

Cara Jan Hamill



Animal
Angels

Do you feel you have a guardian angel watching over you? Wouldn't it be a comfort to know your pets have one as well?

For some, the love of animals only comes after they depart the earth. Five individuals find the passion they never knew existed, as well as a profound love for all animals.

Life and death are often minutes apart. Sometimes the healing starts ***AFTER*** death.

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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Dedications

This book is lovingly dedicated to David, my amazing and wonderful husband, who read the entire book through each revision without complaint. His insight and suggestions made all the difference in the finished work.

My sincere thanks to Larry Roquemore and Trey Shores for editing and for their support. And, to my daughter, Wendy O'Brien, a thank you for letting me read the book out loud to her. When she kept asking that I read more, I knew it was a final copy. Thank you also to early reader critics - Jerry Roquemore, Dennis Sturgis, and Alan Neace.

A special thank you goes out to my kitties, who put a smile on my face every single day, one lick and one nudge at a time.

Prologue

The date is Wednesday, March 28th. The time is 11:11 a.m. in Fort Worth, Texas ... New Orleans, Louisiana ... Omaha, Nebraska ... Oklahoma City, Oklahoma ... and Joplin, Missouri.

Mary has just returned home from the senior center. She had a bingo twice today and won two prizes from the Dollar Store. She sits in front of the TV with her freshly made grilled cheese sandwich, ready to watch the game show channel reruns of *Deal Or No Deal*. Happy with her wins, she is very pleased with her good fortune.

Nick downs two cups of coffee and a large glass of V-8 before heading out the door for a job interview. He dreads the early morning traffic and feels uncomfortable in the dress up clothes he feels forced to wear. He grabs the keys and heads in the direction of his potential employer.

Walter has checked in a little early for his shift at the police station. He wants to finish some of the paperwork he didn't get around to the day before. K-9 companion, Racer, sits by waiting for them to begin the day. Ten minutes later and they are out the door, ready to patrol one of the roughest areas of the city. After getting Racer secured in the back and his fresh cup of coffee settled into the holder, they drive away.

Chris is feeling a little better today and takes advantage of the newfound energy by sitting on the porch with her husband. The children have already headed off to school. They sit in the newly installed porch swing and enjoy the breeze and the great feeling of just being out in the fresh air. Chris's husband excuses himself for a minute and then comes back out with two glasses of tea and a checkerboard. They feel relaxed and hopeful for the first time in a while.

Construction foreman, Sammy, a 'hands-on' type boss, willingly and frequently helped out at the construction sites. He knew he wouldn't have a

choice today, as two people were out sick. The new project was huge, and would require all hands on deck. Paperwork and bill paying would have to wait.

At 11:45 a.m. - Mary, Nick, Walter, Chris and Sammy take their final breath.

Stillness envelops the rooms. Family and friends look at each other in disbelief. They watch as the sheet is placed over the person they love, and continue watching as their loved one is taken out of the room -- out of their sight -- and out of their lives.

The out-of-town relatives are headed back home. The flowers are starting to wilt. All the food has been eaten. Losses are beginning to set in, as memories start to flood the brain.

Simultaneously, family and friends gathered to say goodbye to five individuals who passed on the same day, at approximately the same time -- down to the very second.

Mary, a retired nurse, died of a heart attack at age 70. Her home was Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She is survived by a daughter, two sons and four grandchildren. She was dearly loved by all, especially her bingo group at the senior center.

Sammy, a construction foreman, died at a construction site when a beam fell on him with crushing fatal injuries. He was 52. Fort Worth, Texas was his hometown. Sammy was divorced with no children, but had lots of friends and family. He was always the class clown and life of the party. He kept up with school chums who lived across the country and his popularity never faded.

Christina (who preferred to be called **Chris**), a professional photographer and journalist, passed at age 39, after a long battle with cancer. Her loving husband and children have many photos taken by Chris, which they will always treasure. Her ovarian cancer support group was also the recipient of her exceptional photo abilities with photos and copy, for their awareness campaigns and literature. Omaha, Nebraska was home for Chris.

Nick, age 28, was the victim of a fatal car accident. This time it was not him that was driving under the influence, but the other driver, who came out of this wreck just fine. A huge tree was the only other victim. He is survived by his

mother, father, and one sister. He was a part-time bookie at the time of death. Hometown was listed as Joplin, Missouri.

Walter, a real hero and all-round good guy, died at age 42. He was shot and killed during a routine traffic stop in his duties for the New Orleans police department. The driver of the car who met Walter with a point-blank round from a Colt .45, turned out to be one of the FBI's 10 Most Wanted. Walter was a K-9 officer for the department. His dog, Racer, was also credited with the capture. A lengthy article in the *Times-Picayune*, depicted a remarkable officer, and an equally remarkable dog. He is survived by his dog, wife and one son.



The End and The Beginning

The room is exceptionally bright and cheery. The wall coloring, a light honey-suckle yellow with a slight tint of gold, seems to glisten. The only visible door is a big imposing one made of oak, with ornate carvings and designs from top to bottom.

Three large floor-to-ceiling bay windows are on one side of the wall. Their tinting makes it difficult to see through them. It is like looking through a window with a misty glaze. They have a nebulous glow. Although you can see out to some degree, it is difficult to determine whether it is day or night.

The room exudes warmth and tranquility, with an appealing fragrance of freshly cut flowers.

Mary, Sammy, Chris, Walter and Nick are seated at a long, dark mahogany conference table. The sheen from the wood looks like it has just been polished. Mary, Sammy and Chris are on one side of the table, with Nick and Walter on the opposite side.

The five sit, looking at their new surroundings, wondering where they are and what they are doing in this mysterious room. They are reluctant to even talk to each other.

Chris finally gets brave. “I, uh ... was wondering - can anyone tell me what this room is and where we are?”

They all look at her with blank expressions, but seem to be trying to work it out in their minds as well.

Nick shrugs his shoulders. "Beats me! Maybe it's just a dream, or I guess we could all be in a coma together? The last thing I remember was an enormous tree headed at me awfully fast."

"When was that?" Chris asks.

"Well, today, at least I guess it's still today ... the 28th of March."

"Wait! What did you just say?" Chris moves around and sits up a little straighter in her chair, waiting for the response.

"March 28th," Nick repeats. "I remember because I had an interview for a real job, which I had marked on my calendar for quite some time."

Walter spoke up next. "Yeah, that's also the day I was shot, and I'm fairly certain I didn't make it." All concurred this was indeed the last date they remembered.

"We're dead all right," Sammy said. "But, what's with this room? Are we being interviewed? I didn't bring my resume."

Nick and Walter let out a short laugh. Mary and Chris just smiled at Sammy's attempt at lightheartedness. They soon went back to not talking, and resumed staring at their new surroundings.

After sitting for what seemed like hours, but was in reality only minutes, flashes of light began building at the bay windows. It was almost like a strobe light. There was no sound whatsoever. The light was blindingly bright, but somehow it didn't hurt anyone's eyes. Everyone was drawn to the light and could not look away. The light continued to flicker and strobe. Everyone remained silent and very still.

Just as quickly as it started, it ended. Suddenly, the light stopped and the room went totally dark. When the lights came back on, there were six people in the room instead of five.

At the head of the table, sat a person who can only be described as mesmerizingly beautiful in every way. Her features were beyond description, except to say she possessed an angelic-like beauty. Wavy light brown hair cascaded over her shoulders, framing a face that seemed chiseled in the finest marble. The sheen and different highlights in her hair were beyond being de-

scribed as just shiny. Her light blue eyes were the color of the best blue-sky-watching-day, you could ever remember, with lashes that were long and dark, framing her blue eyes like a painting. Her pettiness added to the allure and aura she exuded. Everyone sat transfixed by her very image.

“Welcome! My name is Rose.”

No one moved a muscle or even blinked an eyelid.

"I know you are wondering what this place is and why you are here." She pauses to study the faces of the five people sitting before her.

"Your life on earth ended the 28th day of March. Your passing was at the same time of day as well."

The voice that came from her resonated like a tone you wanted to listen to forever. It was the sweetest, most gentle voice anyone in the room had ever heard. The stark facts she just stated, surprisingly, didn't seem to alarm the newly deceased.

“You all have two things in common. The date of your earthly demise, which I just mentioned, and the other common denominator is that all of you feel guilt concerning your treatment or lack of care of animals.”

With those words, the group around the table seemed to come to attention. Some lowered their eyes, while others simply closed them briefly.

“I am the spiritual guide and mentor for all earth's animal angels.” The five looked at her incredulously.

“After I speak with each of you individually, you may get a chance to right the wrong and ease this guilt you still carry with you,” Rose adds.

The five felt a sense of impending dread, knowing they were going to be judged on animal issues that happened when they were alive. They looked to Rose for a what happens next. She stood up and addressed Sammy first. “If you would, please follow me - this way.” He looked at the other four, got up from his chair slowly, and followed her.

Everyone watched in anticipation of their 'one-on-one' as Sammy and Rose made their way to a room they had not noticed upon their arrival. The door was opened and then closed softly by Rose.

Chris, Mary, Walter and Nick continue to study the room they are in, which now feels more like a waiting room of sorts.

Inside the other room, Sammy looks very ill at ease. He very much resembles someone about to take a test he is totally unprepared for, and dreads showing this vulnerability.

Rose looks at him sympathetically, and shows him where to sit. He sits down quickly. "I don't think I'm going to like what you already know about me. I have some regrets, and one big one that immediately comes to mind regarding an animal."

Rose pushes a button. A TV screen appears on the wall in front of them. With the handheld remote, she pushes another button. The photo on the screen is Sammy. Underneath the photo is the date of his birth and the date of his death. Sammy sits, transfixed by the image being shown to him.

With another push of a button, the screen is brought to life. Sammy grows tense and takes a deep breath. The scenes are very brief. The set is turned off immediately at the conclusion.

He hangs his head down, as he doesn't want Rose to see him cry. Several minutes pass. Rose sits by quietly. When Sammy finally looks up, he is reluctant to even look her way.

"Sammy, look at me! I know this is hard for you, but it is required that you view your actions before you can move on. If you are chosen to be an animal angel, you will have the opportunity to save countless animals from harm and injury."

"I can't believe I would be given this chance at all," Sammy said. "I just don't deserve this opportunity; don't deserve it."

As Rose stood up, preparing to bring the next person in, she noticed how distraught Sammy still was. "Sammy, why don't you take some time to yourself

before joining the others? Just through this door is a lounge. You can come back in the main room when you are ready to do so."

"Thanks, Rose," he said, as he silently and solemnly walked to the other room.

The remaining four sit at the table trying to make small talk, but no one really wanted to talk. They all tried to be polite, but you could see the fear in their eyes as they waited their turn.

They look up anxiously as they notice the door opening and Rose heading their way. "Chris, please follow me," she instructs. Everyone looks at Chris as if she was going to meet her executioner.

Rose looks at everyone and smiles. This smile seemed to put everyone a little more at ease.

"I like your haircut, by the way." This really caught Chris off-guard. She was not expecting to receive a compliment from Rose about now.

She smiles meekly. "Thanks!"

"Before we begin, Chris, I'd like to ask you if you know what animal issues I was referring to earlier?"

"Um, I was going back over my life and what I came up with must involves cats. There are definitely some regrets concerning them."

Rose picks up the remote and pushes the button that raises the screen. The on-screen picture of Chris appears, with the photo marking the date of birth and the date of death. Like Sammy, she sits motionless, just looking at her picture.

Chris turns away from the screen and gives Rose a shy look. "If you don't mind me asking, where is Sammy? We noticed he didn't rejoin us in the room. He didn't have to go '*somewhere else*' ... did he?"

Rose smiled slightly at this question. "I thought you were going to ask about your picture. It is admirable that you and the others are concerned about him. In fact, Sammy is just fine. He's in an adjoining room, spending some time alone before he rejoins everyone."

Chris looks very relieved.

Rose pushes the button and the screen comes alive with Chris as the star. She watches in disbelief that this part of her life had been recorded and is now being played back for her review.

As it concludes, Rose switches off the TV and turns to Chris. "Would you like to add anything before joining the others?"

Without hesitation, she said, "Ya know, watching myself reminds me of how self-centered, selfish and non-caring I used to be. I will always regret this behavior."

Rose did not comment at this point, but arose, prompting Chris to arise from her seat as well. They walk back into the larger room, and Chris takes her seat. Everyone looks her way, trying to gauge her experience with Rose.

Both Chris and Rose note Sammy is now back in his seat, head turned toward the wall, looking very glum.

"Are you all right, Sammy?"

"I'm OK. Thanks for asking, Rose."

"Good," she said, as she gives him a smile he cannot resist. He could not help but smile back. He suddenly had no control over that part of his face.

"Nick, you're next." He got up quickly and stood by Rose's side, waiting for her to make the first move toward the door, leading to the smaller room. All heads turn to follow their movements.

Once inside, Nick sits down a little harder than he intended to and makes the chair squeak. "Sorry about that."

Rose sets his mind at ease about the noise and then poses a question. "I have asked everyone if they are aware of the animal issues in their life. Now, I would like to ask you this same question. Do you know what issues you have had involving an animal or animals?"

He looks at her with a troubled face. "Yeah, think I have a pretty good idea. It was back when I was trying to make a fast buck. I made some really bad choices back then."

The screen comes on and he views his picture with the dates underneath. The segment of his animal issues begin. Various emotions show in his face that indicate his displeasure at what he is seeing.

When it stops, he moves his head side-to-side and pops his neck. "Sorry, that's one of my bad habits. My neck gets stiff and popping seems to help." Rose knew this habit was really due to nerves more than a stiff neck.

Nick is silent for a few moments. "Ya know, I regret this more than any other bad thing I did in my life, and there were plenty. This was, by far, the worst. I was even plagued by terrible nightmares. That was really hard to watch. It really was."

"OK, Nick, it's over now." Rose opens the door and they walk single file out of the room.

He tries to look upbeat about his meeting, but the others can see the tenseness in his face, as he takes his seat. Both Mary and Walter look at Rose. They are each eager to get their interviews over with, and wonder who is next.

"Walter, let's have our meeting now." He springs from his chair with a bit of nervous energy and follows closely behind Rose, mind filled with wonder about what he'll see and hear in the other room.

