

Squire With Fire

• A Happy Dragon Tale •



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WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY Joseph Cassis

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"Grandpa,
What is that?"

Mac asked as the curious young child pointed to Grandfather's wrinkled but strong hand.

"You mean this

gOLD rING?"

responded Grandpa, who was dressed in his favorite royal purple shirt. He proudly curled his hand into a tight fist to show Mac his gold ring better.

Mac nodded. "Yep, it's so shiny."

Grandpa leaned into Mac and said in a soft voice, "My father gave it to me and his father gave it to him and his grandfather gave it to him. Well, you get the idea. It was a very long time ago. This special family ring is over 600 years old."

Mac's big brown eyes widened, staring at the gleaming ring. "Wow, like you, Grandpa?"

Grandpa chuckled. "Well, no. I am a bit younger than 600. When they were seven years old, our ancestors competed to be squires. They learned the ways of being a knight, and then if they proved they were worthy, they became squires at fourteen and received this beautiful gold ring."

"Oh," Mac said, excitedly. "I'm seven now, so will I get your ring soon?"



"Well, it's just not that easy, Mac. You must show me that you have all the qualities of a squire," said Grandpa.

Mac looked puzzled and stared at Grandpa. "A squire? What's a squire?"

Grandpa answered with a slight grin, "A squire is young person who is a knight's helper."

Mac smiled. "I know. You mean he helps knights fight dragons?"



"Maybe dragons, but actually, the squire helps his knight get ready

to Fight,"

explained Grandpa. "Usually, the battles were against evil warriors or mean people who had not done nice things. A squire had to learn what it took to be a good knight. And not just anyone was selected to be a squire. If a child was chosen to become a squire, this meant that the young person was a good person wanting to learn to be even better. It was like going to school for seven years."

Grandpa held out his fist again, displaying the old gold ring. "People would see this ring on the squire's hand and know he had earned the

right to be a squire—a great honor. However, the villagers knew the squire had to work even harder to become a knight by the age of twenty-one. The knight apprentice learned how to use a sword, ride a horse, fight using quick body moves, and, most importantly, help others in times of need. For seven more years, the squire would improve these required talents. If the knight apprentice passed all the tests, he would be knighted by the king, queen, or highest authority in the land at twenty-one years old and receive the title of Sir."

Mac was thrilled. "Tell me more, Grandpa. What else did he have to learn? I know!! He had to learn how to fight with his sword and a shield!" Mac jumped off the couch, grabbed Grandpa's black walking cane, which laid against the small oak table, and pretended to be a knight by swinging around the make-believe sword.



"Mac, come on now, sit back down here." Mac climbed back on the couch next to Grandpa. "Well, yes, that was a part of what squires had to learn. The squires learned how to be respectful to elders, be courteous to all people, be honorable, be humble and not brag, and display great gallantry toward all people, especially women."

