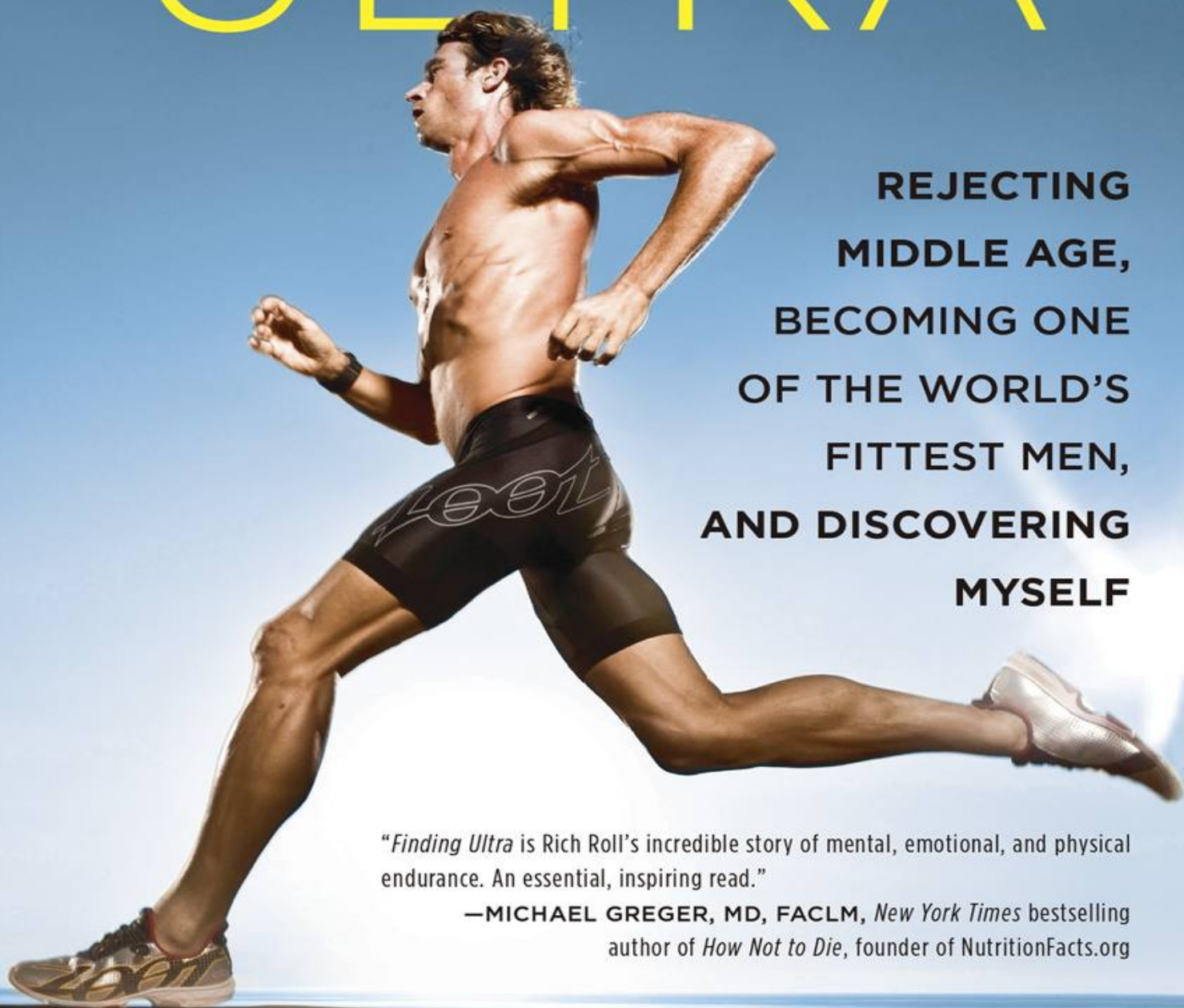


REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

# FINDING ULTRA



**REJECTING  
MIDDLE AGE,  
BECOMING ONE  
OF THE WORLD'S  
FITTEST MEN,  
AND DISCOVERING  
MYSELF**

*"Finding Ultra is Rich Roll's incredible story of mental, emotional, and physical endurance. An essential, inspiring read."*