"Before we get started, I need to inform you that I asked the others not to disclose what was discussed in this room. I am asking the same of you."

"I understand, Rose," Walter said, wondering what was with all the secrecy.

"Do you know why I am talking about animals with you?" Rose poses the question as she directs him to a chair next to hers.

"Yeah, believe I may have come up with the only logical explanation. I definitely have something in my life I wish I could do over regarding an animal."

The screen comes on and Walter recognizes his picture with the dates underneath. This doesn't seem to surprise him. Instead, he looks at it with fascination.

The next scenes do take him by surprise, however. As they play out, the different emotions begin to show in his face. His, was a face of sadness and despair.

"Walter, do you need time to regroup before we go back in?"

"No, I'll be all right in a minute. It just breaks my heart that I had such an opportunity there for so long, and I didn't even try to take it. I will always regret this."

As they walk back into the main room, Walter is several steps ahead of Rose. He seems eager to take his seat at the table, and leave the memories of the other room behind.

"Mary, you're last, but certainly not least." Mary smiles at the comment, and is up and eager to get her interview over with. No one at the table would say anything, and she has no idea what the meeting was going to be about. Her steps behind Rose are so quick, she bumps her slightly as they walk.

"Sorry, Rose! Guess I'm more than a little anxious today."

Rose smiles sweetly. "Mary, I saved you for last, on purpose. You are the only one who has already started to 'right the wrong' so to speak, while you were on earth."

"I did something good and not bad?" Mary asks.

"Yes, you did indeed do something good. Let's look at the screen together, shall we?"

The photo with the date of birth and death is shown to Mary. Next is the replay of her animal issues, but with a follow-up story dated just two days prior.

"Mary, as I mentioned, you had already begun the healing process before you left life on earth. It has been noted, and you are officially invited to be an animal angel." Mary looked stunned.

"What the others do not know as yet, is that each of them had to express regret before and after their interview to be considered. You had regrets, but were doing something about it."

"You mean I can be one of the animal angels, you were referring to earlier?"

"Yes, that is just what I am proposing to you. What do you think? Would you like to be part of a network of angels worldwide who comfort, save and rescue animals?"

"Oh my, yes!" Mary blurts out. "What about the others?"

"In good time, I will discuss the option with them. At that time, you will know who will be invited to join you as well. Ready to go back?" Mary nodded her answer.

Chris, Walter, Sammy and Nick could not help but notice the huge grin Mary had on her face as she sat down. They wondered how she could be so happy coming from *'that'* meeting with Rose. They certainly did not come away happy.

All eyes are on Rose now, as she sits down at the head of the table. She looks around at all the questioning looks on the faces of the five who sit before her. They look genuinely worried, and she can tell they fear what might be coming next. Mary, on the other hand, is sitting in her chair, with a *'happy as a lark look'* on her face.

It is time to set everyone's mind at ease. She is ready for the big announcement.

"After speaking with each of you and reviewing your comments, I would like to formally invite you to become animal angels. As an animal angel, you will be able to save a multitude of animals before your assignment ends. The guilt you carry may leave you completely as well."

The four people sitting at the table look as if someone had just poured a bucket of water on them, and they were suddenly revived. Mary needed no water, of course.

"Seriously?" Nick asks.

"I can't believe I'm being chosen to be an angel," Chris said.

Walter chimes in with similar thoughts.

"Are you sure you want me as an angel? Right now I don't feel at all worthy of the title," Sammy said.

Rose got up from her seat and walked over to him. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said to the group, "You are all worthy, and I look forward to working with EACH of you. So - is that a YES from everyone?"

Everyone nodded, enthusiastically.

A flood of questions started building up in Walter's brain and he just blurted out what he was thinking. "Rose, how can we help animals? What kind of powers will we have, and how do we find animals that need us? Can we fly? OK, scratch that last question, unless you don't think it's a silly one. It just popped in with the others."

"Wow, can't believe I just said all that. Did I even take a breath?" Everyone smiled after his rapid-fire line of questioning had ended.

"This will all be worked out and explained to you in detail when I return, and all your questions will be answered. In the meantime, while I am away preparing for your missions and journeys, please take this time to open up and share your feelings with each other. You need to understand each other and learn to work together, and trust each other. So, enjoy your time together. I'll return soon."

With that, Rose exited from the room in the blink of an eye.

"That was some vanishing act," Nick said.

Everyone began studying each other. Mary had more eyes on her than anyone else, because she was STILL smiling.

Nick looks away; moves his head back and forth and pops his neck. After a few minutes, he said, "Guess I'll start." Everyone settled back in their chairs, with full interest in what they were going to hear from him and each other. Each of them now knew what animal issues Rose was referring to earlier, and what she wanted them to share with each other.

"My life wasn't always the cheeriest. My self-indulgent ways and drinking got me in lots of trouble in the past. I lost jobs, friends, girlfriends and more girlfriends, but most of all, self-respect. Did I say girlfriends?"

"Even though I was still bartending some, I had given up drinking altogether. But, no one wanted to hire me because of my past reputation. So, to

make extra money, I used to help my buddies set up illegal dog fights and take bets for them."

"It was truly brutal and sad what happened at these fights. No one cared about anything except the money. No one cared how much the Pit Bulls were beaten and battered. To them, *the kill was the thrill!* My nightmares started when I showed up one day during a practice session with some of the dogs. I left the house, and threw up behind my car, before leaving. That was my last involvement with dog fights and taking bets."

Everyone sat perfectly still through Nick's narration. Mary and Chris looked shaken. Sammy had a very somber expression on his face. Walter, being a police officer, knew firsthand about the illegal fights, and what Nick had witnessed and participated in. Hearing it from someone so close, however, really made an impression on him.

Several minutes pass before anyone else volunteers their story. The next person to speak up was Walter. "I was a K-9 officer with the New Orleans Police Department. My dog, Racer, was part of the elite patrol that pits dog and man against crimes and criminals. My regret is that I didn't spend enough off-duty, quality time with Racer. The dogs live with their handlers, so I didn't have any excuse not to become his friend."

"I was really only attentive to him when we were working. At home, I was too busy working out on my home gym, and self-centered to even throw a Frisbee or ball to him. I ignored his need for play and love. He loved me, but I didn't show any love towards him."

"My young son was not even allowed to play with him. Now that I think about it, I should have played more outdoor games with my son, as well. We spent way too much playtime indoors, instead of out in the good old fresh air."

"When I was attentive to Racer around the other guys, it was all 'show' because they all treated their dogs with such love and affection. I really just faked it." Walter took his seat and was a little more shaken than when he started. Again, no one moved quickly to share his or her animal confessions.

Mary moves around a little in her seat, as if to get comfortable, before she begins. "You will all think this is very silly. I feel guilty because I never let any of

my children have a pet, not even a goldfish or a frog. I had this thing about germs. Perhaps it was because I was a nurse and saw so many diseased people walk into the hospital. I also didn't want to deal with a furry, slobbery dog or an animal I had to clean up after, like a cat, with their litter box bathrooms. My kids literally begged me, year after year, for any kind of pet, and my answer was always No, No, and No again."

"I regret not allowing that kind of companionship, and letting them have someone to take care of besides themselves. Having a pet would have taught them so much - I now see."

"When my children became adults and had children of their own, they held tight just like I did, and said no to any pets. This is what they were taught and therefore, I also deprived my grandchildren from having pets."

"Wouldn't they laugh if they knew I was secretly volunteering at the local shelter every Tuesday and Thursday? Walking the dogs, and petting the adorable cats made me feel so good and so useful. I was just on the verge of telling them my secret." Mary took her seat, glad to get that off her chest.

"I'll go next," Sammy said. "My experiences are the worst, and you'll all hate me after I tell you about them. Let me figure out where to begin. Okay - here goes!"

"I was leaving work late one Friday afternoon, heading to a meeting with a new client. My new truck, with the extra horsepower, made it possible for me to speed, without even realizing it. As I zoomed down the lane a bit faster than the 65 miles per hour allowed, I heard a loud thud. I looked in my rearview mirror and then the side mirror, and saw a big dog laying half on and half off the road. It wasn't moving. I felt bad, but really didn't have time to stop, because I was already late for my meeting. I just kept on going."

"I am still haunted by that dog - someone's dog that probably died that day, all alone in the road. Maybe if I had stopped and taken it to the vet, some little boy or little girl would still have their pet."

"Unfortunately, this wasn't the first animal I hit either. I was careless driving at night and never gave it a thought to look out for animals trying to get across the highway. I don't know the number, but I know for sure I hit plenty of small

animals during my lifetime. The dog, however, was always the most traumatic for me.”

The room was silent. Sammy felt every eye on him, or at least it seemed to him that every eye was on him.

“Yeah, I know, it’s heartless.”

No one argued with him.

“My story is just as bad,” Chris said. “You will hate me, too. As a professional photographer and journalist, I traveled quite a bit in my younger years. I had two cats, only because one of my friends insisted that if I wasn’t going to have a boyfriend to keep me company, I needed these two little brothers to fill the gap. My friend explained to me how they were no trouble and how clean cats are. What she didn’t tell me was that she had these cats for a few months, and was unloading them on me.”

“I only had goldfish as a kid, so I really didn’t know much about cats. She even brought me the food, treats they like, and a litter box. Again, what she didn’t tell me was the taller one, named Lucky, preferred to use the walls, furniture, carpet, and space outside the litter box, as his bathroom. He peed on everything in my house. He also had a behavior problem with his brother. The smaller brother use to hide out during the day just to get away from him.”

“Both cats were declawed, so the furniture survived. I never really bonded with either of them and really didn’t try to. I guess I should have chosen a boyfriend instead, except my friend probably would have given me one of her ex’s,” she added with a shy laugh.

“What I did next was truly unthinkable. When I was transferred out of state, I simply left the cats to fend for themselves. I didn’t try to find them a home or call a shelter. I put their favorite food, treats and water outside, and left it to the neighbors to take care of them. I had no qualms about driving away.”

“I used to run across stray cats from time to time, but ignored them totally after that, and never thought to feed them or try to help find their owners. I just looked the other way and considered them a nuisance more than anything else. I even advised a friend of mine to do the same thing I did, when she was transferred. So, I am also responsible for the fate of her pets as well.”

As she was finishing up, Rose seemed to appear in her seat at the head of the table. "I'm glad you were able to share your stories with each other. It will be a reminder of why you are here and what you must now accomplish back on earth."

"I will explain your mission to you now, in great detail, and if you have any questions at the end, they will be answered." Everyone was transfixed with the image of Rose, and waited anxiously for the details of what their "*lives*" would be like from this moment on.

"This room is your room. It will go with you. You can come back here at any time to regroup, meet with each other or just reflect."

"The animals can see and hear you. They will feel your touch and respond to you. People will be able to sense your presence and hear you subconsciously, but will not be able to see you."

"You will have the power to heal, but will not be able to save every animal you come across. Some must leave, so others can be born. You won't always know which ones God is taking."

"Walter asked earlier if you could fly. The answer is no. You will get from place to place by simply materializing."

"Hey, sounds like *Star Trek*," Nick said.

"Yes, it is similar to that TV series concept, I guess."

"Cool!" Nick said, as he looked at Rose, hoping she was not upset about his SECOND interruption.

Rose smiled and continued. "I will be in constant contact and will be available any time you need me. Progress meetings will be called from time to time in your room. Each of you can also call for a meeting any time you desire."

"You will have the ability to reach each other, and me, with your coded communicator. By pressing the picture of the person you want to reach, they will be called. There are various information screens as well, and programs for summoning human help when needed."

“Can I see one of those phones?” Sammy asks. He examines it as if he was in a local retail cellular store buying a new cell phone. “Do we have unlimited calling and Internet access?” Everyone laughed, as he handed the device back to Rose.

"This communicator is a very special device. It automatically shows you animals in distress and animals you need to comfort or rescue. By pressing the 'answer' button, you are there. If you lose it or it becomes damaged during a rescue, don't worry. Another communicator will appear and the one misplaced or damaged will simply disappear."

“And, Sammy, to answer your question, nights and weekends are included in the plan," Rose added, with a sparkle in her eye. Sammy gave her a toothy grin.

“There is no set limit on how many animals you must help. I will know when your assignment ends, and that's all that matters right now."

"You may help each other, if you desire, or call me for assistance, especially, if a particular rescue requires more than one angel. The choice is always yours."

“There are animal angels all over the world. This team is headed to the United States, and Florida to be exact. Right now I have somewhat of a shortage there, and the state always has an enormous amount of animal issues."

"Questions, anyone?"

They look at each other trying to come up with a question they might have, as their coded communicator is placed in front of them. “Go ahead and study your device. If you want to practice reaching each other, now would be a good time," she advises.

Everyone enjoyed looking at, and playing with, their new toys.

Sammy piped up. “Can you hear me now?"

Mary and Chris enjoy the little bit of humor Sammy and Nick are always supplying, especially as they head off on such a serious mission.

As everyone practiced and continued to study their device, Rose studied everyone and pondered these thoughts: On earth they were often judged on how they looked and appearance was everything. Now, the only thing that matters is how well they will be able to help the animals on earth.

It doesn't matter that Nick is an exceptionally handsome man with sandy, blond hair and stunning hazel eyes, or that Walter is a black man with that popular shaved-head look, or that he has a very muscular physique. It doesn't matter that Mary has a slight gap between her front teeth, and looks much younger than her years. It doesn't matter that Chris is a very attractive, slender woman with a cute, spiky haircut and very chic look about her, or that Sammy doesn't have great features and is losing some hair. His heart-of-gold shows in his face and makes his not-so-perfect features, perfect. To the animals in need, all they will see when they look at these five individuals is their own special guardian angel.

"When are we leaving?" Nick boldly asks.

"Before you start your assignment in Florida, there are five stops we are going to make first." The angels look at Rose with a great deal of curiosity.

"We are going to Fort Worth, Joplin, New Orleans, Omaha and Oklahoma City. The angels thought they knew what this meant, but could not believe this was really going to become a reality for them.

"Rose, are you seriously going to let us go back to our home towns now?" Sammy asks. "I mean, is that even possible?" The other four look to her for the answer.

"Yes, Sammy, that is precisely what I am saying. Each of you will be able to see your families again and will have the opportunity to let them know your thoughts. It will be your choice just what you want to say to them."