"What does

gallantry

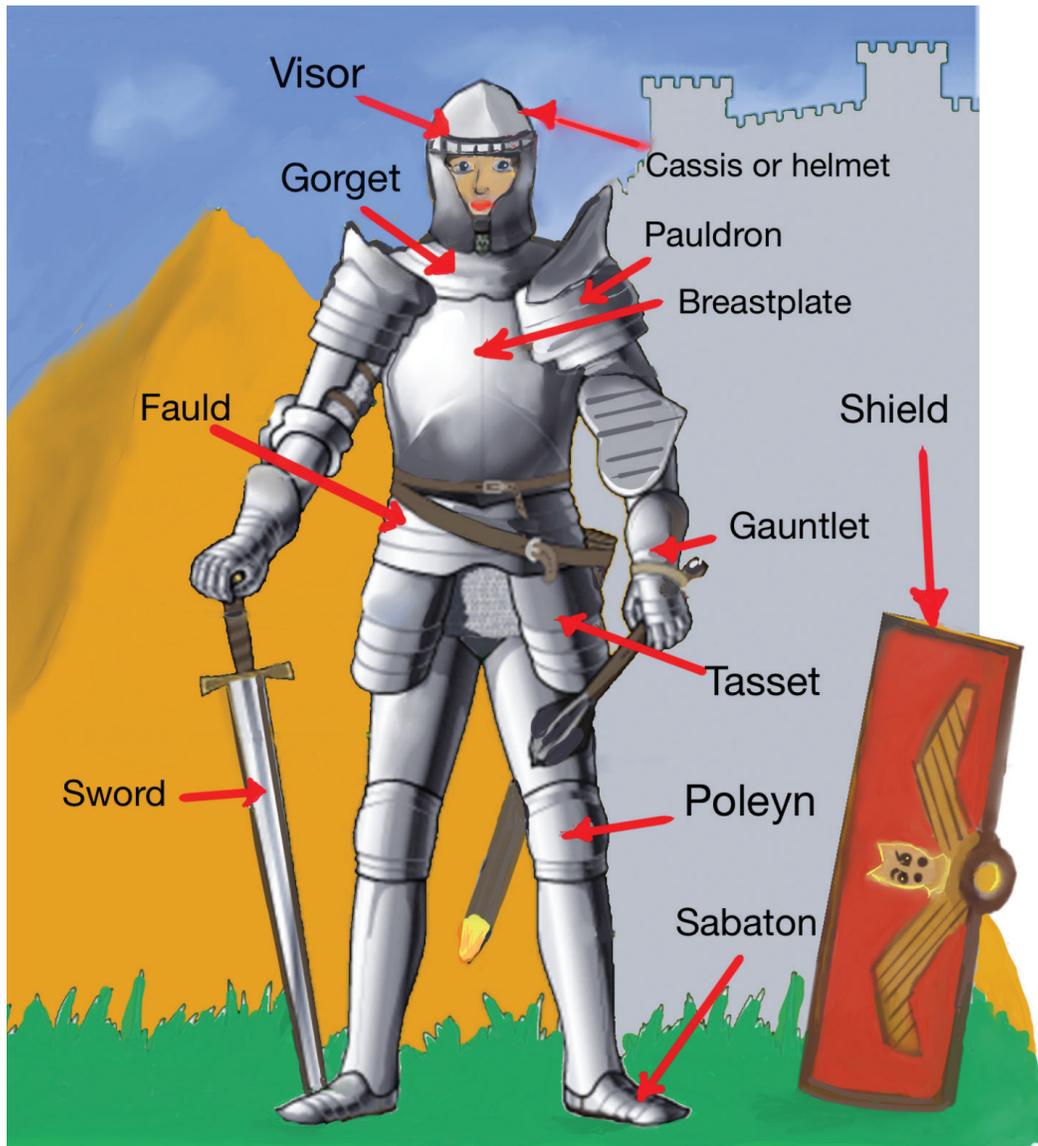
mean, Grandpa?"

"Well, Mac, it means be kind to girls and help them when necessary. Oh, and a squire learned to be very brave, too."

Mac yelled out, "Wow, that's a lot of stuff to learn!"

Grandpa nodded and said, "That's why it took the squire seven more years before even becoming a knight."

Eagerly, Mac asked, "When can I start so I can get the special squire ring?"



"First, you must imagine being a squire," said Grandpa, as he grabbed his tablet. "Here, I'll show you a photo of a knight."

Think how the knights looked, from head to toe. Many knights wore robes and heavy leather to protect themselves in the earlier days. Later, most knights wore metal armor when they went into battle to fight evil people."

**"That's so
COOL,
Grandpa!"**

Grandpa pointed to the illustration. "See Mac, this knight is wearing a cassis—or helmet—and a suit of metal wrapped around his body called armor, along with metal boots for complete protection. And, as you know from swinging my walking cane, the knight used a large sword and a shield to fight."

Mac stared at the drawing of the knight and said, "The knights had to carry so much."

"Yes, and so did the squires. Most of the items were for protection."



Grandpa continued to tell the family's history. "Our great-great ancestor, Mackenzie Stewart, was a knight in Scotland who had an interesting life as a squire. Mackenzie worked in this huge stone castle with other squires and was assigned to take care of the most powerful knight. His name was Sir Galahad. The other squires living in the cold and damp castle were bigger than Squire Mackenzie. They constantly teased and bothered the young squire.