—MICHAEL GREGER, MD, FACLM, *New York Times* bestselling author of *How Not to Die*, founder of NutritionFacts.org

# RICH ROLL

## PRAISE FOR **FINDING ULTRA**

“A remarkable journey of overcoming mental, emotional, and financial barriers to fulfill a personal quest.”

—*Booklist*

“*Finding Ultra* is about a journey we all take as human beings, when we decide to pursue the impossible and live a life of mission. When I need to dig deeper, push harder, and find a little boost, Rich Roll is the guy who comes to mind. He is inspiration embodied.”

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“*Finding Ultra* is the ultimate story of hope, perseverance, and endurance against life’s biggest challenges.”

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“This awesome piece of writing—one part memoir, one part how-to, and one part megadose of gut truth—reminds us to wake up and live our best life. Prepare to be entertained, but most of all, prepare to be inspired.”

—Mel Stewart, fourteen-time national champion, former world-record holder, and winner of two Olympic gold medals in swimming

“I loved this. A rare book, unusual for its honesty and willingness to bare all, that really does deserve such superlatives as ‘riveting’ and ‘compelling.’ I was moved by watching Roll

conquer his demons, and felt privileged to share in his eventual enlightenment. By laying it on the line, Roll absolutely wins us over.”

—Rip Esselstyn, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Plant-Strong* and *The Engine 2 Diet*

“*Finding Ultra* is an inspired first-person account of fast living and even faster swimming, biking, and running that will leave you convinced of the power of your own will.”

—Brendan Brazier, bestselling author of *Thrive*

“A tribute to the fortitude of the human spirit, and the power each of us has to grab hold of our life and achieve the unexpected. For anyone who feels stuck, Rich offers sage advice on everything from relationships to lifestyle to diet to spiritual well-being.”

—Dave Zabriskie, five-time U.S. National time-trial champion in cycling

“An inspiring story of a man whose life took a tragic turn but then rebounded spectacularly. Down but not out, Rich Roll rose like a phoenix, taking the commitment to his own health to a new level and achieving a remarkable transformation. I believe everyone will be able to relate to this plant-powered athlete’s riveting story and perhaps garner some inspiration for their own journey. A top read!”

—Luke McKenzie, five-time Ironman champion

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***REJECTING MIDDLE AGE,  
BECOMING ONE OF THE WORLD'S FITTEST  
MEN, AND DISCOVERING MYSELF***

## ***RICH ROLL***



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*TO JULIE*

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# FOREWORD

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation, and go to the grave with the song still in them.”

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

The American Dream is an elegant, aspirational ideal originally premised on egalitarianism: equal opportunity for all. A mandated right to seek self-improvement. An open door to pursue potential, and in turn, contribute the fruits of one’s journey for the benefit of all.

But along the way, the foundational ethos of this enchanting concept lies a smoldering carcass on the shoulder of a modern superhighway, supplanted by a relentless compulsion to accumulate and consume. The priority is no longer self-actualization. Nor is it contribution. Personal responsibility has been exchanged for victimhood. Challenge is to be avoided. Comfort is king.

*And he who amasses the most wins.*

Indeed, personhood has been reduced to consumerism. Our social currency is stuff—worth dictated not by who we are but by what we own, fueled by a cultural mandate that forsakes the value of service, struggle, and authentic expression for the pursuit of luxury, instant gratification, and ease.

The implicit promise of this perverted paradigm? Happiness, of course. Peace of mind. Contentment.

This is perhaps the greatest lie ever perpetrated on humankind. Because stuff doesn’t make one happy. Because the quest for status is rooted in ego. And because security is an illusion.