The angels were silent. It was difficult for them to comprehend what was being said. Their innermost thoughts all ran along the same lines of not knowing how they would react to seeing their families now, knowing they were, in fact, deceased.

"We are going to start in Joplin with Nick's family. Nick, your mom and dad, as well as your sister, Larissa, are at home right now. Your other relatives have gone back to their homes already."

Nick looks at Rose with a startled expression because she mentioned his sister by name. "I can't believe this is really happening. I know they can't see me, but you did say they can feel my presence and hear me, correct?"

"Yes, Nick, they will be able to hear you and definitely sense your presence. I am sure once you get there, you'll know just what to do and say to them." The other angels were taking special note of Rose's words in preparation of their visits.

"We are all going to each town, but will not invade the privacy of each other's visit. You will be allowed to spend as much time as you need with your loved ones, until you feel comfortable that you've said everything you want to say to them."

"If you would please take out your communicators now and push the screen that says *Nick/Joplin*. We will all arrive at the same time, outside of his family home."

"Nick, are you ready?" Rose asks.

The usual witty and casual Nick now had nothing to say except, "Yeah, I think so." He looks at the other angels with a "wish me luck" face. They each pick up their communicators and push the appropriate button.

Standing outside his parent's home was both amazing and exciting for Nick. Mary, Chris, Walter and Sammy were equally excited about their prospect of seeing their families. Being at Nick's home just reinforced that this WAS really happening.

"OK, Nick, press the screen for entry inside the house. We will be out here waiting for you. Take your time with your family. We aren't going anywhere."

Nick looks at Rose and the angels with a look of reluctance on his face. He hesitates for a moment longer and then pushes the button that will enable him to materialize inside.

As he walks down the familiar hallway, he hears voices in the den and heads that way. Before him, he sees his mom and dad, as well as his younger sister. They are watching a video and still pictures of him. He watches for a moment and can't believe the age of some of the pictures. He wonders where in the world they dug them up.

He is having a great time looking at the old pictures, but suddenly realizes his parents and sister are crying. His mother is letting out the little sobs he remembers when she watches a sad movie. The whole scene is surreal to him. He stands perfectly still and just observes.

Suddenly, his mom stops crying and begins to look around the room. Nick heads her way. He sits down beside her and puts his arm around her shoulders. She turns and looks directly at him.

"Mom, it's me - Nick. I'm here today to let you know how much I love you and that I am happy where I am. I have a very important role now. Believe it or, I'm an angel - an angel to animals, that is. Don't be sad anymore, please." Nick continues to talk directly to her.

Her face suddenly takes on the look of someone that has just heard the best news in the world. The tears stop flowing and her frown turns to a smile.

Nick moves over to his dad, who is sitting in his favorite chair. "Dad, I love you. Don't worry about me." Nick has his hand directly on his shoulder.

"You can't see me, but I know you can hear me and sense my presence. I have already talked to Mom. She knows I'm here. Please take care of each other and sis and know that I have a chance to right every wrong I did on earth now. Please tell the rest of the family that I love them and that I was here also." His dad looks at his mom, and they both smile at each other.

Nick moves to his sister, Larissa. "Hey, Lar, guess who!" She jumps when she hears his voice. "Mom, Dad, please tell me I'm not crazy. Do you sense that Nick is here with us, in this room?" They look at her and shake their head to indicate they have the same feeling. With gladness in their heart, they continue watching the video of Nick.

He places his hand on his sister's hand and looks into her eyes. "Lar, I know I didn't say it much as a kid, but I do love you. Whether you know it or

not, I always had your back too. Ever wonder why Terrible Ted, down the street, never bothered you, but hassled all the rest of the kids on the block? That would be because of me."

"Even your big brother has a good side and is going to be doing a lot of good from now on. Can't stay long because believe it or not, there are four angels and a spiritual guide waiting for me outside."

He stands in the center of the room where he can see each family member. "I want you all to know that I will always be grateful for the time I had with you and will miss you. Please don't forget to let the rest of the family know that I was here today. You may have a hard time convincing them, though."

He starts to use his communicator, but decides to say more before leaving. "I don't want any of you to grieve for me. I have a big smile on my face, and so should you. I think this is the most I've talked to any of you in a long time. Not big on words usually, but today, I just can't shut up."

He goes over to his mom and kisses her cheek. She touches her cheek and looks to the side where he is standing.

Even though he never kissed his dad after the age of five, today he did just that. The next kiss went to Larissa, who also turned to that side.

"I really have to go now, but this moment will be engrained in my memory forever. I love you all very much," Nick said, as he pushed the screen that would take him back outside with the others.

He turns up next to Rose. The look on his face and the smile say it all.

"Good visit?" Rose asks.

"Oh, yeah! I can't even begin to put into words how much better I feel now about leaving them behind. Having them know I'm OK means the world to me. You wouldn't believe some of the baby pictures they were looking at in there. There was even a duck in the tub picture." The angels all laugh with him.

"Mary, It's time to head to Oklahoma City. We will be arriving outside the funeral home, as your memorial service is now underway."

Mary looks startled. "You mean I am really going to be attending my own service?"

"Yes, the timing just happened this way. You see, the time frame on earth is totally different from where you are now," Rose explains.

When the angels and Rose arrive outside the funeral home, Mary notices several buses from the senior center parked outside. She is very surprised at the number of cars parked in the driveway, and feels there must be more than one service going on. Rose directs her to the front of the chapel and she and the others take a seat in the outer foyer.

As Mary is walking toward the front, she sees familiar faces from the senior center, the animal shelter, neighbors, friends, and even the girl who does her hair. Every seat in the chapel is filled and there are people even standing up around the aisles. She can't believe that all of these wonderful people are there just for her. As she makes her way down the aisle she notices all the beautiful flowers and for the first time, hears her favorite song being played. She finds herself singing along to *Stardust*.

It's difficult for Mary to take in everything she is seeing and hearing. She is totally overwhelmed by the experience. As she continues walking toward the front of the chapel, she notices the large screen displaying picture after picture of her. There are pictures of her as a baby, teen, wedding photos and even pictures she remembered being taken of her recently. Brother Shane is at the podium, talking about her and her life.

A computer screen caught her eye off to the side of the room. She can't believe her eyes when she sees a laptop set up on a table and her grandson in Japan pictured on it. He is watching the service by way of Skype. This is the first time she has seen his fiancée, who was sitting by his side. She stops and smiles at the grandson, her world traveler, whom she adores. "Cute girl," Mary said out loud, as she studies the picture of the person sitting next to him, clutching his arm to comfort him.

Before she makes it to the front row to see her children and grandchildren, she pauses to listen to what her pastor is saying. At this moment, she is very glad that no one can see her, as she is feeling a bit shaky on her feet.

"Today I will be reading favorite recollections and memories from the family. Mary's daughter, Sherry, put these together and collected e-mails even from those who could not be here today. I now have the privilege and honor of sharing them with you."

"From Mary's grandson, Trent, in Japan," he writes - "Nana always had the softest hands. I remember telling her that often and she was proud of the fact I noticed. She would tell others that I thought she had the softest hands I ever felt. She always made me spaghetti when I was at her house. I'm usually not a big eater. We eat simple, but well, here in Japan, but when I'm at Nana's, one plate of her spaghetti was never enough."

Mary's daughter, Sherry, remembers her mom always shopping with her for prom dresses and taking her shopping for school clothes. "Mom always had the best taste in clothes. We would always pick out three or four dresses and then she'd tell me to choose one to take home. The problem was I usually liked all three or four. Mom never made me settle for just one. I would go home with at least two of the four. I was always the best dressed in school, thanks to Mom."

The recollections continued with every relative giving a small portion of their loving memory of the person they all dearly loved. Mary found one empty chair and sat down to listen to the remainder of them. She could see her daughter and sons from afar, but had not yet gotten close to them.

As she looks around the room, she notices many people both laughing and crying at some of the family memories being read. She is astounded that she knows this many people and that they care enough to come to her service.

She is now back on her feet as she makes her way down the aisle to the front row. As she approaches, she notices the dress her daughter, Sherry, is wearing. She had gone shopping with her when she bought it. To see it now at her own memorial service was quite unexpected.

Since there were no seats between her daughter, and sons, she had to stand in front of them. She did her best to drown out the other people around her, as well as the pastor's words being spoken. She was there to talk to her loved ones and give them some assurances.

As she stands in front of her family, she notices a strange settling starting to happen. It was as if the tenseness and sorrow was letting up some. She gathers her thoughts and begins. "I am here with you in spirit today. I want to thank you for providing such a wonderful remembrance of me. Thank you, Sherry for coming up with the recollections from everyone. You always were very thoughtful and creative. I know you all had a part in this service and it is a tribute I can't thank you enough for. You even remembered that I love *Stardust*. I am touched beyond words."

Sherry, Tad and Bill all look at each other. Sherry whispers, "Tad, are you hearing Mom's voice?"

"Uh - yeah, and I'm SO GLAD you are too. I thought I was losing it." The other brother is trying to listen to the pastor, but finds himself listening to their conversation instead.

"Bill, what about you -- hearing Mom's voice?" Bill is speechless, but shakes his head as a yes. He tried to ignore the fact he was hearing things earlier. They continue to stare straight ahead and listen.

"I can't stay much longer, but wanted all of you to know how much I love you. I don't want you to grieve for me because I am very happy and have a new adventure coming up. Believe in angels, because they are very real. I have been chosen to be one. Of all things, I will be helping animals. That should give each of you a big laugh. Love each other and cherish your time together. My memories of each of you will never die."

As Mary makes her way out of the chapel, she smiles to herself thinking that her remarks would certainly give them something to talk about. She looks back as she walks up the aisle and notices the two rows of her loved ones had all turned around and were looking toward the back of the room.

She couldn't help herself when she notices two of her best buddies from the center. She goes over to them and tells them how much they mean to her and not to worry about her. They begin to dry their tears, as they smile at each other, looking toward Mary.

When Mary joins Rose and the angels in the outer room, they immediately look up from their conversations. "I never in a million years thought I'd be go-

ing to my own funeral. It was lovely. Being able to give my family peace of mind and hopefully soften the blow of my passing, is beyond anything I could have ever imagined being able to do today. I think I accomplished it though."

"I am very happy for you, Mary. Finding the right words will just come naturally from the heart from each of you." Rose assures everyone this will happen for them as well.

"Sammy, your home town in Texas is next. You have family and friends gathered at your favorite uncle's house."

"Well, after hearing Nick, and now Mary, I can't wait to share my joy with my family. I bet Uncle Phil has a really good spread out for everyone. He used to date a lady from an amazing catering company. Guess I'll know soon enough."

When they arrive at their destination, Sammy quickly notices the street is lined with cars, and his uncle's driveway is also packed with even more cars.

After entering the house, he begins to look around the room he landed in. He can't believe what he is seeing. There are friends from college and high school as well. Coach Brewer, his high school football coach, is chatting with former, fellow players and several of his teachers from high school are reminiscing with his fellow classmates. He sees his two best friends, LJ and Mike. He goes over to listen in, to their conversation.

"Ya know, I miss having our old singing group. We were way ahead of our time, with the band style and numbers we did," LJ said. "Old Sammy could really crank out the tunes back in '*the days*'. I remember how the girls would want to hang around with us after we had a performance. It was great times."

"Yeah, I'll miss throwing the ball around with him. It was sometimes hard to get him to relax and get his mind off work, as he was a semi-workaholic of sorts. I could usually throw a ball to him and get him to respond though. He loved playing quarterback. Remember how great he was and how we seemed to always pull it off, when behind in the score. He helped us win many championships," Mike said, as he moves over to talk to Brenda.

"Hey, pretty lady, how are you? You look as good as you did in high school," he adds. "How come you and Sammy never dated? You know, he always had a crush on you."

"Funny, I remember me being the one with the crush," she said. "I always wanted him to ask me out, but he didn't seem that interested. He had plenty of girls to chose from, from what I remember."

Sammy stood next to Brenda and also observed how good she did look. He couldn't believe his ears, as he did in fact, have an enormous crush on her in high school, but never asked her out, for fear of rejection. Now he was hearing that she also had a crush going. He wondered what would have happened if they had gone out. Would she have been the widow today?

Sammy decides, enough with the what-ifs. He needs to start telling people what he wants them to hear. He is glad to see they all appear to be enjoying happy thoughts and reminiscing about the good times.

Just as that thought occurs, he notices his parents. They look absolutely devastated. He goes over to them. As he studies their faces with fascination, he is having a difficult time believing he is really standing in front of them, at this moment in time.

"Mom, Dad - it's me, Sammy. I am here! Please don't be sad. I know it was a shock to lose me this young, but I am really fine and couldn't be in a better place."

They both look at each other. "Did you hear Sammy's voice just now?" She looks at her husband for the answer she is hoping he'll give.

"Yep, clear as a bell. He's here with us. I know it. Son, I don't know if you can hear me, but please know how much we have always loved you. You have been a blessing to us since the day you were born."

Sammy touches his hand and smiles at him. He turns toward him and smiles back.

"If you are really here, son, please let me know this is real." Sammy goes over to his mom and kisses her cheek. She reaches into the air trying to touch him.

"Mom, you can't touch me. I can see you, Dad and all the others gathered here today though."

Uncle Phil comes over and sits next to Sammy's mother. "Hungry? Elva put out a huge spread. Why don't you eat something?"

"Not hungry." She replies while looking straight ahead and not at him.

"By the way, what are you two smiling about? You have been so sad and devastated, that I never thought I'd ever see you smile again. What is making you suddenly so happy?" Sammy's Uncle Phil is genuinely perplexed.

Sammy's mother looks around the room and says, "I know our hearts are broken now, but I feel Sammy would not want us to be sad forever. We have to celebrate his life and not dwell on his death. We have to let the rest of the family know this as well."

"I could not have said that any better myself, Mom," Sammy said to her.

"Whoa! Am I hearing voices or what?" Phil looks over at his sister and brother-in-law for an answer.

"No, Uncle Phil, it's me you are hearing. Mom is right. I want everyone to hang onto the memories, but hold the tears. I couldn't be any better than I am right now. You have to have faith that you will see me again someday, because you will."