"The name Mackenzie was quite famous, thanks to your ancestor who fought for the poor and weak after becoming a tough and mighty knight. In fact, Mackenzie's name means 'being fair' and also 'born of fire.' But remember: sometimes people call each other bad names."

"I know, Grandpa. Billy calls me 'big lips.'"

I DON'T LIKE THAT,"

said Mac.

"Those kids, like Billy, are known as bullies. That's why bullies make fun of others. They try to get the person to doubt themselves because they don't believe in themselves. Mac, just remember that you can achieve great things. You have to believe in yourself. Do you understand?" asked Grandpa.

Mac nodded and shyly said, "I think so."

Grandpa grinned and explained further. "For example, when those squires called Mackenzie

bad names like 'little piggy' because the young squire was short and squatty, it was not true. Mackenzie knew being shorter and a bit heavy may be a challenge. That challenge made the knight apprentice work even harder to be faster and stronger, especially when using swords. Amazingly, Mackenzie could block all the sword thrusts during the training sessions, which astounded Sir Galahad and the other knights in the castle."

Mac jumped off the couch again and started pretending to use the make-believe sword as if fighting an evil warrior.

"Now settle down, Mac," said Grandpa. "Your mom will think we are wrestling in here and she will get upset."

Mac quickly replied, "Nah, Grandpa. Remember, she went to the store. Besides, we are preparing for battle."



"Well, squires had to do more than help knights prepare for battle," said Grandpa.

"They fed the horses, polished the armor, and—maybe worse—cleaned out the horse stalls filled with hay and poop."

“OH,
YUCK!”

said Mac.

Grandpa laughed and said, “Remember when I said sometimes those names can hurt and sometimes they can be a way to show a person friendship?”

“Kinda,” said Mac.

Grandpa continued with his amazing story. “Murdock, the third squire that was with your ancestor, was strong and offered to even lift large stooks of hay into the stalls for the

horses, knowing that Mackenzie could not do it without some help. He would call Mackenzie “Little Mac” and for doing something silly, Squire Murdock would call Mackenzie ‘Little Mac and Cheesy.’ They were really good friends.”

Mac laughed and laughed. “Cheesy. Little Mac and Cheesy. That’s so funny, Grandpa. Just like me. I’m Little Mac, right?”



"And sometimes Cheesy, too," chuckled Grandpa. "Calling people names may be bad or good, but hurting someone physically is even worse. One day, the other squire named Alexander loosened Sir Galahad's saddle straps to get Squire Mackenzie into trouble.

When Sir Galahad got on his horse, the saddle slipped, and Sir Galahad fell on the hard, rocky castle floor. The squires started to laugh, but quickly stopped snickering after seeing that Sir Galahad had hurt his leg. Sir Galahad thought Mackenzie had done the poor work setting up his horse and blamed the young squire for the bad fall. Alexander's bad joke was very dangerous, since Sir Galahad could have been fighting a mean warrior or one of the monsters in the mountains. He could have fallen right in front of a creature and been burned by the monster's fiery breath."

"YOU MEAN LIKE A
DRAGON,

right, Grandpa?" asked Mac.

Grandpa nodded and continued with his story. "Yes, you are absolutely correct. You probably know these monsters as dragons since they look like huge snakes with legs and wings. They have been known to breathe fire when they get very mad. Speaking of fire, Squire Mackenzie thought that if only they had heat from a fire within their cold, musty castle, everyone would be nice and warm during the cold and stormy nights."



Grandpa further explained, "The Queen of the Rothesay Castle sent Sir Galahad and two other knights to rid the dragon from the mountain in order for the village not to be in danger any longer. The trip was a long one, even on horseback. They could only go so far before the climb became too rocky and steep for the horses. So, the knights continued on foot and hiked up the side of the mountain to the dragon cave."

Mac listened to Grandpa with much intent.

"Grandpa,

Why Was the dragon
SO MEAN?"