As a result we suffer. In turn, we inflict pain on others. And upon the planet at large.

Intellectually, we all know it’s true. The key to our identity, and ultimately our happiness, cannot be found in what we own. Our quest is not to accumulate. It’s not to seek power. And it’s not to remain safe.

Nonetheless, we persist in reflexively bowing to the material gods,



mindlessly chasing that elusive consumerist high with the insatiable appetite of the fiendish addict. And just like that addict, we are left not fulfilled; instead we are broken, hollow, wreaking havoc, and like Thoreau's percipient observation, quietly desperate.

To say that this cultural malaise has left us infirm is to woefully understate the situation. Right now, millions of people all across the world are suffering, terribly and unnecessarily, imprisoned by the delusional promise of our displaced priorities. Never before in the history of humankind have we been more depressed, obese, diseased, stressed, lethargic, medicated, generally unhappy, and more unfulfilled than we find ourselves today. It's an entrenched, self-perpetuating cycle that drives us to further escape, salving our pain and disillusionment with anything we can get our hands on, from unhealthy food choices and television and video games, to illicit drugs, prescription pharmaceuticals, alcohol, shopping, gambling, and relationships.

Anything to numb out, dull our emotional state, remove us from the present and distract us from the truth. The hole never gets filled, of course—it just grows deeper. More hungry. An endless pit of woe to which we willingly enslave ourselves. A succumbing, in the ethos of Thoreau, to the *delusion of need*. A profound lunacy that is bankrupting our souls and decimating our planet.

Most of all, we're *sick*.

Today finds us facing an unprecedented healthcare crisis. Despite spending over \$22 billion a year on fad diet and weight-loss products, 70 percent of all Americans are obese or overweight. One out of every three deaths in America is attributable to heart disease, our number one killer. By 2030, 30 percent of Americans will be diabetic or pre-diabetic. And depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. Despite the heartbreaking fact that a vast majority of these chronic diseases can be prevented and often reversed through some simple diet and lifestyle changes, we instead divest ourselves of personal responsibility and become willing indentured servants to the pharmaceutical industry, popping pills that effectively mask symptoms but, more often than not, do little or nothing to prevent or cure the underlying chronic illnesses that ail us.

Moreover, addiction continues to rob lives at an alarming rate. Every year, 100,000 people die from alcohol-related causes. The incidence of drug overdoses in America skyrocketed in 2016, claiming over 64,000

lives, with prescription opioids like OxyContin and imported fentanyl taking center stage for the first time in history. Nonetheless, treatment remains woefully underfunded, fueling an epidemic we refuse to responsibly confront.

Meanwhile, our environment is faltering, due in no small part to our food system. Industrialized animal agriculture, our primary means for feeding the planet, is broken. It is destroying our delicate ecosystems and depleting our planet's quickly dwindling natural resources at an almost unfathomable rate.

Our reaction? Denial. Deflection. A sense of powerlessness to do anything. Pop a pill, grab a beer, order a pizza, and leave me alone—because it's *Monday Night Football*.

I've been there. I too bought into the great lie. Blinded by its false promise, I spent years in pursuit of a life I didn't mindfully choose. But rather than do something about it, *anything*, I simply medicated myself to salve a pain I wasn't even consciously aware I harbored. Drugs, alcohol, fast food—you name it. It's a path that took me to some very dark places. And it's a life that left me profoundly desperate, accelerating me to the grave without any awareness that deep down, lying dormant, was a song. A song yet to be discovered. A song yearning to be sung.

This book is about my search for that song. It's a story about pain, and the unhealthy relationship with myself and the world that drove me to madness. And it's about the hard-fought journey to reclaim my life. A life of purpose, personal meaning, and service to others.

Through a grace that far exceeds my own power, I found a way out. It's a solution that begins with how you feed the *body*. Extends to how you fuel the *mind*. And concludes with how you nourish the *soul*.