"I'm going to go say a few words to some of my friends before I have to go, but please know I couldn't be any happier. I will miss you and will never forget you." Sammy took one last look at the now, smiling faces of his mother, father and uncle, before moving to the center of the room. He sees that his mother is heading to the buffet.

LJ and Mike are talking sports. As Sammy walks by, he quietly says, "Thanks for coming today." They both stop talking and look around briefly, but then go back to talking, as neither wanted to say anything about hearing *voices*.

His next stop is Brenda. He couldn't help but notice she didn't have a ring on. The old what-if came back again briefly.

"I would have asked you out, if I had known you would have accepted my invitation. You were my dream girl, in that I only dreamed about going out with you, but never experienced it." Sammy stood directly next to her as he spoke.

Brenda almost drops the glass she is holding. She has to steady her hand, before putting it down on the nearby table. She immediately begins looking around the room, trying to figure out if she is overhearing a conversation from someone else. She quickly notices that the only people nearby are some neighbor children.

Her immediate reaction was that somehow Sammy was sending her a message and that she was special to him, back in high school. She goes over to the table and looks at one of the many yearbooks that had been placed there by his friends who came by the house today. The page is turned to a picture of her and Sammy together in a play, where they had the leads in the eleventh grade. She stares at the picture for a moment, remembering.

As she looks up at the ceiling, not really sure why, she says in a whisper, "Sammy, you are a great guy and we will all miss you." He gently touches her shoulder with his hand. He was hoping that he wasn't frightening her. She responds by moving her shoulder up toward her face and then putting her face on the spot he touched.

With that, Sammy pushes the button on his communicator and materializes outside with the others. As before, after Nick and Mary's reunion, everyone looks to him for reaction.

"It was the craziest thing," he said. "There was a girl there I always had a crush on in high school and I find out just today, that she had a crush on me as well."

No one was quite sure how to respond to this proclamation. Sammy looks at them and smiles ear to ear. "Guess I had it back then and didn't even know it." Chris assured him that he still 'had it'!

"Chris, your home is next. Your family and friends are gathered to share in the joy of knowing you." Chris smiles, but tears begin to form.

"What do I say to them, Rose? How do I possibly begin to tell them how much I miss them? I don't know if I can even do this."

Rose walks over to Chris and puts her arm around her shoulder. "Chris, seeing your loved ones again will help you put some closure on your death and being able to tell them how you feel will make a big difference in their lives, with-

out you, as well. Once you are inside, all your doubts will leave you.” Chris looks at Rose and shakes her head up and down quickly, to indicate that she knows she is right in everything she just said to her.

“I’m ready. Sorry, Rose, for the reluctance on my part. It’s just going to be so emotional for me. I didn’t mean to be such a baby. I’m usually just the opposite.”

“We’re all here for you when you return,” Mary assures her.

“Chris, you’ll do fine,” Nick adds.

Chris appears in the front hallway. At first, all she could do was look around at the hallway itself. The pictures on the wall - the umbrella stand - the coat rack - even the hall table and lamp are a fascination for her. As she stands, staring at the lamp, a familiar voice causes her to look towards the family room.

As she walks into the room, the view is wall-to-wall people. Her husband and children are sitting on the sofa, and her parents are seated on the loveseat across from them. Again, she stops to look at the faces of the family she loves so deeply. The feeling is beyond description. She remembers that Nick said the same thing about his visit. She is rooted to the spot where she is standing and can’t seem to do anything but observe her surroundings.

Kandi, her best friend since elementary school, comes over and stands very close to her now, to address the gathering. She moves over a little bit, as if Kandi might be crowded. She smiles to herself, as she remembers no one can see her. Kandi does feel something, however, as she looks to the side where Chris is standing. She clears her throat and wipes away fresh tears starting to form.

“As you all know, Chris was my best friend. We were neighbors growing up and went to elementary, junior and high school together. We even went to the same college for a while, before I transferred to be near a certain someone, that I later married.” Kandi’s husband waves and blows a kiss her way.

“Chris was there for me throughout my battle with breast cancer. She was my hope and inspiration, when I moved back into town. Her photos of me and my support group, as well as the creative brochures and written material,

helped us raise money for the cause and added even more awareness about cancer. She helped save my life.”

“The shock of her diagnosis of ovarian cancer took all of us by surprise. She was always so healthy and full of life.” Kandi looks over at the immediate family, seated nearby. “I know it took a huge toll on each of you and Chris fought hard. Your support and faith meant the world to her. She acknowledged this to me many times.”

Through an emotionally charged, broken voice she continues. “My support group has gotten together, and we have decided to start a fund that will help pay for college for Nathan and Virgil. I know Chris would have really wanted you guys to go to college,” she said to the boys. She pauses to wipe a tear and blows her nose. They smile their approval. Chris has tears coming down her face now, as well. Kandi continues with praise of Chris and stories from their childhood days.

Friends, Kaye, Paula and Dolly all contribute their fondest memories. They get many laughs from the gathering as they share their little known secrets and stories of childhood dreams and escapades.

Chris is finally able to move. She passes Kandi on the way to the sofa. “Hey, Kandi - good speech.” Kandi stops moving and looks around the room. She smiles, but then looks like she is dismissing the fact she actually heard a voice. She looks around briefly again, and moves to the other side of the room to talk to Paula. She feels Paula needs a shoulder to cry on just about now, as she always was the emotional one.

Chris reluctantly remembers she is there on a mission, and decides it is time to talk to her parents, husband and sons. She goes to the sofa and sits down in the small space available next to her husband, and in between her sons. She studies their faces, trying to memorize every detail.

She talks quietly to her husband, in a voice that he alone can hear. “Donald, I love you. Don’t worry about me. There is no pain now and I’m really happy.” He turns toward the voice he is hearing, with a startled look on his face. “Yes, I am really here. I was even able to hear all the wonderful things said about me,

and I am thrilled with the college fund. I plan to tell Kandi just that on my way out."

She looks over at the boys and doesn't want to scare them. She simply tells them that she loves them and that she is happy where she is. Both boys look toward her and then at each other, and then at their dad.

Donald speaks up. "Your mom is with us today. She wants us to remember her, but not to grieve her loss. She will always be with us and she wants us to have happy moments again."

"Dad, we heard her voice too," Virgil said.

"Is Mom really here, Dad?" Nathan asks.

"Yes," was the simple answer he gave them.

Chris hears the conversation and knows that her husband will do a great job for the boys and will always be there for them. Before she gets up, she places her hand on her husband's hand. He immediately places his other hand on top of hers, which in reality is on top of his own hand. Of course, she knows he cannot see her hand, but he evidently must feel it there, or feel something. She does the same with each of her boys. They respond by looking at each other and smiling.

She moves to where her parents are sitting. She looks them in the eye and feels bad that they look so sad.

"Mom, Dad, I'm fine. I know you worried about my pain. I have none now. I will always love you." They look at each other and then at Donald, Virgil and Nathan. Chris touches their hands and prepares to leave. She is not really sure how long she has been in the house, but feels it's time to go.

On the way out, she passes by Kandi. "Thanks for the kind words and for the college fund. I love you, girl." Kandi looks her way and smiles. "You're welcome and I love you too," she says in a whisper. Chris takes one last look at everyone in the room, and instead of materializing, she walks through the front door.

"Oh, my gosh. I can't believe I just did that," she says out loud. Old habit, I guess. At least the door didn't hit me in the rear end. Now, I know we can all walk through doors and probably walls too, she speculates.

Chris is back outside now with the others. No one notices she came by way of the front door, as they were busy conversing with each other about their own experiences.

"You were right, Rose. I did know what to say and how to say it. It was wonderful seeing my family again. My friends are even starting a college fund for my boys. Can you believe it?"

"That's wonderful," Rose said.

"That's major! In this day and time, you have to have a college education to even break even," Nick remarks. Everyone agreed with his statement.

"Our final stop is Louisiana." Walter comes to attention as Rose makes the statement.

"Well, I'll have to say after listening to everyone, I'm now very anxious for my visit. Sounds like I am going to know what to say and do as well. I'm ready, Rose, when you are."

"Our first stop is the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Alexandria. This is where the funeral service is being conducted."

"Oh, yeah, that's where my in-laws go to church and where my wife and I were members before moving to New Orleans. It makes perfect sense that the service would be there."

"After the service, we will continue on to the Alexandria National Cemetery in Pineville, which is not far from the church. Walter, you are going to have a military burial, with full honors," Rose informs him.

Walter becomes very emotional. He is a little embarrassed by his reaction and looks away from the group momentarily.

"I never thought about the fact that I would have a military burial for my service. Of course, no one really thinks that much about their death, when they are

just in their 40's. This is quite an honor and I have my family to thank for arranging it.”

"Let's program in the church now and we'll arrive outside together," Rose said. The angels depart for Walter's funeral.

As they gather on the front steps of the church, all six of them are taken back from what they were seeing. Hundreds of law enforcement vehicles are parked in and around the church and more are being directed to parking spaces. The entire lot, which is a good size lot itself, is jammed with cars and motorcycles.

Cars are being directed to a grassy area in the vacant lot next door and it is already becoming full. Still more cars and motorcycles continue to line up. Walter notices not only representation from New Orleans and surrounding parishes, but also units from Baton Rouge and Lafayette. He is very touched by the turnout.

News crews from four different stations, including two from New Orleans, have converged on the scene. The on-camera personalities are talking about the incident that took Walter's life, live and on-air. The angels listen in to one of the reporters.

"We are gathered here today to honor a man who risked his life every day, for our safety and well-being. When he put on that uniform and strapped on that gun, his thought was not of himself, but the safety of the citizens of New Orleans. His sacrifice and his life are being honored today at this service.”

“As you can see, the turnout is one of the largest any of us has ever seen in the state of Louisiana.” The camera panned the parking areas and showed shots of the fellow officers and officials walking into the church, including the mayor of New Orleans and the governor of the state of Louisiana.

“The station is going to switch over now to our reporters in New Orleans, Kenner, Metairie, Gretna, and Mandeville. We understand that hundreds of people have lined the streets in front of police stations and down major roads. They are waving flags and holding signs, thanking this fallen officer for his heroism. It's really remarkable to see how much his death has touched everyone. This is Jennie Brewer, for *Fox 8*.”

The angels gather around Walter to offer their support. "This is epic, Walter," Nick said. "I don't think any of us realized what a big deal this funeral is. You are a hero, my friend." Walter's fame seemed to amaze everyone.

"Yeah, you're a 'rock star' today, Walter," Sammy assures him. "Have you ever met the governor before? He's here for you, buddy. We're here for you too, Walter," he added, as he patted him on the back.

"We'll wait for you here. It's time to go inside now." Walter looks at her, without saying anything. "The words will come. Don't worry," Rose adds, reassuringly.

Walter stands meekly at the back of the church, and cannot comprehend the representation of law enforcement gathered in the huge Sanctuary. He sees officers he recognizes and hundreds that he does not. He realizes they are there anyway, for a fallen brother, and is humbled.

At the front of the church, he notices a large screen with picture after picture of him, both work related and casual pictures of him at home with his family. The stage has more flowers than any florist he ever remembers going into. Seated on the stage are over 50 people from his division, including his supervisor, best friend on the force and members of the K-9 unit. The mayor of New Orleans and the governor of the state are sitting side by side.

As he begins to walk toward the front of the church, he notices people are still pouring in and that there is not one seat available. He pushes forward.

Walter is now at the front of the church, looking directly at his wife, Nadine, and son, Josh. His parents, brother, sister-in-law, and nieces are seated in an adjacent pew. Several officers are stopping by to offer their condolences. He lovingly watches them and listens to their conversations. He wants to talk to them, but is not sure the timing is right. He decides to wait until after the service.

Nadine looks so pretty, were his only thoughts. Her red and swollen eyes are troubling to him, however. He decides to stay near his family during the service.

The seat next to Nadine was taken when he first came in, but now is empty. His brother has moved to the stage, as he is part of the program today. Walter

takes his seat. He places his hand on Nadine's hand. She jumps a little, but then looks at ease with what she thinks she is feeling, and that is the presence of Walter. He left his hand there during the entire service.

Walter studies Josh. He looks so grown up in that suit, he thought. He was concerned about him losing his father at such a young age, but knew the men he called friends and coworkers would also be there for him, as well as his brother, Tad. None of these people would let him down, he knew for a fact.

The pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church took the podium. "We are gathered here today to celebrate a life - a full life, and a life of service to others. Walter was a dedicated father ... husband ... son ... brother ... and law enforcement officer. He took his roles very seriously and was never deterred by the dangers he always faced in his chosen profession. This danger was faced courageously on March 28th, when he was responsible for the apprehensive and further conviction of number three on the FBI's *Most Wanted List*. That man's life changed that day and so did all of yours. We lost one of our finest."

The speakers continue with praise for Walter. His brother, friends and coworkers take the podium also to share personal stories that bring laughter and tears of joy to the massive audience. Walter sat by his wife, still hand on hand and enjoyed every minute of the service and cherished every word said about him. He was very moved by the experience.

As the last speaker finishes, he advises everyone they are to proceed to the Alexandria National Cemetery for the military burial. Walter decides it is time to at least speak to his wife.

He turns toward her; looks into her eyes, that now look a little better, and says, "Honey, I'm here today. I have had my hand on yours during the entire service. I love you with all my heart. What I want you specifically to know is that I'm fine. If you could look into my face, as I can into yours, you would see happiness and contentment. Of course, I will always miss you guys. Please don't grieve for me. I am not going to say anything directly to Josh because I'm afraid it would startle him if he heard my voice. Please continue to tell him how much I love him now, and always will."

He kisses her cheek as he rises from the chair. She responds by putting her hand up to the spot, and then smiling.

Walter stands in front of the remainder of his relatives and stares into their sad faces. His brother has now joined them as well.

Nadine and Josh are surrounding by his friends and coworkers, but she continually looks around the room. Walter is glad they are out of earshot because of his concern for Josh. As he continues to study the faces of his beloved family, he notices they are wiping tears and crying continuously, especially his mom.

"Mom, don't cry! I AM HERE today with you. You don't have to worry about me any longer. Believe it or not, I'm even an angel." His mother stops crying and looks straight ahead. She did not ask the others if they heard her son's voice, because she felt he was there especially for her. His mom was always a big believer in angels and he noted she really perked up at that mention.