Grandpa stopped telling his story and said, "Well, Mac, I'll get to that part in a moment. This dragon had a good reason.

"After swinging his shield around his back on a leather strap, one of the knights lit a torch in order to see in the dark, dreary cave. With their very sharp swords drawn along with a blazing hot torch in hand, the knights slowly entered the dark, smelly cave where the dragon was living.



"The cave stunk so badly that the knights could hardly breathe. The bitter air hurt their noses. The cave walls were wet and moldy. The cave floor was littered with old bones. The knights could not tell if the bones were from animals or people. Suddenly, the scary dragon came boldly at them.

"The enormous green dragon had huge green eyes, yellowish horns, jagged teeth, and long, sharp claws. White smoke was bellowing out of his massive black nostrils. He spread his gigantic wings out, but not fully. Then the fight began. The knights thrust their swords at the beast. The dragon made a screeching sound like this: 'Reeeeeee,' which was so loud as the noise echoed throughout the cave that it hurt the knights' ears.

"They were not able to reach the dragon, even with their long swords, because of his fiery breath. Then, with a few quick strokes of his

front legs, the dragon hit them with his mighty claws. The knights were badly wounded and had to stop fighting. Sadly, the dragon was much stronger and sent the knights home with many injuries. Sir Galahad broke his arm when the dragon threw him against the wall. One knight was severely burned from the fiery dragon breath and another one was cut across the arm and bleeding badly from the dragon's claws. Upon the knights' return, the villagers were even more scared since there were no knights left to protect them from this evil creature.

"The squires were stunned when they saw their knights hurt so brutally. The knights' armor had been charred and burned from the dragon's fiery breath and their helmets had been sliced by the dragon's sharp claws. They knew something had to be done before the village got destroyed by the mean dragon.

"As the squires cleaned the knights' armor and took care of the horses, they talked about destroying the dragon with their own swords. Squire Murdock even suggested pushing a huge rock above the dragon's cave down the mountain to cause an avalanche of rocks to crush the nasty dragon. But after careful thought, the squires decided that idea was a bad one because the rocks could keep rolling down the mountainside into the village and hurt or kill the very people they were supposed to be protecting.

"So, instead, the squires went to the mountain and climbed near the top where the dragon's cave was located. Since Squire Alexander was the oldest and biggest squire, he thought he should go in first."

Grandpa stopped telling his story for a moment and said, "Remember, Mac, these brave squires were much smaller than the knights. They were just between fourteen and twenty years old. Their swords were also much smaller in order for them to hold these weapons. They could barely lift the swords that the knights used."

"Then why were they going to fight the bad dragon?" Mac asked with a very worried look.

Grandpa smiled and said, "Because sometimes people have to go beyond what they know they can do. They do what they have to do."

With that, Grandpa continued his family story. "Squire Alexander slowly led the squires into the musty cavern. The dragon stepped forward from the shadows and screeched a loud noise like before:



'Reeeeeee!'

The squires' eardrums were throbbing from the sound. Then the dragon blew a massive ball of fire out of his mouth that hit Alexander's helmet. Then the creature raced deeper into the cave.

"Since Alexander had forgotten to put his visor down over his face, the flames burned his

eyebrows off. Alexander frantically ran out of the cave. Squire Mackenzie knew running from danger was not what they had been taught to do in times of trouble, even if they were not yet knights. Mackenzie thought no knight should fear danger. They should be brave and continue to fight.



"Squire Murdock felt he was brave enough and knew how to use the sword to kill the dragon, so he cautiously went further into the cave. He could hear heavy breathing getting louder and louder as he approached the dragon's sleeping area. Suddenly, the mighty dragon jumped out of a side entrance and slammed Murdock against the wall before he could thrust his sword. The dragon blew his fiery breath at the squire and the flame hit Murdock in his butt as he tried to run. This caused smoke to come out of his metal suit. Murdock ran out of the cave with a trail of smoke that followed him all the way down the mountain. Mackenzie thought it

was a funny sight, seeing smoke coming from Murdock's butt, but he also knew this was a very serious situation—a life-or-death situation.

