No need to discuss what we should do: we hurried as fast as we could go, back to the wayside restaurant where we asked the woman to prepare us a meal as quickly as possible! Soon our rice arrived with bowls of peppered vegetables and soya beans. After we had devoured three bowls apiece, we felt satisfied. The meal had cost us four mei each; so we still had thirty-two mei left!

After a short rest we started off on our way, always taking the widest road when there was a choice. We had no idea where we were going nor what adventures might lie ahead. When the sky darkened, we decided to spend the night in a little inn by the side of the road.

After we had eaten supper, we talked of our plans for next day. Suddenly we remembered that our friend Ho Shu-heng whom we called Hu-tzu (The Moustache) lived in this district and we should visit him. I had his address in my diary and the innkeeper thought it was about seventy kilometers away. That would be just a good day's walk from the inn. Tomorrow night we should be with our Ho Hu-tzu.

Early next morning, we had a quick wash and set off for Ho Hu-tzu's home. It was to be our habit to walk ten kilometers each morning before breakfast. It was the habit in Hunan to eat a heavy meal in the morning the same as for lunch and dinner. This custom was very different from the usual breakfast of watery rice or congee, which was customary in Peking, Shanghai, Soochow, and other cities. To eat this congee in Hunan implies that one is very poor since Hunan is one of the big rice producing areas and one must be in the last stages of final misery not to be able to afford a good bowl of rice each meal.

We walked along lightheartedly because we were rich: we did not need to beg today. Also, we knew that when we arrived at our friend's home about nightfall, we would receive a generous and happy welcome! We felt almost as if we were going home.

As we walked, we talked together about the life of Fang Pi-tsung,
a strange man who not only was my cousin, but had married my older sister. Mao had heard of him and was very interested in all the details I could tell him of his life. He was the fourth grandson of my maternal grandfather and when I was a child I called him Chen Chiu-ko, Big Brother Chen Chiu. My father was famous for his literary works when he married, but he was not very rich. Therefore, Grandfather Fang gave my mother some land as a dowry, so she would have something in case of need. Thirty years later she needed money to enable my brother to have an education, and the land was sold. By this time, the Fangs also had become poor; much of their land had been sold; and Fang Pi-tsung was unable to complete his studies.

He started a grocery store, later began weaving, then turned to sewing, building houses, and finally making furniture. The strange thing about this was that he attained proficiency bordering on perfection in all these crafts despite the fact that he had never studied them. In China it was the custom for sewing and weaving apprentices to study under a master for at least three years but Fang Pi-tsung had become an expert after only a few days’ study. He could imitate any sort of handcraft with incredible perfection.

Mao Tse-tung wondered how this gift could be explained and considered it a pity that he should have been born in China where this sort of genius was not appreciated and cultivated. “Why if he’d have been born in Italy, he might have become another Michelangelo!” he suggested.

I pointed out that when Fang was a small boy he had been very fond of making toys of wood and bamboo; so he was given a collection of small tools: hammers, knives, saws, a plane, and so on, to work with. He had a miniature factory. But although he was a genius in handcraft, he was no good at all in calligraphy or painting. Mao contended that this was due to faulty education along certain lines.

Five or six years after this conversation Fang Pi-tsung arrived in France at the same time as Chou En-lai, Li Li-san, Li Wei-han and Ts’ai Ho-shen under the student-worker scheme. After four years spent in France, he returned to China where he died at the age of forty. His son, named Lian, had exactly this same manual ability. During the Sino-Japanese war he was attacked by bandits in north Szechwan and was killed, before he was thirty years old. I promised
Mao Tse-tung that I would introduce Fang Pi-tsung to him later but the opportunity never came and they never met.

That day we talked about Fang Pi-tsung off and on till midafternoon. The sun was very hot; so we sat to rest in one of the roadside teahouses; but the shade was so pleasant that we fell asleep. When we wakened, it was late and the innkeeper told us we still had to go forty kilometers to Ho Hu-tzu’s place.

Now we walked in silence, concentrating on keeping up a good pace and getting to Ho Shu-heng’s by night. In the evening, we reached a restaurant where we ordered a supper of rice, vegetables and fried eggs, and the owner told us he thought we still had to go about twenty kilometers further on. Eating supper quickly, we set off at a steady pace. When we came to a crossroad with a number of narrow tracks leading off in every direction and with no signposts, we had no alternative but to wait till someone came along and told us to take the track that led up over the hills. Ho Hu-tzu lived in an out of the way part and when we got into the hills, we came to another crossroad. We had seen no people, so we debated which to take. Both tracks looked alike. Finally we turned right, out of the hills, hoping to meet someone who would tell us where to go.

The moon was shining now but in the mountain forest it was dark and many animal noises could be heard. We were not afraid, however, because this was a small forest and there would be no tigers. Also there were two of us. When we had walked an hour, the hills ended and the track petered out. Before us was a broad plain across which led a wide road and in the distance we saw two houses without lights. The people had retired. Since we had no idea where we were, we went to the nearest house and knocked. We were told we had taken the wrong fork in the hills—we should have turned left—but we could cut across to Ho Hu-tzu’s home which was about fifteen kilometers away. The Chinese saying, “In a hundred-mile walk, the first ninety is half way” was appropriate on this occasion.

Since we met no one on the road, we had to ask our way several times at houses where the road branched. Finally, when we were sure we must be at our destination, we asked, “Is this Ho Shu-heng’s house?” After many negative replies, they said, “No, it’s the house just up the road there!”
At last we had arrived! We rushed to the door and knocked excitedly. "Ho Hu-tzu! Ho Hu-tzu!" we called loudly. "Get up and let us in!

A light went on in one of the rooms and Ho Hu-tzu appeared at the door and embraced us with a happy laugh. "Siao Hu-tzu! Whatever are you doing out this way? And Jun-chih has come too? I never dreamed of seeing you two out here! Come in. Come in!"

As we entered the big room, his father entered from another door. He was a typical farmer of about fifty years. Our friend's brother came in; we had met him when Ho Hu-tzu taught at Ch'u Yi School. His twelve-year-old nephew appeared next; I had known him as a student in the Ch'u Yi School. Then Ho Hu-tzu asked his wife and sister-in-law to come and be introduced. It was like a family meeting to welcome long absent members. We felt as if we had really come home.

When introductions and greetings were over, Ho Hu-tzu asked, "Where have you come from, Siao Hu-tzu?"

I told him we had come from Changsha and Mao added, "We walked all the way from Changsha especially to visit you!"

"I am not worthy of that honor," said Ho Hu-tzu. "You are very welcome and we are delighted to see you, but why did you walk? You must be exhausted!"

"Oh," I answered, "the walking was not bad at all. In fact, we are thinking seriously of making a walking tour of the province."

"You see," added Mao, "we are making an experiment. We are trying to travel as far as we can without money. We are living like beggars."

Ho Hu-tzu was visibly shocked. "Living like beggars?" he asked.

"Yes," I continued, "we left Changsha without a cent in our pockets; so we should have to beg our way."

"But I still don't see why you want to do that!" said Ho Hu-tzu.

"The idea is to see if we are equal to solving difficult situations; to see if we can live and travel as we want, even if we have no money. In a word, we are trying to learn to overcome difficulties," I explained.

Ho Hu-tzu sighed, "What strange fellows you are. What strange things you do!"

When the younger brother brought a bottle of wine, we protested
that we had eaten supper, but we all drank a little wine and ate some fruit before we went to bed at about two o’clock. We were dead tired after our day’s walk of about eighty kilometers and we knew that we had already disturbed them too much for one night.