To the rest of the family, he reiterates much of the same message and thanks his brother for his part in the service. His voice drew looks from each of them, and he could tell they would compare notes later.

Walter materializes outside and takes his place beside Rose, Nick, Chris, Sammy and Mary. "Aren't you going to ask me about the service?"

"We didn't want to pry," Mary said. "Of course, we are all dying to know any details you are willing to share."

Walter really wanted to talk about the service. He told them how gratifying it was and what a remarkable experience it had been. Rose had not seen this much animation out of him since the day she met him. She was very pleased with his reaction.

"Walter, we need to make our way to the cemetery for your observance of the military burial," Rose said.

"I'm ready. I'll have to admit, I am very eager to witness this part of my service."

The entrance to the cemetery was lined with cars. They watch as the procession makes its way into the cemetery, and were once again reminded of the vastness of this tribute.

"Walter, we are going to wait out here, just inside the front gate. You need to make your way to the gravesite over to the left. Don't worry about the time. If you feel you need to say more to your family, please do so," Rose said, as the angels made themselves comfortable on two benches that were provided at the entrance.

He begins to follow the rest of the people making their way to the gravesite. He stops! The image he is looking at is the flag-draped casket. Just knowing that his body is inside that box startles him. He can't seem to make his feet move and doesn't want to use the communicator, to make them move. Seeing this part of the service is going to be the most traumatic, he now knows.

Walter is finally able to move forward toward the service. His family is seated at the front and the pastor is praying. All heads are bowed and eyes are closed. He also bows for the prayer.

When the prayer is finished, he sees the bugler taking his place. As every emotion possible builds in his body, he listens to taps being played. This special song, signifying that a fellow soldier has fallen is always so sad to listen to, and today was no exception for Walter's family. He could see the tears being shed by both his family and friends.

Next came the gun salute and the folding of the flag. He watches with fascination, at how the flag is slowly and carefully folded, as it is taken off the casket. The flag is then presented to his wife. She takes it and places it gingerly on her lap. Josh reaches over, touches it, and smiles at his mom.

For the final time, he tells his wife how much he loves her and assures her that he is fine. He then materializes back at the entrance.

Rose and the angels had been able to hear taps and, of course, the gun salute as well. It was a very moving experience for each of them. This was one service they all felt they were able to share somewhat with Walter.

The angels felt a closeness with each other, they had not felt before. They all knew the past, was now really the past, and that what they had to look forward to was a fulfilling future as animal angels.

Rose surveys her new group of animal angels and decides she couldn't be more pleased with the people standing before her. "Time to head back to the room now." Their conversations stop, and the communicators are used.

It was hard to believe that they all left earth a few days, hours, or minutes ago. No one knew for sure, and now, they were back to complete a mission. "Well, should we all put our hands together one on top of the other; say a chant and then, go team?" Walter asks.

"Let's just wish each other well," Chris said. All agreed.



Saves

“I’m already getting a call,” Sammy said. “Guess I’m up. Bye all.”

“He didn’t look nervous at all,” Mary said, as she moved a little closer to Chris. Chris gave a little wave to Sammy and the guys just nodded to him.

What Sammy saw on his screen was a truck driver in his cab driving down a dark, lonely stretch of highway. The screen showed the driver’s name as Chet. As he looked more closely at the screen, he could see the problem now more clearly. Chet had his eyes shut, while he thundered down the road in his big rig.

He didn’t quite understand what this had to do with animals, until he arrived in the cab of the truck. Wow, this is a big comfortable seat, he thought. Getting used to the continual bouncing was another matter however, he decided.

Sammy rode shotgun for several miles observing Chet. Every now and then, Chet would shut his eyes for a second and his head would bob. The radio was turned up loud. “Country Classics All The Time,” rallied the announcer, but this wasn’t helping Chet stay awake. There was black coffee in his cup. He even had the window down to let in some of the chilly night air. None of this seemed to be working. Chet simply should not be driving right now, as he was beyond just being tired. Chet was about to completely fall asleep at the wheel.

Well, guess it’s up to me not to let that happen, Sammy knew. He leans over and said in a louder tone than the radio, “Chet, wake up!”

He immediately shot upright and jerked the wheel a bit. Chet looked around the cab as if he was looking for someone. “Gees - must have been daydreaming or something. Wish that coffee wasn’t cold.”

Sammy had to use the wake up call several more times during the night until they dropped off his load. Two deer, a raccoon and a brown bear survived that night, as well as Chet, due to the vigilance of Sammy.

At the drop-off, Chet's logbook was checked. He was fined for driving too many hours. A lesson was learned that night, and Sammy had made a difference. He was off to a good start as a fully fledged animal angel, even if he did say so himself.

Sammy was still in the truck terminal watching all the trucks checking in and thinking about Chet and all the animals saved that night. He was hoping that Chet really did learn a lesson and would obey the rules from now on. One can only hope and pray, he thought.

As he held that last thought of Chet, the "Double C," as he calls it, goes off. This time he is getting a picture of a puppy that apparently had fallen in a well. He is injured and trapped. The town location shows Gainesville, Florida. He immediately pushes the 'answer' button.

The entire family is peering down into the well. You can tell right away that the smallest of the three boys claimed this puppy, which he had named Scooter. He is crying his eyes out and shaking uncontrollably. His mother is holding on to him, trying her best to console him. The father and other two boys are just standing there, shaking their heads. They have no clue what to do to help Scooter.

First things first, Sammy quickly decides. He goes directly to the father and stands next to him. "Call the fire department rescue team to get Scooter out of this well," he says in his ear.

The father turns his head as if a light bulb went off. "Lonnie, go call the fire department and tell them we need their help right away." Since Lonnie was the oldest, he was given this very important task. He takes off in a full run toward the house.

Knowing human help is on the way, Sammy heads to the bottom of the well to attend to Scooter. As he makes his way down to Scooter, he can hear him whimpering. The dog is not moving and his eyes are shut tight.

“Hey, little guy, don’t worry. I’m here to help you.” He knew the dog was in bad shape with internal injuries and some broken bones. He was amazed that he knew this just by looking at him. Well, Rose said we could heal, but I don’t know if this is one I can help or one that God is letting go. Guess I’ll know soon enough, were his only thoughts.

Since we all forgot to ask Rose how we can heal animals, I guess I’ll just play it by ear, he decides. As he places both hands directly on Scooter’s little body, he feels a spark, like electricity, along with a glow of light. The dog jerks and opens his eyes. Scooter looks up at Sammy, snuggles up against him and goes to sleep. “Wow, this is totally amazing,” Sammy says to the dog. “I did it! I healed you.”

While Sammy watches the puppy sleep soundly, he hears the blaring of the fire engines. Soon, lights are being pointed down into the well, and he can hear orders being shouted.

He decides to stick around and make sure Scooter makes it out of the well and back into the arms of his loving family. “I’m just glad this isn’t a really deep well. The rescue will be more difficult for the rescuers,” he said to the puppy, which was now wide-awake from all the noise.

As Scooter is being pulled up, one of the fire department EMT’s reaches out and takes Scooter from the harness. He gives him a once-over. With a puzzled look on his face, he hands the now-squirming puppy over to the little boy. “This little fella is gonna be OK. I don’t know how or why, but your dog seems to have escaped major injury. A check by the vet wouldn’t hurt though.”

The whole group hugged the EMT and profusely thanked the entire fire rescue team for the part they played.

Seeing the smiles on everyone’s faces and little Scooter licking the young boy’s tears, Sammy felt a sense of satisfaction and awe he had never known in his life. This is for real, he thought. I really am an animal angel!

He looked down at his “Double C” trying to will it go off. He was more than ready to start on another save, but nothing appeared on the screen. After what to him seemed like an hour, he decided to head back to the room.

It was a lull for Sammy, but in another part of Florida, another angel was about to get his feet wet, an hour and a half away, in the northernmost part of the state, near the Georgia border.

"Whew, could it be any hotter?" Danny asks. "Between these wildfires, our protective clothing and the temperature today, I don't see how hell could be any hotter."

"Yeah, sometimes being a firefighter gets me hot under the collar," Alan shot back.

"Good one, there, buddy."

"Ya know, my sweat even has sweat today," Danny continues with the 'hot' jokes. "Seriously, though, at least we're making some headway with these fires."

"Yeah, that makes it all worthwhile," Alan added, as they pack up their equipment to head to another area.

While Nick is watching the firefighters talk on his communicator, he realizes just how difficult and dangerous their job is. As he continues to watch and listen, he sees a set of glowing eyes at one corner of the screen. He zooms in for a better look.

Oh my gosh. That's a cat! "Don't move, little guy or girl. I'm coming," Nick says to the picture on the screen. The cat is perfectly still, too afraid to run, even from the flames, he notes. Fur on its underbelly is smoldering and the cat seems to be in shock.

Ouch, that's got to hurt, Nick thought, as he materializes next to the cat, and sees firsthand the flames that are almost enveloping the cat. "I'm going to take away your pain and blow out the fire around you and on you. Don't be afraid."

He takes in a deep breath and gives a slight blow to the fur on the cat's underbelly, and to the area around the cat. The smoke and the flames seem to disappear into nothing, as do evidence of the cat's burns, except for some redness around the missing fur. Suddenly, the cat sits up and begins to stretch, as if nothing has happened.

"You are one gorgeous creature. I don't think I've ever seen a cat like you before, and I'm just hoping your tail is supposed to be that size, and not burned off," he said to the now nonsmoking cat. He watches admiringly, as the cat indulges in a leisurely session of grooming.

Nick sits down next to her and begins telling her of his plans. "It's a great achievement to be able to know you are a female just by checking my communicator. He then checks the screen for more information.

"Your breed is Japanese Bobtail, and yes, your tail is supposed to look like that. You know, your eyes are amazing, as well as that black stub of a tail you have."

He marveled at the beautiful white cat, with black around the top of the ears and head and black patches around the back legs, with a solid black stubby tail. The eyes, slightly slanted, were an amazing light green color. Nick also notices the ears are more prominent than most cats he had ever seen.

"You are certainly a rare, beautiful breed. I bet someone is worried sick about you."

"OK, before I look for your owner, I need to check you out a little further and make sure there aren't other injuries besides the burn on your belly." He does a once-over. "Well, you know, that burned area looks pretty good, but you're not out of the woods quite yet. You're going to need vet care so that the skin will heal back, as well as the fur. We need to get some human help for you ASAP."

"It's very puzzling that my screen doesn't give me your name. I usually can always get that piece of information right away." He continues talking to the cat, as he scans his information screens.

"Oh! Now I see what the problem is. Unfortunately, your owner is an animal hoarder. This is NOT GOOD!" Nick views an elderly woman with mental and physical problems in a house full of cats, dogs and birds.

"You can't go back there, that's for sure, and I need to get help for all the other animals before we get you out of here." He taps into dispatch for the police to check out the address noted. Nick knew the police would take the call

and see the situation firsthand, and then call the proper authorities to deal with both the animals and the woman.

"Now to get you out of this smoky environment and into a new home, by way of a vet. Think I know just the guys to rescue you," he said, as he remembers the two firefighters nearby. He orders the cat to stay put.

He locates them and stands beside Alan. "You need to go recheck the area west of here that was extinguished yesterday, just to make sure no more fires have started up."

Alan stops what he is doing and suggests to Danny that before they leave the general area, they go west and recheck where they finished yesterday.

"Sure, man. Good idea. Better safe than sorry."

As they approach the area, they both see the same thing.

Wait a minute - is that a cat?" Alan asks, as he picks up his pace.

"Ah, yeah - think so," Danny said. "Yep, there's a cat that seems to not have a care in the world. Wow - look! This whole area seems to have been recently incinerated, including the area surrounding the cat. How can that be?" They approach the area and hope the cat isn't frightened away.

"Hey little girl, how are you?" Danny asks. Alan gives him a funny look. "Don't ask me how I know this is a girl. She is just too darn pretty to be a boy."

Alan examines the cat and confirms the she feeling, as well. He is especially interested in the stubby tail.

"Hey, I know what kind of cat this is," Alan informs Danny. "It's a Japanese Bobtail. I saw a special on them on Animal Planet just last week. They date back over a thousand years. The real unique thing about them is just like our fingerprints are unique to us, their bobtails are unique to them. No two tails are alike. It's like their DNA marking."

"I wonder how an exotic cat got way out here?" Danny asks.

"I don't know, but this cat needs that burned underbelly area taken care of pronto. Why don't you go get the truck, so we can make her more comfortable for transport. I'll stay with her."

"OK, back in a few." Danny hurries away to get the truck.

Alan sits down beside the cat, and begins petting her. "Hey, little one, you know I have a rescue cat at home. He's also an exotic breed. He's a Persian. His name is Percy."

"Percy is a real sweetheart and loves having a home. I think he either got lost or someone decided they didn't want or need a cat, and put him out. He was roaming the neighborhood dirty and hungry when we found him, or I should say when he found us. No one came to claim him. We even had a vet check for a microchip, but none existed, so Percy became an official member of our household just last week. Perhaps, our cat would like to have a friend. How does that sound to you? If no one claims you, maybe you'd like to come live with us? I don't want to get my hopes up, but I have a feeling you and I were supposed to find each other today," Alan said to HIS new cat.

Well, my job is done here, Nick decides. He knew Alan was correct in his 'deja-vu' feeling about two exotic members in his household after today. He also knew Alan was the kind of guy who would take wonderful care of this cat, and the one he already had at home.

Observing the happy scene, Nick sits down and begins to take in his surroundings. Confident is the word that comes to his mind about this save. He is totally confident of his abilities now.

Another angel is nearby, soon to become confident of her abilities, as well.

Mary sits daydreaming. Her mind filled with thoughts of knowing nothing about animals at all until a few months ago when she began volunteering at the animal shelter. I can't believe I was given the task of animal angel - me, of all people. She chuckles to herself, with the thoughts.

Pixie, the adorable little gray cat, and Bert, a lively bulldog, were her favorites. She continues to reminisce about walking Bert and others every Tuesday and Thursday, and spending hours petting and talking to Pixie and the gang.

Her mind turned to the no-pet policy she so rigorously enforced. No matter how much her kids begged and pleaded, she would not relent. She was Miss Germ Fighter USA, and hated the thought of cleaning up after any creature.