"Now, Squire Mackenzie had to decide to either run back to the castle along with Murdoch or face the dragon alone. Sliding the helmet's protective visor down, Mackenzie held the sword tightly and grabbed a small torch in the other hand. The brave squire entered the cave slowly, staying very close to the damp cave wall so the dragon would not see the courageous invader. The smell was horrible. The terrified squire stepped on some old bones and a large cracking sound vibrated throughout the cave.

"Suddenly, Mackenzie saw a large set of bright green eyes reflecting back the light from the torch. The dragon looked so scary. He had spread his wings and was ready to spray fire at Mackenzie. But then the strangest thing happened. The dragon started to cough. He spat little fireballs at Mackenzie that simply bounced off the squire's armor without causing any damage.

THE FIREBALLS LOOKED LIKE FIREWORKS

exploding with many colors, but very little heat or force.
Now only puffs of smoke came out of the dragon's mouth.



"The dragon called out in a growling sound. He didn't speak, but talked in grunts. He grunted: 'Kala ma cu do.' Strangely, Mackenzie understood the dragon. The dragon's thoughts were in the squire's mind. The dragon explained that he did not want to hurt anyone. He said that people had come to kill him out of fear and that he had simply been defending himself."

"Grandpa, how did Mackenzie know what the green dragon was thinking?" asked Mac.

"It's like when you know your dog, Carmella, wants to go outside. She barks. She doesn't say, 'Hey, Mac, I have to go out.' We know that her bark means she has to do her business outside. Other times when she barks, the sound is different, and you know she might have heard a noise to alert us. Or she may bark a different sound to ask you for a treat."

"Yeah, Carmella talks to us all the time. She barks to tell me she saw a squirrel outside.

So, the dragon was a good dragon, but he was sick, right, Grandpa?" Mac stated, looking very concerned.

Grandpa nodded. "Yes, that is correct, Mac. The dragon was hungry and tired with no other place to go but the chilly, wet cave. He had caught a bad cold and could only spit little balls of fire. The dragon had tears in his eyes. Mackenzie had a good feeling about the dragon and placed the sword on the cave floor. Knights taught squires never to put down their swords, especially when in battle or facing a dragon, but Mackenzie didn't think this was a battle. Mackenzie wanted to gain the dragon's trust.

"Just then, the dragon coughed really hard. When he coughed this time, more tiny fireballs came out of his mouth, and the dragon tooted smoke from his butt."

"REALLY Grandpa?"

Laughing so hard, Mac fell off the couch.

"Are you OK, Mac?" Grandpa asked, as he helped Mac off the floor.

"I'm OK, Grandpa. Poor dragon. He really was a sick dragon, tootin' smoke." Mac continued to giggle while climbing back on the couch next to Grandpa.

"Yes, poor little dragon," said Grandpa. "Maybe he wasn't that scary. So, there is more to the story, Mac. Squire Mackenzie told the dragon, 'Dragon, we have to get you to a warm place so you can get well. I'm calling you Spitfire, since you spit little balls of fire. I'm going to take you to the castle out of this cold cave. And you

need to cork that fire! You will only use your fire for good things, understand?' Squire Mackenzie sternly commanded all of this to the dragon as they walked toward the cave opening."

"So, Squire Mackenzie and Spitfire became good friends, right, Grandpa?" asked Mac.

"Yes, Mac. They became very good friends. As they walked out of the cave, Spitfire shook his head, coughed, and blew more little fireballs out of his mouth. A puff of smoke came out of his butt again. Mackenzie looked stunned and said, 'OK, we might have to cork your butt, too, if you keep tootin' smoke. People will think you are going to explode.'"



Mac and Grandpa both chuckled and Grandpa shared more of his story. "Mackenzie picked up the sword and motioned for Spitfire to follow the squire down the mountain to the castle. The other squires and knights were horrified when they saw Mackenzie and Spitfire approaching. They ran to get their swords and shields to fight the huge green dragon.

"Squire Mackenzie screamed,

'NO!!