If my story stands for anything, it is that the human body, mind, and spirit are far more resilient than you can possibly imagine. My testimony is that each and every one of us is sitting atop vast reservoirs of untapped potential. We're all capable of feats beyond our limited imagination. And personal growth isn't just possible, it's our mandate.

To echo Thoreau, *we need not lead lives of quiet desperation*. You too can break the chains of enslavement to take control of your health and destiny. You too can be better, do more, consume less, thrive. And along the way, achieve things beyond your imagination.

It's never too late to change. You only have to do one thing: decide.

Today I sing my song. I sing it proudly, and loud.

My hope is that these pages will help you find your song. So you too can sing it with everything you've got. Because you deserve it. And because the world needs you to be who you really are.

# PREFACE

The crash comes out of nowhere. One second I'm feeling good, cycling as fast as I can at a good clip, even through the pouring rain. Then I feel a slight bump and my left hand slips off the damp handlebar. I'm hurled off the bike seat and through the air. I experience a momentary loss of gravity, then *bam!* My head slams hard to the ground as my body skids twenty feet across wet pavement, bits of gravel biting into my left knee and burning my shoulder raw as my bike tumbles along on top of me, my right foot still clamped in the pedal.

A second later I'm lying faceup with the rain beating down and the taste of blood on my lips. I struggle to release my right foot and pull myself up using the shoulder that doesn't seem to be bleeding. Somehow, I find a sitting position. I make a fist with my left hand and pain shoots up to the shoulder—the skin has been sheared clean off, and blood mixes with rainwater in little rivers. My left knee has a similar look. I try to bend it—bad idea. My eyes close, and behind them there's a pulsating purple-and-red color, a pounding in my ears. I take a deep breath, let it out. I think of the thousand-plus hours of training I've done to get this far. I have to do this, I have to get up. It's a race. *I have to get back in it.* Then I see it. My left pedal shattered, carbon pieces strewn about the pavement. One hundred and thirty-five miles still to go today—hard enough with two working pedals. But with only one? Impossible.

It's barely daybreak on the Big Island of Hawaii, and I'm on a pristine stretch of terrain known as the Red Road, which owes its name to its red cinder surface, bits of which are now deeply lodged in my skin. Just moments before, I was the overall race leader at about 35 miles into the 170-mile, Day Two stage of the 2009 Ultraman World Championships, a three-day, 320-mile, double-ironman distance triathlon. Circumnavigating the entire Big Island, Ultraman is an invitation-only endurance-fest, limited to thirty-five competitors fit enough and crazy enough to attempt it. Day

One entails a 6.2-mile ocean swim, followed by a 90-mile bike ride. Day Two is 170 miles on the bike. And the event's culmination on Day Three is a 52.4-mile run on the searing hot lava fields of the Kona Coast.

This is my second try at Ultraman—the first occurred just one year before—and I have high hopes. Last year, I stunned the endurance sports community by coming out of nowhere at the ripe age of forty-two to place a respectable eleventh overall after only six months of serious training, and that was after decades of reckless drug and alcohol abuse that nearly killed me and others, plus no physical exertion more strenuous than lugging groceries into the house and maybe repotting a plant. Before that first race, people said that, for a guy like me, attempting something like Ultraman was harebrained, even stupid. After all, they knew me as a sedentary, middle-aged lawyer, a guy with a wife, children, and a career to think about, now off chasing a fool's errand. Not to mention the fact that I was training—and intended to compete—on an entirely plant-based diet. *Impossible*, they told me. *Vegans are spindly weaklings, incapable of anything more athletic than kicking a Hacky Sack. No proteins in plants, you'll never make it.* I heard it all. But deep down, I knew I could do it.

And I did—proving them wrong and defying not just “middle age,” but the seemingly immutable stereotypes about the physical capabilities of a person who eats nothing but plants. And now here I was again, back at it a second time.