Now she was an animal angel. She smiles and shakes her head at the thought.

Just as she was daydreaming more about Pixie and Bert, her communicator flashes. She jumps, as this is the first time it had gone off. She had honestly forgotten it was even in her pocket.

The picture on the screen is an elderly lady and a malnourished looking dog at her side. The screen shows the names as Faye and Clyde, and that they are in Hallandale, Florida. "I think I am supposed to push the 'answer' button," she said to herself.

Before Mary could wonder further if she worked the communicator correctly, she is standing in Faye's living room. Faye, a sweet looking woman, in her late 70's, is sitting in a large overstuffed chair, eyes glued to a soap opera on TV. Clyde, her loving companion, sits unmoving, on the floor next to her.

Given the condition that Clyde is demonstrating, Mary decides to head to the kitchen to see if there are any food supplies there for him. What she finds disturbs her greatly. Dirty plates and dishes are everywhere. Flies are buzzing around open bags of food. Clyde's bowl lays on the floor with some rotten-looking food caked in it. A bag of dog food is nearby, and she can see that a trail of ants is making its way up and down in the bag. "Goodness me!" Mary said alarmingly, before literally running back into the living room.

She takes in more of the situation. The TV is blaring, and she can tell that Faye probably sleeps in that same chair where she was now sitting, and that the TV was always on, and blaring. Clyde just sits on the floor by her chair, and seems to have no energy at all.

I wonder when the last time this poor dog, and Faye for that matter, had anything to eat or drink, she wonders. From her training, she recognizes the early signs of dementia. Mary knew she had to do something quickly, and begins looking around the room for an answer.

After finding a picture of Faye's daughter, Connie, and son-in-law, Larry, she is able to materialize at their home, which turns out to be about an hour and a half away by car, but the push of a button for Mary.

Standing in their family room, Mary observes dogs, cats, birds and even a huge aquarium full of exotic looking fish. Faye's daughter is a young replica of herself. As she watches Connie interact with her pets, she can see instantly how much she loves all of them. Both cats and dogs have all kinds of toys, cozy beds and furniture of their own. I'd like to live here myself, if I were a cat or dog, she decides. Mary almost got carried away just watching Connie playing with everyone and giving them the kind of love and attention all animals deserve. "Focus, Mary," she said to herself.

Not knowing exactly how to talk to Connie, she made her way over to where she was standing, and said to her, "Your mom is having problems with her memory. She is not taking care of herself or her dog. They both need immediate help and a change of lifestyle. Don't wait. Go now!"

"Larry, I'm going to check on Mom."

"Now? Didn't you just talk to her a few days ago?"

"Yeah, but I feel like she needs me. I can't explain why I have this feeling, but I do, and have to leave right this minute."

"Want me to come?"

"No, that's all right. I'll call when I get there," Connie said, as she closed the door behind her.

"Drive carefully," he shouted, as he sat back down to watch TV.

Connie wasted no time getting in her car, and made the drive to Hallandale from West Palm Beach in just over an hour. The entire way she was filled with dread and could not shake the feeling that something was amiss. The feeling seemed to intensify as she pulled up to the familiar childhood home and let herself in with her key.

"Mom, it's me - Connie."

Faye almost jumps from her chair, as she was so startled by the appearance of her daughter. Her hearing certainly wasn't the best these days, and the loud TV muffled Connie's announcement of arrival. Clyde, on the other hand, had a newfound energy and got up as best he could, to give her a big tail-wagging greeting.

Connie always wondered if she was doing the right thing every time she gave in to her 78-year-old mother, who insisted on living on her own. She was always so independent and full of life. Now, she was shocked to see how quickly her mother had gone downhill.

“Mom, have you eaten, and fed Clyde today?” Faye looks at her daughter, trying to remember just what it was that she ate.

“I think so,” she replied. Clyde’s bowl was empty, as was the big water dish she brought for him on her last visit, Connie notices out of the corner of her eye.

She couldn’t believe the stench of the house. The carpets were stained and dirty, and the awful ammonia smell made her eyes water. After a closer look at the other rooms in the house, she knew the mother she remembered would never totally be the same.

The house was in complete disarray. The specially made walk-in tub looked like it had not been used in a while, as the folded washcloths and towels appeared untouched. She remembered ordering this tub, and how happy her mom was about being able to take baths without the worry of falling. She could take her walker right into the bathroom, fill up the tub and step in, leaving her walker close by the door.

Connie felt it was a miracle her mom had not been hurt before now, with the condition of the house and her failing mental capacity. “How in the world did I miss this?”

When Connie visited, she always brought Clyde food and treats. This visit was no exception.

“Mom, I’m taking Clyde out for a walk. I’ll be right back.” She had to get out of the house before she herself became ill. She washed out the food and water bowls and took them outside.

Clyde was very weak and walked very slowly out the door. He sat patiently by as Connie filled the bowls with fresh, clean water and his favorite dry food, mixed with a little wet food. He ate slowly at first, but with more gusto as his strength and appetite began to return somewhat.

"Guess Mom wasn't letting you out in the fenced yard to do your business either," she said to Clyde. "It's not your fault the carpet and house have become your indoor bathroom." Clyde just looks at her as he cocks his head to one side.

She sat on the front step watching Clyde eat, and began to cry. Clyde immediately went over and began licking her. He then snuggled up beside her, after going over to check the food bowl for any scraps that he might have missed.

How could she have hidden this so well? How did I miss the signs, and why didn't I check on her more often, in person instead of by phone? These feelings flooded her mind and she cried even more. She felt so guilty and overwhelmed with what she found today, that she just had to sit on the step for a while, trying to compose herself before going back in the house.

As she wiped tears from her face, she got out her cell and called Larry. After sobbing through the story of what was going on with her mom and Clyde, she hung up the phone and knew what she had to do next. Her real estate office would just have to do without her for a few days, and this house would definitely be put on the market soon.

Clyde was so thrilled to be outside and happy to have food and water that his tail seemed to be on speed wagging. "Oh, you poor baby. I'm so sorry you have had to go through such abuse." She knew her mother never meant any harm to Clyde. She loved him too much.

Connie cried even harder, just looking at Clyde, and thinking about his unconditional love for his owner. "You will be spoiled rotten from this day forward," she promised him. He looked at her with knowing eyes, and that ever-so-happy tail wagged on and on.

The second call she made was to her primary care doctor in West Palm. She asked for an emergency appointment for her mother and was given one for the next afternoon at 2:00 o'clock. They were very sympathetic to her situation.

I have to get Mom and Clyde out of this house now - this minute, she thought. She would deal with clean up, repair and selling the house later. She

wondered who would even want to buy this house of horrors? Her mom was now top priority.

“Mom, I’m back.”

“Where did you go, dear?”

“Just took Clyde out for a walk - remember?”

“Oh, that’s nice. I know Clyde is always glad to see you, and me too for that matter.”

“Mom, we need to get you cleaned up and dressed. I’m going to pack some things, and you and Clyde are going home with me.”

“I’m kind of tired today. Maybe we could drive over tomorrow for a visit,” Faye added in a tired, feeble voice. “It’s also time for Clyde’s nap.”

Connie couldn’t imagine her mom driving a car to the end of the block safely. “No, Mom, we need to go today. Your visit can’t wait.”

Connie helped her mother up from the recliner. As she maneuvered her around, she wondered just how long she had been sitting in that chair? Getting her cleaned up and dressed was no small chore, but she managed somehow.

After packing a few things, she grabs Clyde’s leash and collar and heads out the front door. Whew - this fresh air smells so good, was her first thought. She realizes now that she had been holding her breath.

“Mom, you’re walking nicely with your walker. Do you use it around the house much?”

“No, dear, I don’t really need it, you know. I am just humoring you.”

Connie smiles, thinking of the energetic, and witty mom she used to know. If she only knew just how much she needs help with everything right now.

The 1982 Buick Regal was in the driveway. The keys were in the ignition and the doors were unlocked. A spare house key was also part of the keyring set. Connie shuddered to think someone could have used the key to come in the house. Did she even remember to lock the door? Come to think of it, when I arrived and used my key, it was not locked at all, she recalls.

She shakes her head with fright and amazement of the facts at hand. She hates to think how much longer this could have gone on without something horrible happening. They could have both starved to death or died of dehydration. A stranger could have entered, robbed her, and done her harm even. She knew she would be forever kicking herself for not visiting more often.

Connie took the keys out of the ignition and locked the car. She then went back to make sure the house was locked up tight. “Not looking forward to coming back to this place,” she said to herself, as she turned to leave.

Mary knew that Connie and Larry would welcome Faye and Clyde into their home, and that Faye’s condition would be treated. She also knew she had saved Clyde and Faye as well. Not bad for a first save, she decides.

Mary was back to daydreaming about Pixie and Bert, her two favorites at the shelter, when her communicator goes off for the second time. On the screen Mary views an elderly man with a cat by his side. “Here we go again,” she says excitedly to the communicator.

Looking at the information on the screen, she learns that Eddie is 73 and lives alone. The pictures show that Eddie’s home lacks many of the comforts most of us would take for granted. It is a small house with a tiny kitchen and a bedroom/living room combination. The bathroom is barely big enough to get in and out, without backing in and out. The shower is made for someone who can fit in this tiny room.

Eddie sits lovingly stroking his cat, Grace, telling her how sorry he is that she is sick. Mary can see that Grace has a serious eye infection. One eye is shut completely. She knows that Grace needs immediate care or she could become blind, or worse.

Apparently Eddie has not taken Grace to the vet, probably because of lack of money, she decides. He did what he could, which was to hold and soothe her and try to make her as comfortable as he knew how. He had applied warm cloths and attempted to keep the eyes wiped off, but it was simply not enough.

Mary quickly materializes. After walking around the house and checking out food supplies, she found both lacking. The kitchen was very neat and tidy, she

noted. Grace had clean dishes with water and dry food that looked untouched. Probably too sick to eat, she surmises.

Looking up Eddie's history, she learns he had outlived his only son and had one cousin, who lived three states away. Doesn't look like there has been any contact with the cousin for years. Eddie is on his own here, she now knew.

It didn't take long for Mary to think of the senior center. She knew from being active in her center that they deliver Meals on Wheels and will take food to pets as well. She knew she must get Eddie enrolled to start receiving meals right away.

Her plan was to also get him involved in center activities, as it would get him out of the house and give him a social life as well. She was just hoping it was close enough for him to ride the bike she noticed out front. Finding a way to get Grace to a vet might take some doing, she knew, since the bike seems to be their only mode of transportation.

After a quick search, she discovers surprisingly, the senior center is only a few blocks from Eddie's home. Mary immediately places herself at the center to observe, and decide how she is going to handle the Eddie/Grace situation.

The center director, Susie, is an attractive woman in her mid 60's. Just by the way she moves and the sparkle in her eyes, you can tell she has a heart of gold (which is engraved on a plaque above her work station). She spoils everyone, and makes all the seniors feel right at home at the center. It is a very welcoming place. This is great, Mary thought. She felt it was certainly a place Eddie would love coming to. She spots a group of men playing pool in one room and cards in the next.

Now to find the list for Meals On Wheels, and pet companion food deliveries. She knew it had to be somewhere in the office. Correct in her thinking, she sees that it's sitting on top of other paperwork, on Susie's desk.

After successfully locating the list, she knew she had a dilemma, as she wasn't sure she could write anything on the page and have it show up. Without hesitation, however, she picks up a pen and quickly adds Eddie's information to the list, which would set it up for delivery beginning the next day. She adds

Grace into the pet section with all the pertinent information to also get food delivery for her. And then, she waits patiently.

A volunteer comes into the office shortly thereafter and takes the clipboard. Mary holds her breath. She hears her mention to Susie she has a new delivery for tomorrow, not far away, named Eddie.

Well, what do you know. I can write and people can see it. That is very good to know. Mary took note.

The next day at 11:30 a.m., the doorbell rings at Eddie's house. He gets up from his chair; moves the curtain back and looks out. "Hmm, not sure who that is. She looks pleasant enough." He opens the door to volunteer, Mary Jo.

"Hi, Eddie. I'm Mary Jo, a volunteer for the Meals On Wheels program. Here's your hot meal for today, and Grace's food as well."

"What meal?" Eddie asks, with a confused, but happy look on his face.

"You are signed up to receive a hot meal from us every day, as well as food for your pet." He scratched his head and looked at her as if he'd seen a real angel from heaven. The food container she was carrying smelled so good to him. "We have rolls and dessert for you too," Mary Jo added.

Eddie took the food delivery, and invited her in. "Make yourself comfortable, here, in my best chair. I'll put this in the kitchen. I can't thank you enough for the food," he said, as he walked into his small kitchen area.

Mary Jo notices his beautiful gray and white cat, curled up in a blanket beside the couch. She is saddened and shocked by the appearance of Grace. She gets up from the chair and goes over to her.

"Eddie, what's wrong with Grace's eyes? Have you taken her to the vet?"

Eddie begins to cry at this. His composure lost, he explains how he has been trying to treat her by wiping her eyes out every day. "I want to take her to a vet more than anything, but don't have the money or a way to get her there. I know she is getting worse, and I'm really worried about her."

Tears begin to form in Mary Jo's eyes as well, but she instantly brightens up with her next thought. "Eddie, my daughter, Anna, is a vet. I'm sure she would

not mind stopping by here today after she leaves her office. I'll call her and fill her in on the problem."

That look came upon Eddie's face again. He knew his prayers had definitely been answered, and that this Mary Jo, was some kind of angel.

If he only knew, the 'other Mary' thought. She knew this particular assignment took an earthly angel as well as an animal angel to get the job done.

Mary was eager to see how Grace made out at the vet and how Eddie was doing as well. From reading the follow-up on her communicator, she learns that Mary Jo invited Eddie to the center, and he is a real regular now. He goes to bingo every Tuesday and Friday, and has won two of the last three pool tournaments.

She also learned that one of his new buddies at the center was looking for a roommate to come live in his big house to keep him from being lonely, and approached Eddie with a proposal. Eddie and Grace are now living in a spacious home with all the comforts they never had before. Grace even has her own bed, and a new best buddy, older cat, named Mae. Her eye infection healed, and Grace's eyes are once again bright and beautiful.