Spitfire is a good dragon and will help us heat the castle with his fiery breath. He promised not to hurt anyone. Right, Spitfire?' The young dragon nodded and grunted 'Doa,' which meant 'Yes' in dragon language. The squires and knights were flabbergasted. Indeed, they were so surprised that they dropped their swords and shields. Spitfire grunted "Sar-me-goo. Mazo dolly macca goes." Mackenzie explained what Spitfire had said: 'He is sorry for hurting anyone, but he had no choice if he wanted to stay alive. He did not come looking for the knights. The knights came looking for him.'

"The knights and squires felt bad since all of this was true. They understood that they had judged all dragons as bad. Not all dragons were bad and every dragon should not be judged the same. The knights bowed to Spitfire and saluted him by touching their right hand to their heart, as if to say: We accept and share love for you. Spitfire smiled and squirted tiny balls of fire like fireworks to celebrate his new friends. Everyone laughed and gave each other high fives."

Grandpa

High-Fived Mac

and then continued with his story.



"Mackenzie took Spitfire to the big hall where an enormous black kettle full of water was hanging. Squire Mackenzie told the dragon to use his special flame and heat the kettle, pointing a finger to Spitfire's mouth and then at the kettle. 'It will provide a source of heat for a day or two until you have to come back and heat it up again,' Mackenzie said.

"Since Spitfire was feeling much better being inside the castle and out of the cold, musty cave, he grew stronger. He huffed a bit, drew a huge breath of air into his lungs, aimed his large green snout at the black kettle, and blew a burst of flames from his mouth. The cauldron lit up and fire surrounded the kettle. The dragon continued blowing until steam rose from the kettle. Almost instantly, everyone felt the warmth from the hot cauldron and, oh, did it feel good! The knights smiled. The squires smiled. The dragon even smiled. Spitfire knew he now had a family whom he would protect forever, especially Squire Mackenzie. The end!" Grandpa had reached the end of his story.

"Grandpa, did Spitfire become like a pet? Maybe like a pet dog?" asked Mac.

"Yes, Mac. Spitfire became Mackenzie's best friend and even helped Mackenzie become an excellent knight. You could say Spitfire became Mackenzie's protector, and that Mackenzie became a protector of the village people after becoming a knight. Mackenzie wore this special gold ring until the Queen of Rothesay Castle made her a new knight. Later, Mackenzie's son, Joshua, received a similar ring when he became a squire."

Confused, Mac asked, "Grandpa, you made a mistake. You said the Queen of Rothesay Castle made *her* a new knight. Mackenzie was a boy who later became a knight, right Grandpa?" Grandpa made a funny face as he scrunched his nose and smiled. "Well, I'll be. You should know better."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN,

Grandpa?" asked Mac.

Grandpa smiled and explained, "You assumed that Squire Mackenzie was a boy. Mackenzie was, like you, Mac, a girl! There were female knights, too, who fought as well as, if not better than, any male knight. They were known as dames—an honorable knight title—and they went through the exact same knight-dubbing ceremony as the men. Someday in school you may learn about a famous girl named Joan of Arc who led knights into battle very long ago. But male or female, all knights must first be a squire."

"So, I can be a Squire!"