Just one day before, I'd begun the race in great form. I completed the Day One 6.2-mile swim at Keauhou Bay in first place, a full ten minutes ahead of the next competitor. Clocking the sixth-fastest swim split in Ultraman's twenty-five-year history, I was off to an amazing start. In the late 1980s, I'd competed as a swimmer at Stanford, so this wasn't a huge surprise. But cycling? Different story altogether. Three years ago I didn't even *own* a bike, let alone know how to *race* one. And on that first day of the race, after I'd blasted out two and a half hours in strong ocean currents, deep fatigue had set in. With salt water-singed lungs and my throat raw from vomiting up my breakfast half a dozen times in Kailua Bay, I faced ninety miles in blistering humidity and gale-force headwinds en route to Volcanoes National Park. I did the math. It was only a matter of time before the cycling specialists would quickly make up lost time and I'd get passed on the final twenty miles of the day, a backbreaking four-thousand-foot climb up to the volcano. I kept looking back, fully expecting to see the Brazilian three-time Ultraman champ, Alexandre Ribiero, fast on my heels,

tracking me like prey. But he was nowhere to be seen. In fact, I never saw a single other competitor all day. I could hardly believe it as I rounded the final turn through the finish-line chute, my wife Julie and stepson Tyler screaming from our crew van as I *won* the Day One stage! Leaping from the van, Julie and Tyler ran into my arms; I buried myself in their embrace, tears pouring down my face. And even more shocking was just how long I waited for the next competitor to arrive—a full ten minutes! *I was winning Ultraman by ten minutes!* It wasn't just a dream come true; I'd made an indelible mark on the endurance sports landscape, one for the record books. And for a guy like me—a plant-eating, middle-aged dad—well, with everything I'd faced and overcome, it was nothing short of miraculous.

So the morning of Day Two, all eyes were on me as I waited with the other athletes at the start line in Volcanoes National Park, tensed and spring-coiled in the early-morning dark, cold rain falling. When the gun sounded, all the top guys leapt like jaguars, trying to establish a quick lead and form an organized front peloton. It's an understatement to say that I wasn't prepared to begin the 170-mile ride with a flat-out, gut-busting sprint; I hadn't warmed up before and was caught completely off guard by just how fast the pace would be. Accelerating downhill at a speed close to fifty miles per hour, I dug deep to hold pace and maintain a position within the lead group, but my legs quickly bloated with lactate and I drifted off the back of the pack.

For this initial twenty-mile rapid descent down the volcano, the situation is what's called "draft legal," meaning you can ride behind other riders and safely ensconce yourself in a "wind pocket." Once enveloped in the group, you're able to ride pace at a fraction of the energy output. The last thing you want to do is get "dropped," leaving you to fend for yourself, a lone wolf struggling against the wind on nothing but your own energy. But that's exactly what I'd become. I was behind the lead pack, yet far ahead of the next "chase" group. Only I felt less like a wolf than a skinny rat. A wet, cold skinny rat, irritated and mad at myself for my bad start, already winded and staring at eight hard hours of riding ahead. The rain made everything worse, plus the fact that I'd forgotten covers for my shoes, so my feet were soaked and frozen numb. Not a lot bothers me, including pain, but wet, cold feet make me crazy. I considered slowing down to let the chase group catch up, but they were too far back. My only option was to soldier on, solo.

When I reached the bottom of the descent, I made the turn down to the

southeastern tip of the island just as the sun was rising. I was finally beginning to feel warmed up by the time I made the turn onto the Red Road. This section is the one part of the entire race that's off-limits to crew support—no support cars allowed. For fifteen miles, you're on your own. I saw no other riders as I flew through this rolling and lush but diabolical terrain, the pavement marked by potholes and sharp, difficult turns, gravel flying up constantly. Utterly alone, I concentrated on the whir and push of my bike, the silence of tropical dawn broken only by my own thoughts of how wet I was. I was also irritated that my wife Julie and the rest of my crew had blown the hydration hand-off before the "no car" zone, leaving me bone-dry for this lonely stretch. And just like that, I hit that bump. A Red Road face-plant.

