

Chapter 1: A Journey of the Heart

Date: September 30, 2032 A.D.

Location: Glacier Peak Wilderness, near Chelan, Washington

A tired young man twenty-five years of age is hiking his way alone into the wilderness of the North Cascades. He's about 5'10" and wears an old leather coat and a knit wool hat, dark-chocolate hair, wind-blown, a beard of several days' growth, and a dark tan from his wilderness journey. He looks as if he belongs to the mountain. The brightness of the setting sun is reflected off his face, forcing him to squint a bit even with his mirrored Oakley sunglasses. His boots are caked with mud and are still wet from following the trail that often had water or snow on it. He's at an altitude of 4300 feet and about seven miles from the trailhead where he started today.

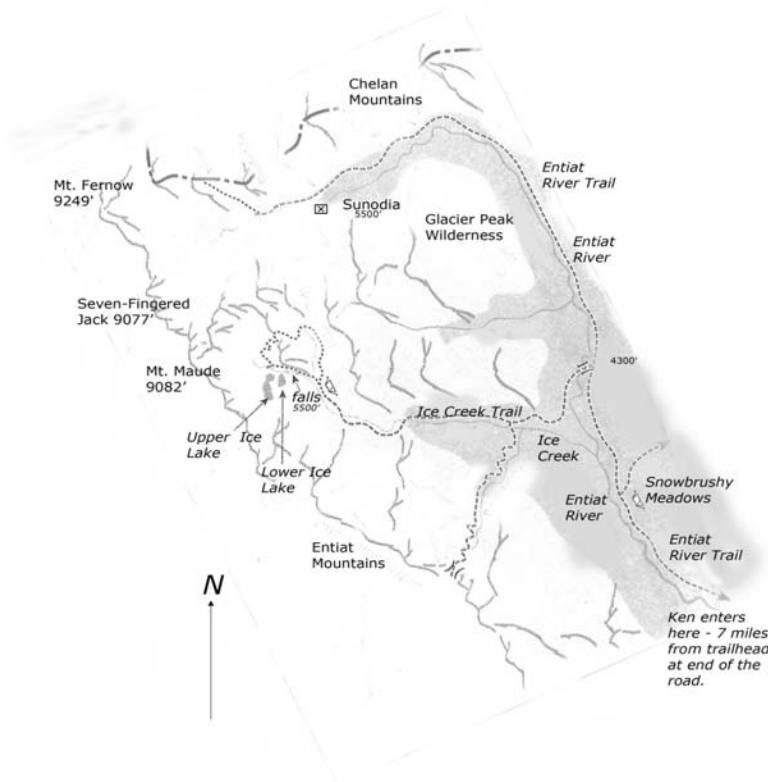
Weird. That's what it was. He hadn't seen anyone or any signs of civilization for hours. It was time to camp. Somewhere out there, if his friends were correct, is a wilderness community. His friends told him to meet them there. Why did they want him to hike for three days to get there? Why couldn't he have taken a helicopter shuttle out of Entiat or Chelan to where they were? Why did they want him to hike it?

Now it was quiet. Inside himself, however, Ken was a tangle of emotions. Like a cauldron of water on a hot stove, bubbling, and spilling over onto the stove. Nothing made sense in his life. His church seemed oblivious to the failing culture, his girlfriend of ten years died, a mentor he trusted gone on to heaven. Where was God in all this?

He thought back to early yesterday when he left the ranger station at Entiat. A friend drove him from Seattle the approximately 162 miles east through the Cascades and then another few miles north to Entiat, a little below the resort area of Chelan. They spent the night there. Early the next day his friend drove him another 38 miles from Entiat up a remote road to the trailhead near the end of the road. From there he started his hike. The only sign of civilization he met were a few hikers and campers on the early part of the trail. Most of the hikers turned off on side trails, eventually leaving him alone as he followed the Entiat River trail. At one of those camps near the trailhead he met a crusty old man with an orange vest with three rather noisy hound dogs. The voices of those dogs echoed all over the valley. Ken was scared to death of the sound, with no protection, all alone, and nowhere to run if they came at him. They were on leashes; but Ken still was concerned. The baying and howling of the dogs carried over many miles, but now were finally fading. The guy was probably a hunter.

Ken traveled northwest on the trail, with the trail turning north now. Although his trail that day continued to be muddy at times, it was level and followed the Entiat River. Along the trail grew a forest of Englemann spruce, Pacific silver fir, and Douglas fir that now opened to a

meadow and the Snowbrushy campground. He decided to camp his first night here, east of the river. The campground was deserted.



Looking ahead and eastward, he could see the Chelan Mountains. Although it was fall, the recent warm months left only the top of the mountains covered with snow. The earlier mists in the valley had now dissipated. For the moment, the glory and majesty of God’s creation swept away most of the brokenness he felt inside.

