

KIRK'S STORY — penned in 2018

TREK: New Zealand

TREK AGE: 49

WRITING AGE: 51

#### ADVICE

You'll get out of it what you put into it. Your commitment to your vision will anchor you.

'If we are to achieve things never before accomplished we must employ methods never before attempted' — Francis Bacon

#### STORY

It had been an insanely windy day but the winds were gone for the moment, blocked by the mountain I was now climbing. Determined to crest Lindis Pass I pushed onward and upward, encouraged that I could finally see the summit ahead. As I slowly climbed, a small, blue, farm truck with dogs in the back barking loudly pulled up beside me. I tried to ignore it but the truck was moving at my pace and the dogs were far too loud to ignore. I looked sideways to see an old man driving it. His window was down and he was motioning for me to stop. Feeling miffed at having to stop, I unclipped and wondered what this old man could want.

"Are you Kirk?" he asked. "Yes," I replied. "Your riding partner says he's going to stay at Dunstan Downs and you are to turn around and go back to him."

I was not surprised that Eric had decided to stay at Dunstan Downs. Given the extreme winds at that point of the road I had considered staying there too. However, there were no winds now and I had traveled and climbed quite a distance. What should I do? What would Eric do? I thought of what I had written at the beginning of the trek about what it meant for me to do this journey "heroically" and turning back now did not seem to fit that vision, especially being so close to the summit. I concluded that for me to do the journey as I had envisioned, I had to go forward. I thought if Eric was with me, he'd agree.

"What's your name?" I asked the old man. "Peter," came the reply. I reached out and we shook hands. "Peter, thank you for finding me but please tell Eric that I'm okay and I'm going to carry on." Peter gave my reply some thought, then a nod, and said he'd radio back to Dunstan Downs and make sure that Eric got the message. We said goodbye. He got in his truck and drove away.

As soon as Peter had driven out of sight, I thought that I should have asked him to tell Eric to come straightaway and not stay at Dunstan Downs because what seemed impossible at the time (due to the winds) was totally possible now. When I got to the summit of Lindis Pass I stopped and took a photo of the sign marking the elevation. I checked my phone again for cell service. Nothing.

Now it was time for the descent. I hoped for favorable winds but without protection of the mountain they remained fierce. My next destination was supposed to be a campsite but I didn't know where it was. I didn't know where I was going. I had relied on Eric to navigate. He had the map.

I finally got to a sign on the road that I thought might be the one indicating the turnoff to the campsite but I had my doubts so I cycled up to a nearby, isolated house to get confirmation. Unfortunately, no one was home. What should I do? Trust that this was the turnoff to the campsite or keep going? I agonized about the decision but felt best about moving forward. The farther I went the more convinced I became that I had passed the turnoff to the campsite. I approached another significant hill. As I climbed the hill I became convinced that I had gone too far.

As I rode, I remembered Jordan saying that you could survive the night if you lied down in a ditch and let the wind pass over you. I started looking for a ditch. Despite my bleak prospects I felt surprisingly calm. I knew that no matter how crazy the winds got, no matter how many hills I had to climb, I would find shelter before nightfall and I'd be okay. In the distance I saw a row of tall trees that would break the wind and give me a chance to gather my thoughts and plan for my night of solitude. I stopped there and checked my phone again for cell service. Finally! I sent a text to the group. I got a response. They were on their way with a truck and trailer. They soon arrived and I was so happy to see them! Such a blessing!

Unexpectedly, Jordan started to lay into me for not staying with the group. (I learned later the reasons for his passionate response and legitimate concern). However, at that moment I had no regrets. Uncharacteristically, I had not the slightest inclination to apologize. I had made the right decisions in the moment for me. I had trusted my instincts and been true to my vision. Miraculously, things had turned out perfectly. I learned that Eric had forged ahead on his own without an invitation from me. If I had possessed the map and taken the correct turnoff to the campsite, it would have been a major inconvenience to drive and collect me. The group was safely reunited.

Why did I need this experience? Growing up my dad was an authoritarian. I was brought up to respect, obey, and in some cases, fear authority. I needed this experience to understand that there is an alternative to subservience. Peter had stopped me as a friend, not a foe. Yet, due to his age, Peter was a "father figure" and he came to me representing Eric, who based on his role at work, was an authority figure. However, Eric was also a friend. For several days he had been encouraging me to go ahead of him and ride strong. Therefore, being able to reject Eric's imperative to return to Dunstan Downs, by means of the advice I sincerely believed he would give me if he were with me, was an empowering experience. While my decision was grounded in my commitment to my vision, I had said "no." My answer was not in defiance to authority but came from a place of new-found confidence that I felt would be accepted by authority.