I unsnap my helmet. It's broken, a long crack threading through the center. I touch the top of my head, and under my matted, sweaty hair the skin feels tender. I squeeze my eyes shut, open them, and wiggle my fingers in front of my face. They're all there, all five. I cover one eye, then the other. I can see just fine. Wincing, I straighten out my knee and look around. Aside from a bird that I should probably be able to identify—it's long-necked with a sweeping black tail and a yellow chest—pecking at the ground by the bike, there's not a soul around. I listen hard, straining to hear the rising approach of the next group of riders. But there's nothing but the peaceful caw of a bird, a rustling in a tree close by, the slam of a screen door echoing through the trees, and over and over, the small crash of nearby ocean waves on sand.

Nausea moves through me. I hold my hand over my stomach and concentrate for a minute on the rise and fall of the skin beneath my hand, the in and out of my breath. I count to ten, then twenty. Anything to distract me from the pain now entering my shoulder like an army at full gallop—anything to keep me from focusing on the pulpy skin on my knee. The nausea subsides.

My shoulder is freezing up and I try to move it. It's no good. I feel like the Tin Man, calling out for the oilcan. I flap my feet back and forth, my damn wet feet. I stand up gingerly and put weight on the bad knee. Grunting, I lift the bike up and straddle it, flipping at the one remaining pedal with my foot. No matter what, I have to somehow make it another mile to the end of the Red Road, where the crews are waiting, where Julie will take care of me and clean me up. We'll put the bike in the van and shuttle back to the hotel.

My head throbs as I make a wobbly push-off and begin riding with one leg, the other dangling free, blood dripping from the knee. Beside me the sky is clearing into full morning over the ocean, a gray-white slate above muting the tropical sea to a dark-hued green, spotted with rain. I think of the thousands and thousands of hours I've trained for this, how far I've come from the overweight, cheeseburger-addicted, out-of-shape guy I was just two years ago. I think of how I completely overhauled not just my diet, and my body—but my entire *lifestyle*—inside and out. Another look at my broken pedal, and then I think about the 135 miles still ahead in the race: *impossible*. That's it, I think, equal parts shame and relief flooding through me. For me, this race is over.

Somehow I press through that last mile or so of the Red Road—pedaling gingerly on just one leg—and soon I can make out the crews waiting ahead, vehicles parked, supplies and gear spread out in anticipation of tending to the approaching competitors. My heart begins to beat faster and I force myself to keep going toward them. I'll have to face my wife and stepson Tyler, tell them what happened, tell them how I've failed not just me, but them—my family that has sacrificed so much in support of this dream. *You don't have to*, a voice inside me whispers. *Why don't you just turn around—or, better yet, slink into the foliage before anyone sees you coming?*

I see Julie pushing past the other people to greet me. It takes a moment before she realizes what has happened. Then it hits her, and I see shock and worry cross her face. I feel the tears well up in my eyes and tell myself to keep it together.

In the spirit of *ohana*, the Hawaiian word for “family” that is the soul of this race, I'm suddenly surrounded by half a dozen crew members—from *other* competitors' crews—all rushing to my aid. Before Julie can even speak, Vito Biala, crewing today as part of a three-person relay team known as the “Night Train,” materializes with a first-aid kit and begins taking care of my wounds. “Let's get you back on the road,” he states calmly. Vito is somewhat of an Ultraman legend and elder statesman, so I try to muster up the strength to return his wry smile. But the truth is, I can't.

“Not gonna happen,” I tell him sheepishly. “Broken pedal. It's over for me.” I gesture at the place on the bike where the left pedal used to be.

And I feel, somehow, a bit better. Just saying those words—actually telling Vito that I've decided to quit—lifts something dark off my shoulders. I'm relieved at what I've blundered into: an easy, graceful exit



out of this mess, and very soon a warm hotel bed. I can already feel the soft sheets, imagine my head on the pillow. And tomorrow, instead of running a double marathon, I'll take the family to the beach.