Ken thought about the strange community for which he was searching in this wilderness and wondered how far he still must hike to reach it. He knew little about the community except what he learned while he was a student at Anatole University. While getting his degree at the university, he often used the Internet to talk with Roger and Tom at this “Sunodia”. They told him only that it was a small wilderness Christian community at a government research station. Its name was a Greek word for “a way or journey together.” In the New Testament, it was used to refer to the caravan that traveled to Jerusalem from Nazareth when Jesus was twelve years old for the annual Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:44). Later, Ken met Roger and his wife, Melody, at a conference in Seattle where they encouraged him to visit their mountain community. Now he was taking them up on it. For some reason, the directions were rather cryptic.

Today, he questioned the wisdom of his decision. His feet were sore, he was tired, and hiking alone was always dangerous. The trail was muddy at times and soon would be difficult. Roger

told him to come alone. Ken started with a cell phone in his backpack, hoping to communicate with the community while he hiked. Roger had told him to turn off the GPS locator on the phone so that it wouldn't transmit his latitude and longitude coordinates if he used it. Unfortunately, the batteries gave out and, with no way of charging it; the phone was no longer operational.

With a campfire going and a good supper, he soon felt renewed and rested. Just enjoying the peace there. Soon darkness fell and the stars twinkled above him. The Milky Way emerged and stared down at him. Ken wondered how many people in America ever saw the Milky Way that was hidden from the city dwellers, blinded by their own artificial lights. God made every one of those stars. He thought of the Bible that said in John 1:

*“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness
did not comprehend it (or overcome it, put it out).”*

Ken repeated a Bible verse he knew from memory.

*“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him...”*

Psalms 8:3-4

Soon Ken was asleep, captured through the night by his restless thoughts.

Date: October 1, 2032 A.D.

The next morning after a breakfast, he continued to follow the Entiat River. Soon he came to a place where it appeared the trail crossed the river. It was pretty foggy, and the bridge was washed out. He stopped briefly beside the river and took another rest, washing his face in the cold water of the stream and filling his canteen. There was no real crossing. To cross, he left the trail for a short distance and found a log jam in the river, crossing on that at an altitude of about 4300 feet. The path he was on now wound upward through more Englemann spruce away from the Entiat River and dropping to Ice Creek. Ken was now about 3 miles from the Entiat River as the trail met Ice Creek, which he would need to cross. He quickly discovered it was very appropriately named. Wading was the only option, so he braved the ice-cold water. Brrrr....

As he continued and climbed, he tried to imagine what Sunodia community would be like. How many lived there? What was their goal? What was their history? He tried to remember what his friends told him about any of this.

Time for a break. Ken paused for a rest on the mountain trail, removing his backpack. Opening the top of the backpack, he found his trail mix and water canteen. He savored a bit of his trail mix, repacked, and shouldered the backpack again.

As evening approached, Ken caught the glimpse of a lone helicopter passing with a puttering sound that sounded alien to the quiet environment. The helicopter, he thought, was probably a

forest service helicopter. Ahead, somewhere, was the small community that called themselves Sunodia. He munched more of his trail mix and drank water from the mountain streams in his canteen.

Now he followed the trail and Ice Creek through forest and meadows. It was perhaps only another hour to sunset. Evenings came quickly in the mountains, and Ken knew he needed to look for some type of campsite again. There was plenty of water with the creek nearby.

The path finally led him to a second Ice Creek crossing, which he would have to wade or skip on boulders. This time he boldly crossed the creek by skipping on the boulders. He decided this meadow would be his campsite for the evening. It was a beautiful area, surrounded by golden larch trees¹. As he rested, marmots whistled as they darted about and some pika joined them, squealing at his intrusion. In the distance he could see a baby goat and a young deer. The remains of an old campfire were the only signs of civilization in the area. It must have been several months since anyone camped here. Ken lowered his backpack, preparing to set up camp a second time. The noisy Ice Creek drowned the sound of a beautiful waterfall tumbling down from a much higher lake.

First, he needed a campfire. He found some old rocks nearby and rebuilt what was left of the old campfire site, searching until finding enough wood to start and build his campfire. Once the fire was going, he removed his boots that were wet and cold from fording the rivers and the muddy trail. He put his feet as close as he dared to the campfire and let the warm, dancing flames of the fire with the heat dry his feet, socks, and boots out. He was glad for the dry socks in his backpack. Soon his feet felt better and he was cooking dinner on his campfire. The shish kabobs were soon thawed, marinated, and ready to sizzle.

The smell of his dinner cooking on the campfire eased the tiredness of the long hiking day, and he relaxed against his backpack and enjoyed the view while the smells of the dinner cooking tantalized him. As the sun set to the west, it played hide and seek with the needles of the trees, the colors changing every few minutes. The nearby golden needles of the larches reflected the warm glowing orange light of the sunset against the deep blue of the remote mountains. Soon the food was ready. Ken lost no time putting away the meal.