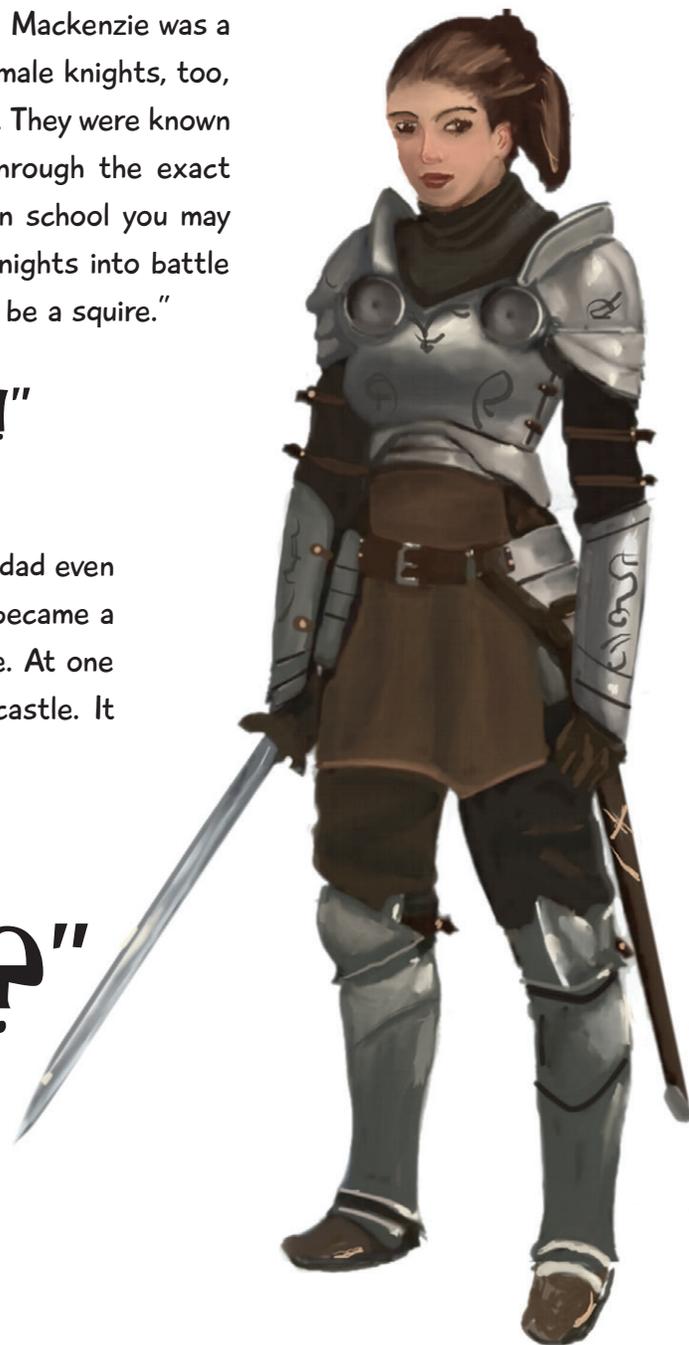
yelled Mac.

"Yes, of course," said Grandpa. "Your mom and dad even named you in honor of Squire Mackenzie, who became a famous knight in the Scottish Rothesay Castle. At one time, the Stewarts were the keepers of the castle. It still exists to this day."

Oh, Grandpa, I want to see the castle.

Can I see it?"

asked Mackenzie.



Grandpa smiled. "Indeed, someday the family will all go there. Scotland is across the ocean, far away from here. In fact, according to a nineteenth-century ballad, the castle is haunted by a Lady Isobel. Her ghost is seen on the 'bloody stair,' behind the chapel. Her family members were killed by Norsemen, known as Vikings. Rather than submit to marriage with a Viking, Lady Isobel killed herself. In those days, that was an honorable thing to do. However, in today's society, people would not accept this type of bravery. We should try to be like a squire and learn the practices of honor, bravery, and chivalry at all times, but not of taking one's own life."

"What is chivalry, Grandpa?" asked Mac.

"Wow, Mac, you certainly ask great questions. Chivalry is respecting all women for what they do in this world. Kind men, especially knights, practice this. Today, many people would say this is not good behavior toward women."



"Why, Grandpa?"
pondered Mac.



"Because," Grandpa replied, "several people feel it suggests women are weak. But in reality, that thinking changed the way society looked at women. The knights revered and honored women and, in many cases, took orders from them as though they were queens or princesses."

“ORDERS?”

Mac asked, with a puzzled look.

“Yes. Many knights were told what to do by queens or women of power. Remember, several male knights had wives, some had sisters and, of course, all had mothers,” said Grandpa.

“AND DON'T FORGET GRANDMAS!”

Mac proudly shouted.

“Yes, grandmothers, too. And don't they deserve to be respected, to be loved, and to be honored?”

“Oh, yes, Grandpa, for sure. Mom and Grandma have done so much for us, right? How about my teacher, Mrs. Akre? And, there's Officer Remington, who lives next door. She is very brave. Even our pastor—she is amazing, too.”