Next to Vito is competitor Kathy Winkler's crew captain, Peter McIntosh. He looks at me and squints. "What kind of pedal?" he asks.

"A Look Kēo," I stammer, wondering why he wants to know.

Peter vanishes as a pit crew of mechanics seize my bike and swing into action. As if trying to get an Indy 500 car back on the speedway, they begin running diagnostics—checking the frame for cracks, testing the brakes and derailleurs, eyeing the true of my wheels, Allen wrenches flying in all directions. I frown. *What are they doing? Can't they see I'm done!*

Seconds later, Peter reappears—*holding a brand-new pedal, identical to mine.*

"But I—" My mind works furiously to understand how this situation has changed so dramatically from what I'd planned. They're fixing me up, it's dawning on me. They expect me to stay in the race! I wince as someone swabs my shoulder. This isn't how it was going to be! I'd made up my mind: I'm hurt, the bike is broken; it's over, isn't it?

Julie, kneeling and bandaging my knee, glances up. She smiles. "I think it's going to be okay," she says.

Peter McIntosh rises from where he's been adjusting the pedal into place. Staring directly into my eyes and sounding like a five-star general, he says, "This is not over. Now, get back on your bike and get it done."

I am speechless. I swallow hard and look at the ground. Around me I can sense that the crews are all looking at me now, awaiting my response. They expect me to listen to Peter, to jump back on the bike, get going. *Get back in it.*

There are another 135 miles ahead of me. It is still raining. I've relinquished my lead and lost a huge amount of time to my competitors. Besides being completely checked out mentally, I'm hurt, wet, and physically drained. I take a deep breath, let it out. I close my eyes. The chatter and noise around me seem to fade, recede, and then altogether disappear. Silence. Just my heartbeat and the long, long road in front of me.

I do what I have to do. I turn off that voice in my head urging me to quit. And I get back on the bike. My race, it seems, is only just beginning.

## CHAPTER ONE

# A LINE IN THE SAND

It was the night before I turned forty. That cool, late-October evening in 2006, Julie and our three kids were sound asleep as I tried to enjoy some peaceful moments in our otherwise rowdy household. My nightly routine involved losing myself in the comfort of my giant flat-screen cranked to maximum volume. While basking in the haze of *Law & Order* reruns, I'd put away a plate of cheeseburgers and followed that with the welcome head rush that accompanies a mouthful of nicotine gum. This was just my way of relaxing, I'd convinced myself. After a hard day, I felt I deserved it, and that it was harmless.

After all, I knew about harm. Eight years earlier, I'd awoken from a multiday, blackout binge to find myself in a drug and alcohol treatment center in rural Oregon. Since then I'd miraculously gotten sober, and one day at a time was staying that way. I no longer drank. I didn't do drugs. I figured I had the right to pig out on a little junk food.

But something happened on this birthday eve. At almost 2 A.M., I was well into my third hour of doltish television and approaching sodium toxicity with a calorie count in the thousands. With my belly full and nicotine buzz fading, I decided to call it a night. I performed a quick check on my stepsons, Tyler and Trapper, in their room off the kitchen. I loved watching them sleep. Aged eleven and ten, respectively, they'd soon be teenagers, grasping for independence. But for now, they were still pajama-clad boys in their bunk beds, dreaming of skateboarding and Harry Potter.

With the lights already out, I had begun hauling my 208-pound frame upstairs when midway I had to pause—my legs were heavy, my breathing labored. Tightness gripped my chest. My face felt hot and I had to bend over just to catch my breath, my belly folding over jeans that no longer fit. Nauseous, I looked down at the steps I'd climbed. There were eight. About

that many remained to be mounted. *Eight steps.* I was thirty-nine years old and I was winded by eight steps. *Man,* I thought, *is this what I've become?*

Slowly, I made it to the top and entered our bedroom, careful not to wake Julie or our two-year-old daughter, Mathis, snuggled up against her mom in our bed—my two angels, illuminated by the moonlight coming through the window. Holding still, I paused to watch them sleep, waiting for my pulse to slow. Tears began to trickle down my face as I was overcome by a confusing mix of emotions—love, certainly, but also guilt, shame, and a sudden and acute fear. In my mind, a crystal-clear image flashed of Mathis on her wedding day, smiling, flanked by her proud groomsmen brothers and beaming mother. But in this waking dream, I knew something was profoundly amiss. I wasn't there. I was dead.