Ken was so engrossed with his thoughts while eating that he almost didn't notice the stumbling old man who came into the campsite up from some other trail. Ken, quite startled, watched silently as the man moved nearer to the campfire. The man carried a backpack and in many ways looked as if he had a lot experience in the mountains. He was wearing well-worn clothes and an old leather jacket. He didn't seem to look tired, so Ken figured he might not have been hiking long.

"Hi," said Ken, "Need any supper? I've got some more food in the backpack."

"You must be Ken," the man wheezed a bit, as if trying to catch his breath, "They told me you'd be along."

Ken wondered who "they" were. He thought this man must be from the community.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I understand you have been doing some deep spiritual seeking. You must learn to see with your heart."

“Yep, I’m Ken. And who might you be?”

“Just call me ‘Gandalf’. That is close enough for now.”

“Gandalf?”

“Sure. You know Gandalf.” Gandalf smiled.

Gandalf removed his backpack and placed it on the ground.

Tom was curious now, “Sure. Loved him in the book and the movie. I’m headed to Sunodia. Know where that is?”

“Sure. You missed the turnoff. Actually, you took the Ice Creek trail, and that trail was the turnoff. You should have stayed on the Entiat River trail and continued to follow that river. You will need to go back to where this Ice Creek trail joins the Entiat River trail. That’s about 4 ½ miles. Cross the river on the log jam. At that point you should see the remains of another trail that continues to follow the Entiat River. Start down that continuation of the Entiat River trail. You’ll see a sign saying ‘private’, but read and ignore. Continue from there on the Entiat River trail for another 6-7 miles to the Entiat Meadows. You’ll see the cabin there.”

Ken was not excited about backtracking through three river crossings again tomorrow; but that was his only option. “It was pretty foggy there this morning. I didn’t see any signs and much of any trail. Thanks for the directions. Need some food or coffee?”

“No thanks—well, maybe a spot of coffee. Oh, a tip on crossing that Ice Creek the second time as you go back. Follow the creek back and then a little farther down from where it leaves the trail. You’ll find a place there you can cross by doing a little jumping as at the first crossing. After that, follow the creek a short distance until you get back to the trail.”

As Ken poured some coffee into a collapsible cup carried for stew, he asked Gandalf the obvious question.

“Gandalf, what do you know about their mission?”

Silence. After a time Gandalf spoke slowly.

“Ah, Ken. I’ll let them tell you.”

Gandalf took the coffee from Ken and took a sip as Ken waited.

Gandalf gave Ken a wink, smiled, and remained silent. Gandalf dug in his backpack and pulled out a dinner he had carried. He gave it to Ken.

“Ken, you’ll probably need this before you get to Sunodia.”

Ken was surprised, thanking Gandalf. Ken sat back against his backpack, and studied the stranger. It was already starting to get dark, but Ken could see the lines of Gandalf’s face, accented by the long shadows of the fading sun. The guy seemed to have a natural awareness of the area, nibbling a few berries he picked earlier and studying the clearing as he drank his coffee. Gandalf also accepted a little of Ken’s shish kabobs.

Gandalf seemed to study Ken.

Ken was puzzled. Who was this guy, and why did he show up here? Apparently he knew something about Sunodia, but probably was not a part of it.

Suddenly, Ken realized it would be dark soon. He quickly got up, cleaned up his dishes in the stream and hung them from a simple clothes line of some rope tied to some high branches with a

light-weight line tied to the backpack. That should keep the animals from the food. He finished setting up the tent from his backpack, and repacked his backpack as the shadows lengthened and darkness slowly moved across the mountains.

While Ken did this, Gandalf remained near the fire, his weathered face shining from the reflections of the fire as the darkness came. Soon Gandalf was scurrying about making a bed out of old needles from the larches, wood, leaves and other natural material he found in the area. Occasionally, he seemed to check the fire and add a small thick branch he found. Finally, Gandalf sat down on his crude pine bed, relaxed, and watched Ken intently.

“Ken, you’ve hiked a long way the last few days, haven’t you?”

“Yes. I have been hiking two days and more tomorrow.”

“Why?”

“What do you mean ‘Why’?”

“Ken, why would you take off and hike up to this community?”

“I’m looking for something.”

“What are you looking for?”

“Hard to describe. Here I am on the threshold of life, just finishing my college degree, and the people we vote for to lead this country have left those core values I believe in, left our Constitution, and are morally deprived. My church and most of the other churches I know are really asleep to any of this reality.”

“Ah. You’re lonely. No Place.”

“Yes, I guess you could say that.”

“Ken, what is this loneliness like?”

“Huh?”

