who walks across with me, will with me forever be. This is beyond the hills...You're the One beyond the hills... my Help."



“Yes,” Josh said, “I am. And more.”

“The castle...then the legend is true!”

“Yes, Farmer, it’s true. But no one can see this place or come here unless he or she is with me. You could never have seen the trail that led us here unless I revealed it to you. You have seen because you believed in and followed me. And because you have believed and followed, within this castle, Farmer, is a very great reward for you.”

Farmer jumped to his feet. “Well...your ankle seems to be better!” exclaimed Josh as he gave him a playful nudge.

“A reward? Can we go to the castle now and see it?” Any hint of tiredness in Farmer was now gone and he had that kid in a candy store look in his eyes again.

“No, it’s not time for that. Your reward is just now beginning. Your reward will depend upon the fruit you produce.”

Farmer began to understand. “You mean like when I gave the apple and the water to that old guy...I mean...older gentleman on the trail?” Josh smiled, nodding his head.

“Exactly.” I could have done it myself, but I’m going to need you to help me. I can only be in one place at one time and there’s lots of people to get around to. But for those, Farmer, who trust me and follow me, I’ve given the privilege of being my ambassadors if you will.”

“Like Petros?”

“You’re catching on quickly! Farmer, when you gave the man the water and the apple, it was just as if you had given them to me. But you don’t do these kinds of things just so you can earn the right to come here. That’s not how it works. You can’t earn your way here because I took care of that long ago when I took the thief’s place in the vineyard. I did it for

him...and for Petros...and for you too, Farmer. No, from now on, you'll do these things because you want to—for me—as a thank you for what I have done for you.

“But...what about the castle? When do I get to live here?”

“One day you'll live here with me. In fact, I'm preparing a room for you made of wood, stone, and precious jewels. And on the day it's ready, I'll bring you back here. Promise!”

“When? How will I get back? How will I know when it's time?”

“That's only for my dad to know.”

“The King?”

“The King.”

“And you're...”

“The Prince. Come on. It's time to head back down the trail.” They walked from the palace grounds toward the great cross that bridged the chasm to the other side. In a flash they were back on the other side. Farmer wanted to ask Josh how he did that, but then decided he didn't have to know. It was enough just knowing that it had happened. As he turned around to take a look at the castle one more time before heading down the trail, it had vanished without a trace. But Farmer knew what happened was real.

On the way down the trail, toward North Ridge, Farmer and Josh talked about a lot of things. Farmer's head was swimming with all he had seen and heard and experienced, but his heart was at peace, and he felt for the first time that his life on The Pile had a purpose—there was something more than just sweat and hard work and then what? He knew that there was an answer to the, “then what?” He didn't know the answer yet, but he knew there was an answer.

As they continued down the trail, Farmer looked at Josh and said, "You told me this morning that you chose to ride with me to bring me here. Why me?"

"Why not you? Besides, there are people who need what you now have."

"What do you mean?"

"People need to know that I'm not a legend, Farmer. You now know the truth behind the "legend" because you've met me and believed in me. You're a different man now than you were at the start of today. You've got a story to tell. Choose to ride with others. Listen to what they have to say. Bring them to the King's Entryway—then leave the rest to me."

"Why did you wait so long to find me?"

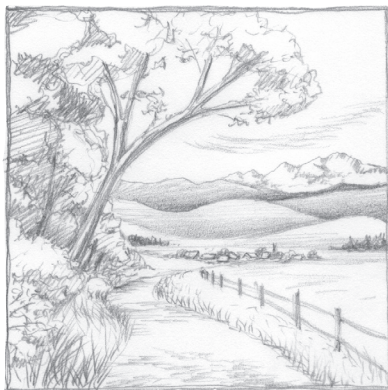
"Oh—I've always known where you were. You just weren't ready to meet me—until today. When we get to town, I'll introduce you to some others who know me. But let's get a move on! I'm getting' hungry. You were a load to pull up that hill!"

When they reached North Ridge, Farmer looked at Josh and asked, "So how do we get back to town? Our bikes, or whatever yours is—they aren't here."

Josh rolled his eyes at Farmer. "C'mon Farmer, you don't think we'd walk the whole way do you?"

And across the road, in front of a large vine with big red berries on its branches, were two bikes. There was Josh's bike with one more nick in it from one more adventure. And the other bike was just like Josh's, with one brand new nick on it.





STAGE 11:

## **THE ADVENTURE BEGINS**



As Josh and Farmer rode on North Ridge toward town, they came to where West Ridge and North Ridge appeared to merge together. But for the first time Farmer noticed that West Ridge actually dead ended. It was North Ridge that led them home.