A tingling sensation surfaced at the base of my neck and quickly spread down my spine as a sense of panic set in. A drop of sweat fell to the dark wood floor, and I became transfixed by the droplet, as if it were the only thing keeping me from collapsing. The tiny crystal ball foretold my grim future—that I wouldn't live to see my daughter's wedding day.

*Snap out of it.* A shake of the head, a deep inhale. I labored to the bathroom sink and splashed my face with cold water. As I lifted my head, I caught my reflection in the mirror. And froze. Gone was that long-held image of myself as the handsome young swimming champion I'd once been. And in that moment, denial was shattered; reality set in for the first time. I was a fat, out-of-shape, and very *unhealthy* man hurtling into middle age—a depressed, self-destructive person utterly disconnected from who I was and what I wanted to be.

To the outside observer, everything appeared to be perfect. It had been more than eight years since my last drink, and during that time I'd repaired what was a broken and desperate life, reshaping it into the very model of modern American success. After snagging degrees from Stanford and Cornell and spending years as a corporate lawyer—an alcohol-fueled decade of mind-numbing eighty-hour workweeks, dictatorial bosses, and late-night partying—I'd finally escaped into sobriety and even launched my own successful boutique entertainment law firm. I had a beautiful, loving, and supportive wife and three healthy children who adored me. And together, we'd built the house of our dreams.

So what was wrong with me? Why did I feel this way? I'd done everything I was supposed to do and then some. I wasn't just confused. I

was in free fall.

Yet in that precise moment, I was overcome with the profound knowledge not just that I needed to change, but that I was *willing* to change. From my adventures in the subculture of addiction recovery, I'd learned that the trajectory of one's life often boils down to a few identifiable moments—decisions that change everything. I knew all too well that moments like these were not to be squandered. Rather, they were to be respected and seized at all costs, for they just didn't come around that often, if ever. Even if you experienced only one powerful moment like this one, you were lucky. Blink or look away for even an instant and the door didn't just close, it literally vanished. In my case, this was the second time I'd been blessed with such an opportunity, the first being that precious moment of clarity that precipitated my sobriety in rehab. Looking into the mirror that night, I could feel that portal opening again. I needed to act.

But how?

Here's the thing: I'm a man of extremes. I can't just have one drink. I'm either bone dry or I binge until I wake up naked in a hotel room in Vegas without any idea how I got there. I'm crawling out of bed at 4:45 A.M. to swim laps in a pool—as I did throughout my teens—or I'm pounding Big Macs on the couch. I can't just have one cup of coffee. It has to be a Venti, laced with two to five extra shots of espresso, just for fun. To this day “balance” remains my final frontier, a fickle lover I continue to pursue despite her lack of interest. Knowing this about myself, and harnessing the tools I'd developed in recovery, I understood that any true or lasting lifestyle change would require rigor, specificity, and accountability. Vague notions of “eating better” or maybe “going to the gym more often” just weren't going to work. I needed an urgent and stringent plan. *I needed to draw a firm line in the sand.*

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The next morning, the first thing I did was turn to my wife Julie for help.

As long as I've known her, Julie has been deeply into yoga and alternative healing methods, with some (to put it mildly) “progressive” notions about nutrition and wellness. Always an early riser, Julie greeted each day before dawn with meditation and a series of Sun Salutations, followed by a breakfast of odoriferous herbs and teas. Seeking personal growth and counsel, Julie has sat at the feet of many a guru—from Eckhart Tolle, to