“What are the emotions of this loneliness? Hope or disillusionment, joy or sadness, peace or restlessness, raging fire or dying embers, love or fear—what are your feelings?”

“Hope, joy, peace, love, fire, I guess. One emotion doesn’t stand alone. Like the colors on a painting, my emotions interweave and bang against each other. I’m a little confused at times.” Ken made a fist with both hands and crashed his fists into each other. His eyes flashed and teared up.

“I had peace once—I loved a beautiful girl. I want that again.”

“And what happened in that, Ken?”

“Death stole her. I could not fight her dying and win. Now I am angry—angry at myself, at God. If God rules the world, why did Sandy have to die? And there was Tim, my mentor—why did he have to die? I tried to move on and have another relationship, but didn’t use good judgment.”

“No, Ken. Anger is an emotion that never stands alone. Hurt precedes it. You are angry because you loved her. Your love forced the anger and hurt. You will never find that peace you seek again until you release that wounded heart to another.”

“To another woman?”

“Not yet. First you release the wounded heart to God. God is the healer. God tells you the next step. Your story isn’t over, it’s just beginning.”

“But why did they have to die? And so young?”

“You are asking the wrong question.”

“What is the right question?”

“The right question is what is God trying to do with you in those deaths?”

“What do you mean?”

“Would you be here hiking this mountain today to wherever if those deaths didn’t exist?”

“No, I guess not.”

“That’s a start. And watch your heart. I promise you can get your heart back, but you will have to fight for it. Rescuing the human heart is the hardest mission on the face of this earth.²”

Gandalf turned and looked directly into Ken’s eyes. There were quiet tears in Gandalf’s eyes. The flickering light of the campfire against the tears in the eyes of Gandalf gave a shimmering effect on the scene that somehow threw Ken into a deep mixture of emotions and passion. “Ken, did you see the breaking light on the mountains this morning?”

“Yes. Beautiful. A revelation of God’s beauty.”

“If you had taken a helicopter in, you would not have seen it. Your back would have been to the breaking light.”

Ken nodded. “I’m beginning to understand. You are saying maybe I’m going through life with my back to the light?”

“Ken, close. Maybe God wants you to see another breaking light. Bigger, bolder.”

Gandalf was quiet for awhile and seemed to be studying Ken. Suddenly this “Gandalf” turned and removed a strange type of gold ring from a finger of his right hand.

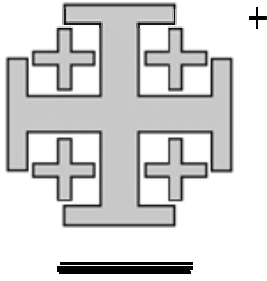
“Take this ring with you in the months ahead,” Gandalf said. “You will need it later.”

Ken protested at first, but finally took the ring, thanking Gandalf. He examined it carefully. The flickering firelight flashed off the gold of the ring as Ken explored it. There was a flat area on the ring with a strange diagram on the flat surface. Otherwise it was a simple gold band.

Ken began to put the ring in a side pocket of the backpack.

“No. You must wear it.”

Ken examined the ring carefully. There was no jewel or stone on the ring. Only a flat surface with the strange engraving. Ken placed the ring on the ring finger of his right hand. It fit perfectly.



In the distance Ken heard the sound of an owl, quietness again. Gandalf suddenly seemed tired, as if he had completed his mission for the moment. Ken watched Gandalf stretch out on the bed he made. As the campfire flickered into the night, Gandalf closed his eyes and was soon fast asleep. Ken looked up to the clear sky, filled with stars, and suddenly felt tired. After a last look about the site, Ken entered his tent and quickly fell asleep. In his dreams John Wayne galloped across the prairie with his horse at full speed. Slowly the dream faded to Captain Kirk on the Enterprise crossing the galaxy at warp speed. Then Gandalf appeared in the dream, reaching out to Ken with his outstretched hand. Ken slipped into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Notes:

1. The Larch is a deciduous conifer. “Conifer” means it is classed as an evergreen, “Deciduous” means it sheds its leaves annually. The larch is one of the few trees that is both conifer and deciduous. In October the needles turn a bright yellow before the tree sheds them. At this time of year the larch trees would have been a very bright yellow, standing out against the deep blue of the more remote mountains. For more info on this trail see: <http://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/ice-creek-ice-lakes>. To see pictures of the golden larch trees the way Ken must have seen them: <http://pixels.com/featured/autumn-alpine-larch-trees-lake-agnes-john-sylvester.html> for professional pictures of the larch trees. Also, this looks a lot like where Ken crosses the Entiat River: http://www.wta.org/go-hiking/trip-reports/trip_report.2013-08-18.4916909680
2. Eldredge, John. *Epic: The Story God is Telling and the Role that is Yours to Play*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004. p. 62