Grandpa smiled. “Yes, and don't forget your sister. They're all wonderful women and girls, like you, Mac. You're very helpful. Oh, by the way, there was something I forgot to tell you. Spitfire was also helpful around the castle. The knights and squires would make s'mores with marshmallows they roasted using Spitfire's fiery breath!”



"REALLY,
Grandpa?"

asked Mac, looking very surprised.

"I Love S'MORES!"

I could eat them all day!"

Grandpa laughed. "Yes, I know, Mac. They're really good. I was just kidding about the knights and squires eating s'mores. As far as I know, knights and squires didn't have marshmallows. But wouldn't that be fun, to have dragons roast your marshmallows for you?"

Giggling, Mac said, "Yeah, because you wouldn't need a campfire. You could have s'mores anytime. That's really funny, Grandpa!"

"You know, I should be calling you by your real name *Mackenzie* instead of *Mac*, since you were named after this famous squire who became the bravest knight in our family. You need to reflect the same qualities. Once you earn this ring, you will receive it as part of our family tradition of pursuing the best."



"I will, Grandpa!! I promise.

May I See

THE SQUIRE RING

again?"

asked Mac.

*Grandpa held out his hand. Mac looked closely at the gold ring and saw a worn inscription on it.

"What does that say, Grandpa?"

Grandpa glanced at the ring and smiled. He looked down at Mackenzie. "My grandfather told me it says, 'Omnia sint paribus inter dracones.'"

"What?" asked Mac with a surprised look on her face. "You are talking funny, Grandpa!"

Grandpa grinned. "It is Latin, a language older than English. The inscription on the ring means: 'All are equal, including dragons.' From my story, you now know what that means."

"Wow!"

said Mac.

"That is so cool, Grandpa. Thank you for telling me this story."



Mac's mom arrived from the store. "Hi, Mackenzie! Hi, Dad! What have you all been doing?"

"Grandpa has been telling me about his very old ring," explained Mackenzie.

Mackenzie's mom chuckled. "You mean about the *knight*s in our family? Speaking of knights, Mackenzie, you are my knight in shining armor for finding my phone for me. I would have been lost without it."

Mackenzie quickly answered with a big smile, "You're welcome, Mom. But, no, I'm not a knight yet."

I'M STILL LEARNING

to be a

SQUIRE."





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1. JUVENILE FICTION, FAIRY TALES & FOLKLORE

Distributed to the trade by The Ingram Book Company

Enjoy your imagination.

Here is a delightful Medieval adventure, a story lovingly told within a story. In a dynamic unfolding, Grandpa delights seven-year-old Mac with tales about the brave squires and knights who populated their family history, including the famous knight in the Scottish Rothesay Castle who shares the same name. Mac is particularly curious about the ring Grandpa wears and its thrilling history: it once belonged to a squire with the dreams—the same dreams Mac now has, 600 years later.

Squire With Fire illuminates and educates and even surprises. The dragon who plays the supporting role makes the lessons particularly exciting. Along the way, Mac learns about chivalry, bravery, ingenuity, and the role of humour in escaping tricky situations. Best of all, *Squire With Fire* explodes expectations around gender roles and throws wide the assumptions about what little girls and little boys might do with their lives.



Way back when his daughter Mallory was just two, Joseph Cassis made a promise on the steps of the Cinderella Castle at Disney World's Magic Kingdom to write a book about knights and dragons just for her. But life flew by, and soon Mallory herself was a parent. Joseph wrote this book to celebrate the birth of Isla, his first granddaughter, and to inspire her to be a lifelong learner so she might achieve great things. Illustrating and writing *Squire With Fire* makes good on Joseph's promise at last.

Joseph is a long-time writer of screenplays and novels populated by imaginative characters but based on true stories. He lives with his wife, Joyce, and their five-year-old Labrador Retriever, Carmella, in Johnston, Iowa. He is well-travelled, but is happiest in his picturesque Midwest home, where the burbling Des Moines River and rolling fields of green corn and soybeans offer a compelling backdrop to his storytelling.

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