I couldn't have dreamed this ending up better if I were writing for the movies, Mary decides. This makes my day ... week ... oh - heck, maybe even my year. Or, maybe a year isn't really a year anymore where I come from, she ponders.

Mary doesn't get to ponder very long, as she soon finds out that Chris has 'double trouble.'

On Chris's communicator, she views two women talking on the phone - both frantic and in tears. One is in Ocala and the other is 70 miles away in Orlando. They are mother and daughter. As Chris watches and listens in, she learns that both of them have a cat fighting for their lives, with almost the same symptoms. Well, I can't be in two places at once, or can I? She calls Mary.

Mary jumps when her communicator goes off, as she is STILL not used to it.

“Mary, I need you. I have two people, a mother and daughter. They both have a sick cat on their hands. Look at the screen now and you’ll see what I am seeing. Want to go to Orlando or Ocala? I have no preference. You pick.”

“Ocala is good,” Mary said.

“OK, I’ll take Wendy and her cat, Rocket. We’ll be in touch soon,” she adds, as she ends the call.

When Chris arrives in Orlando, Wendy is taking Rocket's temperature. The thermometer blazes back at her with a reading of 106 degrees.

“I’m taking Rocket to the ER,” Wendy informs her husband, Jay, and daughter, Mallory, who look on with obvious concern. “I know enough about cats to know this high a temperature is not a good sign.”

“Mom, is Rocket really going to be OK?” Mallory asks, as she reaches over, pets the cat, giving him a kiss on his head, waiting for an answer. Wendy just shakes her head up and down as a “YES”!

“Jay, I’m not sure how to get to the animal ER. Please MapQuest directions for me and print it out. Whatever you do, DO IT FAST. Rocket could go into shock with fever that high,” she explains.

Chris notices that Wendy is frantic and very stressed to say the least. She can’t find the car keys and screams at her husband to help find them and get the carrier ready. Think I need to put a little ‘calm’ on this scene right now before Wendy goes out the door, she decides.

“Wendy, calm down. You being upset, stressed out and unorganized will make this worse. Don’t yell at your family. They are trying to help you. Stay calm and drive safely, and carefully to the ER. Your family does not need for you and your cat to be in emergency rooms.”

Wendy literally stops in her tracks, as if someone had pushed the pause button on the TV. She turns and apologizes to her husband; takes the car keys out of his hand and kisses him. She then, carefully places Rocket into the waiting carrier and blows a kiss to her daughter. She walks out the front door and gets into the car. Buckled up, with the directions where she can see them, she drives away.

In Ocala, Mary is on the scene with the mom, Jane, and Linus. She is in the living room, observing a very sick cat. Linus is having a difficult time breathing.

Mary observes that Jane's other six cats are also having some upper respiratory issues as well. None looks as bad as Linus, however. He is breathing with his mouth open. Eyes and nose are both runny, and he looks very uncomfortable. She recalls what it was like for her when she had similar symptoms. For a cat, she feels it must be much worse. Wish he could blow his nose, she thought.

She continues to observe Linus and can't help but notice what a large, beautiful yellow cat he is. The other five are a mixture of colors, shapes and sizes. They seem to be truly concerned about him as well. Two sit close by, as if they were there to keep him company in his misery.

Linus is easy for Jane to get into the carrier, because he is just too sick to fight, or care about being moved. She seems to be fairly calm and collected about this drive to the animal ER.

The communicator provides Mary with other information about Jane and her rescue cats. The screen showed pictures of two other cats that did not make it after a trip to the ER. One passed away a year ago, and the other one eight months ago. Mary was more determined than ever to do everything to try to save Linus, so Jane would not have to go through a third heartache.

During the drive, Jane talks to Linus the entire way, telling him what a good boy he is and how much she loves him. She literally begs him to please hang on. Mary notes that Jane is also doing a good job of keeping her attention on the road, so as not to endanger both of them.

As human, cat and angel are riding along, Mary also begins to talk to Linus. "I know I can heal. I wonder if this is the time to try it?" Just as she was about to try her skills, Linus begins to violently rock back and forth in the carrier. He then started making gurgling sounds. Jane immediately looks over at the carrier and pulls off the road. Both Jane and Mary hear sounds of gasping, and then nothing.

Jane turns on the flashers and gets out of the car. She races around to the passenger side of the front seat; opens the car door and flings open the carrier. She sees a lifeless, unmoving Linus.

She covers her mouth and tries to fight back a flood of tears and emotions. "NO! PLEASE, DON'T GO, Linus. I can't bear to lose you! PLEASE, PLEASE, DON'T GO!"

Jane takes Linus out of the carrier and puts him in the grassy area next to the car. She begins CPR. Through her sobs and tears, she continually tries to revive Linus. She has had to do this before on another cat, and the unhappy memory comes flooding back into her brain.

Mary is still sitting in the car. Her head is down between her knees and she is crying.

"Rose, Rose, what did I do wrong?"

"Did I wait too long?"

"Rose, I think Linus is dead!"

Rose suddenly appears in the seat next to Mary. "You did nothing wrong. As you recall, I told everyone that you would not be able to heal all animals. Some will die, so others can be born."

"But this is heartbreaking, Rose. Look at Jane. She is devastated. Maybe if I had tried sooner?"

"No, Mary, Linus is gone and we can't bring him back," Rose said with resignation.

"So, Linus is really gone? He really IS dead?" Mary looks at Rose, already knowing in her heart that this statement is true.

A police officer pulls over when he sees the car off the road with the flashers on. When he sees what is happening, he tries to help as well. Jane sits back, exhausted and full of emotion, she talks to the officer quietly. "Everyone loved Linus. He was like everyone's big brother," she said through tears and sniffles.

When the officer shakes his head to indicate that nothing more can be done for the cat, Jane gently picks Linus up and rocks him back and forth for a few minutes, like a baby. She kisses him on top of his head, before gently placing him into the carrier. She runs her hand over his body, and leaves it there for a moment. She cannot contain the grief, or hold back the tears and the sobbing that follows.

The sympathetic officer asks if there is anything else he can do for her. Jane's only request was that he put the carrier back in the car for her. She explained to him how she was going to take Linus to her vet for cremation. She thanked him for all his efforts and kindness.

Linus was now back in the car. Jane sat a while longer in the grass before she got out her cell phone to call home.

When Jane's husband got on the line, all she could say was, "He's gone! Linus is gone! He gasped for air and then he just stopped breathing. I tried to save him. I really did." She sobbed through the story.

She continues to cry as she listens to her husband, who was trying his best to console her. He loved Linus just as much, and it was a shock also for him to learn he had died so quickly.

Jane's son asks to speak to his mom, and gets on the line. "Mom, is Linus in Heaven?"

"Yes, I know he is," she said, trying to hide the sorrow in her voice.

"Mom, about fifteen minutes ago, a little gold kitten came to our back door and looked in the glass at me. Dad says he is a boy cat. There are no tags on him. Mom, he looks like a baby Linus. Can we keep him?"

"YES," was all Jane could say, through a new round of tears. "He is home now."

Mary and Rose were able to hear Jane's telephone conversation, and were able to see the new little member of the household on Mary's communicator.

"Just as I said, Mary, others will be born," Rose reminded.

"It's still so sad. Ya know - I am just really shaken by this," Mary admits.

"I know, Mary, and I am sorry you are having to go through this. Let's go ahead and head back to the room. I think it would be a good idea for you to take a little break," Rose suggests. Both Mary and Rose leave the car at the same time.

Once back in the room, Mary decides she needs to call Chris to let her know what had happened. She is hoping and praying she is going to have a happy ending to her story.

Chris is riding to the ER with Wendy, when her communicator goes off. "Oh, good, that's Mary," she says to the device. She pushes the 'answer' button.

"Chris, what is going on with your situation?" Mary is trying her best to hide the anguish she is feeling

"First, tell me about Linus." There is silence on the other end, as Mary doesn't know what to say or how to say it, or even if she can talk about it yet.

"Mary, are you still there? Mary - Mary?"

"He's dead!" Mary proclaims, in a soft, broken voice. "He died before I could heal him."

Chris was now the silent one, as she had no idea how to respond, and was a little frightened herself about being able to help Rocket.

"I was just about to try my healing technique, when he started moving around the carrier gasping for air. It happened so fast. Next thing I knew, Jane was out of the car with Linus doing CPR on him. Rose came to comfort me and I am back in our room with her now. She said it was not my fault and reminded me that we cannot heal all animals."

Mary got everything out, and off her chest, and then was silent again. Chris could tell she had been crying.

"Mary, I'm sure it was not meant to be for Linus. Please don't blame yourself. I'm sure Rose will be there to help you as long as you need her. It is going to be okay, Mary." More silence on the line. "Before we hang up, I do have a question for Rose, if she is nearby."

Mary asks Rose if she can talk to Chris for a moment, and hands her the communicator.

"Yes, Chris, I'm here. What would you like to know?"

"We are on the way to the ER. I almost feel like I was sent here to save both Rocket and Wendy. Wendy was totally out of control when I arrived. I had to calm the scene and get her motivated to move along and get Rocket out of the house and on the road safely. She was so stressed she could not even locate the keys and kept walking around the house going from room to room just crying."

"We are traveling at a safe speed now, and are not far from our destination. Rocket still has a high temperature, according to my communicator, but he seems to be responsive to Wendy's voice."

"I haven't tried to do anything yet because I wasn't sure if this was the appointed time. How do you know when to try to heal?"

Rose pondered the question and replied, "You will know when the time is right, and you will not try the healing process until you feel the need. It will be instinctive."

"I haven't felt that yet," Chris said.

"Well, there you go. It's not time. You'll know - believe me," Rose assures her.

"I think Wendy is supposed to go to the ER and see it through."

"Keep me posted," Rose said.

"Please tell Mary I am thinking about her as well," Chris added, before ending the call with Rose.

Wendy pulls into the animal ER parking lot and parks in the closest space she can find. She takes out the carrier and rushes Rocket into the waiting room.

"His temperature is very high and he is having trouble breathing," Wendy tells the person at the front desk. The attendant takes the carrier and heads back to the examining area with him.

"I'll be back and we'll talk more and fill out the paperwork," she yells back, over her shoulder.

Wendy is relieved they are finally there, and that Rocket is being attended to. She feels completely drained. She takes a seat and waits.

The receptionist returns a few minutes later and assures her that Rocket is being looked at. She gives Wendy the appropriate paperwork and reminds her that there is a minimum charge of \$80 for ER services, before other treatment options and services are rendered. "I guess everyone is worried about getting their money these days," Wendy says under her breath.

After completing the paperwork and signing the consent to treat page, she hands the clipboard back. She thumbs through the old magazines on hand in the rack and picks a Cat Fancy three months old.

Wendy tries to read the magazine, but just can't concentrate or think about anything other than Rocket. He was always the blast-off -- run around the house like crazy, Rocket. And now, he was only a very low rumble of his original self.

As she opens her purse to make sure her checkbook is there, the front door opens and in rushes a man carrying a bleeding kitten. "This little cat just got hit by a car. I stopped; got out of my car, and scooped it up before it was run over again," the Good Samaritan said, somewhat out of breath.

The receptionist took the kitten and hurriedly headed to the triage area. When she returned, she went over to the rescuer and told him, without hesitation, there was a \$80 ER fee, whether the cat lived or died. Hearing the statement, Wendy couldn't believe hold cold it was stated.

You could also tell this blunt statement really took him by surprise. "I don't have \$80 on me, and not much more than that in the bank," he said. "I also have two dogs at home that have never been around a cat and I'm not so sure it would be welcome in their domain."

The receptionist and the man fell silent, looking at each other very uncomfortably.

A thought occurred to Wendy. She jumps up and spoke out loud, getting right in the middle of them. "I can take this little kitten, and I can afford to pay for all the services it might need. I will definitely have no problems taking him or her home if God allows it to live."

The rescuer quickly lost his dazed look. He shook Wendy's hand and thanked her.

"You take care of those dogs and keep the kitties off the street," Wendy said to him goodheartedly.

"I'll do just that, and thanks again for being so great about taking and paying for this little cat," he said, as he headed for the exit door. "This is a day I will remember for a long time."

"Me too," Wendy said.

That's it! That's it! This is why I wasn't supposed to heal Rocket in the car, Chris now knew. Wendy was supposed to be here to give that little injured cat a home, and pay the ER bill. That's why I didn't feel the need to heal. I got to save not one, but two animals. That is, if they both make it, were her thoughts and concerns.

After a few minutes the vet tech came out, and summoned Wendy to go to room No. 3, to talk to the vet about BOTH her cats. "Both my cats," Wendy said out loud. This was certainly meant to be, she knew.

Wendy tries to read the look on the vet's face when she enters the room, but cannot. "Hi, Wendy, I'm Dr. Runnfeldt. First, let me say that it is very kind of you to assume responsibility for the little kitten that was hit. Thank you for that."

"I am very happy to be able to help," Wendy replies.

"Your first concern - Rocket, is a very sick boy and has a serious upper-respiratory infection. X-rays show some fluid in the lungs as well. Your new little girl - yes, it's a girl, is going to make it. From what we can tell, she was not actually run over, but grazed by one of the wheels of the car," she explains.

"She's a real sweetie and very loving. We estimate her to be around 3 to 4 months old. To be sure there are no broken bones, I'd like to do an X-ray and

give her the first shots, including rabies, since we don't know anything about her history.”

“I'd also like to start Rocket on antibiotics and start an IV diuretic to get the lungs clear. He really needs to stay overnight with us for further observation. It would probably be a good idea to keep both Rocket and your new kitty overnight as well, just to make sure we haven't missed anything with her.”

“This is an estimate sheet that shows charges broken down by as-needed basis. This does not mean that we will do everything you are looking at on the sheet. It merely means that this would be the cost for oxygen, additional X-rays, etc., if needed by either cat.”

Wendy agrees that the charges look reasonable, and signs at the space provided on the form.

“I would certainly feel better if they were here for continuing care and observation,” Wendy said.

“OK! Good! Why don't you go home and get some sleep? I have to be here, but you don't,” Dr. Runnfeldt remarks, with a big smile on her face. “I'll take good care of your babies.”

“Oh, I know you will,” Wendy acknowledges, as she heads out of the exam room.

“Hey, Wendy, want to say good-bye to my patients?”