A couple of minutes later they came upon the Three Blind Mice, sitting on the ground beside their custom-made three-seater. Josh and Farmer slowed down and came to a stop. “Good afternoon, gentlemen,” Josh said. “Anything I can do to help you?”



One of the men spoke, "Our guide dog ran off. The thing we can't figure out is that she's never done this before. We'll just have to wait here for her to return. Thank you for offering though."

"I don't think you'll have to wait long," said Josh. "In the meantime, if I could do anything for you, what would it be?"

"Tell me what was so doggone important for that dog to run off for," said another.

Josh dismounted, and stood directly in front of the men. "Farmer, would you please hand me that bottle of water you have in your basket?"

Farmer handed the bottle to Josh and then stood quietly waiting for whatever Josh was going to do. Josh knelt down in front of the three blind men and said something to them that Farmer didn't quite catch. Josh then gave each of the men a drink from the bottle. To the men's astonishment, and to Farmer's, their blind eyes were opened!

They could now see!!

The first thing the men saw was Josh's beaming face. And the second thing they saw was their dog, sitting at Josh's feet. "To answer your question," Josh said, "Your dog left so you could gain your sight."

"Who are you sir?" asked the three men, trembling, overjoyed and confused, all at the same time, if that's possible, which apparently it is. They tried to stand up, but their legs couldn't bear their weight, as Farmer's couldn't a couple of hours before. All they could do was kneel in awe of the man who stood before them.

"I am," Josh said... "the provider of these fine sunglasses," as he pulled three pair out of the basket on his

bike and handed them to the men. "You might want these. The sun's kind of bright today."

Farmer then stepped up and said, "I'll tell you who he is. Let me tell you what he's done for me and what he can do for you."

An hour later, the five men rode into town, laughing and conversing, until they came to a crowd of riders, who had passed the blind men on their way into town. The crowd, astonished, formed a semi-circle around the men.

One man in the crowd stepped forward. "Excuse me," he said, a bit bewildered, "But aren't you the Three Blind Mice?"

"No sir," said one of the three men. "We are 'The Three Sight-Seers.' Once, yes, we were blind...but now we can see." With that introduction, they launched into their story.

Farmer looked over at Josh. "There'll be some dancin' tonight!" Josh threw his head back and laughed.

As they made their way through the crowd at the finish of the Lamb's Meadow 50, they saw Despondence, whose name is now "Triumphant;" and Wander-Off, whose name is now "Faithful."

"Josh—Farmer...Hey guys." Making his way through the crowd was a familiar face. The man came up to Farmer and Josh and greeted them each with a hug.

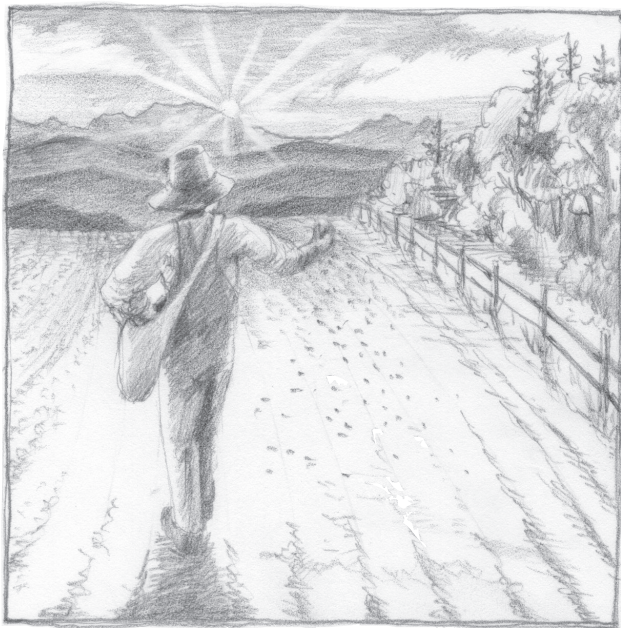
"Hi Dad," said Josh.

"Hello boys. So... Josh...I see you've been on another adventure today. The usual, I expect? Trip to King's Entryway...the canyon...perhaps a glimpse of the palace?"

"Yes Sir," replied Josh respectfully. "Farmer...you remember my Dad—Fred."

“Hello Fred...Sir...uh, Your Majesty,” Farmer stammered out.

“Dad—this is the man you once knew as Farmer—but his name is now Sower; for this, is who he is.



*“The good soil represents those who hear  
and accept God’s message and produce a huge harvest—  
thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much  
as had been planted.”*

*(Mark 4:20)*



*If you would like to know more about Josh, go to  
[www.kingsentryway.com](http://www.kingsentryway.com)  
and click on “Meet Josh.”*