“Really? Yes, I would love to.” She spins around to follow Dr. Runnfeldt.

She could not believe how much better Rocket looked already. He purred as she put her fingers through the cage to reassure him that this was just temporary, and that he would be home soon. Next she moved to the space beside Rocket and saw the beautiful little black kitten that was now hers to love for life. “I'm going to call you Penny,” she said to the cat, as she put her fingers through the cage to touch her.

Dr. Runnfeldt was nearby, heard the proclamation, and asked if there was any significance to that name.

"Yes, my mom and dad had a wonderful, older black cat named Penny. She passed away, due to cancer, earlier this year. This little kitten reminds me so much of their beloved Penny. They will love her."

As Wendy drove home, several thoughts ran through her mind. I came with one and will be leaving with two. Both cats will be cherished always in my home. I think I'll wait and tell Jay and Mallory about this amazing night in person instead of calling them, she decides.

The person who couldn't wait to get on her phone was Chris. "Mary, are you busy with Rose or do you have the time to chat with your fellow angel? You are not going to believe my saves."

"Please, give me every detail," Mary said.

"First, are you feeling better?"

"Yes, I'm going to be fine and I do want to know every detail about Rocket," Mary reiterates.

"Well, now I know why I didn't try to heal earlier. I saved two cats instead of one. Let me start from the beginning." The two angels chatted just like two friends on the line together.

The phone is ringing for another angel as well. Walter is getting a call that is very familiar to him. This one involves law enforcement at its best.

"Did you see that? That big dog just fell out of that pickup, and rolled across the road. Should we stop?" The passenger is very anxious about the scene he just witnessed.

"No, it looks like there are already cars stopping to help," the driver notes.

"How could anyone be so stupid as to let their dog ride in the back like that and on a highway? I'm glad my dog is home safe and sound in his favorite chair -- or mine," the front seat passenger quips.

When Walter gets the call about the injured dog from the pickup, he materializes right in the middle of the crowd of onlookers and the dog's owner. The crowd is one angry looking group.

"You are one stupid SOB to let your dog ride like that unrestrained on a highway," a bystander shouts to the driver of the truck. "I hope you get put in jail for animal abuse," he adds. Others murmur similar opinions.

Someone in the crowd must have called the police as a cruiser comes to a stop, at what now, has been declared a crime scene by the bystanders. The car pulls up and stops close to where Walter is standing.

It felt good to be around law enforcement officers again, but he had a brief flashback of his last traffic stop. The thought quickly left his mind, and the matter at hand was all important to him.

The large German Shepherd was bleeding, and breathing was labored and unsteady. Walter knew immediately the dog was dying.

The owner is a new dog owner who never had a dog before, and took Brucey, as he called him, because a friend of his died in a car accident and the girlfriend of the deceased politely asked him to take the dog.

The new owner had no clue that letting him ride in the back like this was dangerous for him. He really didn't even care about the dog, but Frank was a buddy and loved his mutt. He felt obligated. This information was gained by Walter, via his communicator.

A police officer goes over to question the owner, as the crowd tries to offer their opinions and suggestions as to what should be done with this neglectful and careless person. "Quiet everyone. Back, please," the officer shouts. "Everyone, back in your cars and move along. You are creating a bottleneck to other motorists."

"Move now!" He said in a stern voice. The crowd quickly disperses and leaves. Most of them, however, are still mumbling to each other as they make their way back to their cars.

Walter quickly goes to the dog's side. He can tell there are major injuries, including a broken leg. He doesn't know if this is one he can heal, but goes to work nevertheless.

The police officer arriving first on the scene asks the truck driver for his driver's license and registration information. All of a sudden, what the officer

takes for a concerned owner, now becomes a nervous, agitated and even angry person. He turns and heads to his pickup, mumbling under his breath.

As the owner fumbles for his information, the officer knows it is taking way too long to produce. He carefully approaches to see what the hold up is. Before the officer can get a word out, the man jumps out of the pickup, and takes off at a full run into the woods, surrounding the area. The officer takes off in full pursuit, with gun in hand. He calls for immediate backup assistance, as he pursues.

Trying to ignore what is going on around him, Walter begins to try his healing abilities on Brucey. He places his hands on both sides of his chest area. The electric snap comes the minute he put his hands on the dog. Next he moves to the leg and the head with the same maneuver. Again, the electric snap indicates at least contact was made.

Walter studies the dog's reaction, and checks the communicator for information. He knows the dog will live, but would still need vet care and definitely a new owner. He feels exhilarated.

Other patrol cars are now on the scene, and additional officers are joining in the search for the missing dog owner. Running the plate and information found in the truck shows he has outstanding warrants and a rap sheet a mile long. His status had now changed from dog owner with bad judgment to a felon on the run.

Officer Bransom, who arrived last, immediately went to Brucey. You could tell he loves animals and was very concerned for the dog. He took it upon himself to cover Brucey with a blanket, and then sat next to him, and tried to comfort him. There were several thoughts in his head regarding the situation and the 'man on the run.' Many bleeped words came to mind.

As officer Bransom looks around to see what the others are doing, several of the officers come huffing and puffing from the woods. With them, cuffed and cursing is the dog owner, aka, the wanted felon. He is spitting out curse words as quickly as he could get them out. "I hope that dog dies," he spewed. "If it weren't for that stupid dog, I'd be home free. You dirty mutt. I hate your furry, matted guts," he continued ranting.

The dog-loving officer lunged at him and had to be restrained. "You are one worthless piece of humanity. This dog is better than you in every way," Officer Bransom shouts at 'Mr. Worthless' as they put him in the squad car.

Brucey was now awake and moving around a little. Officer Bransom notes the activity and sits back down beside the dog. He continues to pat him and speak reassuring words in his ear.

"What are we going to do with this dog? Ya know, he looks a lot better than I remember when I first saw him. He took quite a tumble today. Guess he'll need to be checked out by a vet. I'm sure a new owner will be in his future, as well," said the first officer on the scene.

Officer Bransom spoke up quickly. "I would love to take this dog home. Our family pet, Bruce C, recently died from cancer." The other officers stop what they are doing and look at each other.

"Wait, Bransom, what did you say your dog's name was?"

"Bruce C, after my grandfather. We always loved the old man and everyone called him Bruce C because there were so many other Bruce's in the family."

"You know that dog's name is Brucey with a C-E-Y, right?" asks one of the officers who had been instrumental in capturing their fugitive. "I know, because our 'Mr. Not-So-Nice Guy' called him by that name several times during our initial meeting."

Officer Bransom sat dumfounded. He looks at Brucey and back at the fellow officer.

"Doesn't this just take the cake," chimes in another officer.

"This dog could heal many hearts. My family would give him the kind of home he deserves. The fact that his eyes look bright and he is moving around is really a good and unbelievable sign," Bransom tells his fellow officers.

"Ah, I think a grown man is now gonna cry. He just licked me," Officer Bransom said.

"Well, buddy, think we just all may cry at that," another officer, jokingly said to him. "He is your new buddy. That's for sure."

"Pack him up. He's all yours," the sergeant announces. "He is one lucky dog at that. Take the rest of the day off, and get him to the vet. He looks pretty good, but I know you want to make sure there are no serious injuries going on for Brucey. See ya tomorrow and thanks, Bransom, for caring about the furry population of the planet."

"You bet, Sarge. Today, Brucey and I both got lucky. I can't wait to get him home and get our new family member settled in. You take care, Sarge."

Walter felt drained, excited, happy, but most of all, he felt like an animal angel. He found himself staring at his communicator, hoping for another call. He was more than pumped and ready to go again. He felt like Animal Superman ready to blast off at any given moment.



Quick Saves

Nick gets a confusing flash on his cosmic communicator. It shows multiple screens with multiple situations. Walter, Sammy, Chris and Mary also have multiple screens going on. Right in the center is a rose. All instinctually knew to push the picture of the rose -- their Rose.

"Hello, everyone," Rose said to the group. "Guess you are all wondering what is going on with your communicators. The four split screens you are seeing is what I am going to call "quick saves" for want of a better term. You will be able to alert someone of these situations occurring or about to occur and then in turn, they will be able to help. This will be a very fulfilling and worthwhile experience. Each of you will have different scenarios, and will automatically know what to do."

"Simply go from one screen to the next. After the first four are complete, four more will appear. Questions, anyone?"

"Yes," Nick said. "I am looking at a screen that just has addresses. How do I know what to do about that?"

Rose looked at his screens and replied. "If you will notice on the bottom of the screen, it says locations of illegal dog fights that are about to commence."

"Oh yeah, I see it now," Nick said.

"All you have to do is push the screen that says closest police patrol unit. By putting your finger on the address it will automatically go to their police radio as a dog fight in progress," Rose explained. "They will respond. You will be matching up addresses with available units, all with the push of a button. It will

save hundreds of dogs from being brutally used for gambling purposes and their owners will be prosecuted, as well.”

"Everyone else will have similar type screens. Some will be matching up families with pets at the shelters. Others will be notifying police cars of similar situations such as Nick's saves. Everything will be explained on the screen and as I mentioned, you will just know what to do. You are angels, after all," said everyone's favorite spiritual guide and mentor.

"You can always call me or just say my name and I'll be by your side. Okay? Ready to take on this new assignment?"

The five angels assured her they were ready-and-raring to go.

They chatted for a few minutes before signing-off. Each one shared a small bit of their past experiences and wished each other well. They did their best to give Mary their vote of confidence.

"Well, I'm ready to dive into my quick saves," Chris said to the wind.

Nick went back to his screen with the addresses. This is nothing short of amazing, he decides. He was so ready for these people to be busted and the dogs to be saved from their cruel fates.

Here goes! Address No.1 and police radio No.1 - connected and announced. Nick pushed the screen again and could see the car speeding to the address. Next screen came on, almost like a speeded-up version of a TV show you had on hold, and wanted to skip until you got to the good part. It showed the police car busting up the illegal dog fighting ring, and the bad guys being hauled off. Amazing -- truly amazing, Nick marveled. "I could do this all day, or forever," he said, as he moved to the next group of addresses. He had already called in over fifty.

Nick knew in his heart, however, these saves may not count in the sense of being allowed to live. He knew for a fact from watching Animal Cops on TV that most of these dogs have to be humanely euthanized because they are unacceptable as pets due to their training and poor treatment by their owners. At least they won't suffer at the hands of these criminals anymore," Nick said, as he looks at his screen for additional information on the dogs.

He felt a tremendous weight has been lifted off his shoulders, and knew his part in catching these criminals was something that would stay with him forever. He wondered what forever was really going to feel like.

Chris, working in another area of Florida, begins to view her quick save screens. Looking at screen No.1 she views a large turtle trying to cross a busy intersection with cars zooming by. "Too bad he has the speed of a turtle," she said to herself, without even realizing how stupid the thought sounded. "What I need is a police officer."

A quick search found a unit close by. She announces on his police radio, so that only he could hear, a request for assistance for a pedestrian, with the exact location.

When the officer pulls onto the street that was radioed in, he sees no pedestrian in sight. What he did see, was a giant turtle slowly making it's way across the pavement.

The officer knew this road well. It was busy no matter what time of the day or night. "I'm surprised this guy has made it this far without being flattened," he said, as he pulled up to the scene. Guess I'm getting this pedestrian across the road safely, he smiled to himself with the thought.

He carefully pulls off the road, turning his flashing lights on, and places an orange cone in the road. He put on a pair of heavy duty gloves just in case this turtle was of the snapping turtle variety. His knowing full well that these little guys could easily take a finger off.

He then gently picks up the turtle and carries it to the other side of the road. A pond was nearby. "Guess you knew where you were going all right," he said to the turtle. He took one last look for the pedestrian in question, then returned to his car to resume his duties.

Yeah, guess someone just played a little joke on me back at the station. I'll find the culprit when I go in today. He started thinking about who might be the guilty party.

At the end of his shift, he tried his best to get someone - anyone, to admit to the call. The dispatcher on duty assured him it wasn't her, but suggested,

"Guess you were just chosen today to be a guardian angel for that turtle." She smiled at him, totally believing this is just what happened.

Chris had many more screens like the turtle scenario. Some were ducks. Some were squirrels. There were stray cats and dogs, all just trying to get from point A to point B, without being killed or maimed by careless, and sometimes non-caring humans. She was responsible for hundreds, maybe even thousands of lives saved, by simply sending these animals across the streets when no cars or motorcycles were motoring down them. She could safely say that at 1:30 p.m., every squirrel in Florida made it across the road to live another nut-gathering day.

Chris thought of Mary and wondered what she had on her quick saves. She felt that females were a little nosier than the male population, as she decided the guys probably never gave it a thought. She had a strong feeling Mary was having the time of her life. There's that word again - life. Well, it certainly sounds better than saying she is having the time of her death, she decides.

Mary was indeed having the time of her life. She had multiple screens of animal shelters across Florida. On her communicator, the screens show cage after cage of cats, dogs as well as other animals. As she looks at the screens, she knows right away that her job is to match up people and pets. She is going to be a matchmaker today, and is thrilled to be given this particular assignment. As she gets ready to begin, Chris comes to mind. Mary wonders what she is working on and where.

As she reviews the screens, she sees cats that aren't going to be first choices for people, mainly because they aren't the right color or have a deformity of some sort. "I definitely am going to start with these guys first. Let's see what we have here," she says, as she scans her information.

As she searches, she stops on a cat with white and yellow fur markings. The cat has one eye. Speculating that an injury cost this little guy an eye, she feels bad for him. On second look, however, Mary notices he doesn't look unhappy about things at all. Instead, he looks very content.

The note taped on the cage gives the name of Lefty and states that he is a male. "Very clever, as the good eye is on the left," Mary said, to herself. She is

curious whether the person who dropped him off had given him this fitting name, or if it was one of the staff who had gotten creative. Mary knew Lefty would not be left today.

She begins her search for the perfect match. She moves from one picture to the next of people in the shelter. Ah, perfect! The communicator shows a family with a little boy around the age of seven or eight. As she zooms in for a closer look, she immediately notices the young boy's head looked bigger than it should be in proportion to the rest of his body. Mary directs this family straight to Lefty.

"Look, Mommy, that little cat has only one eye. He's looking at me with it. What happened to his eye, Mommy? Did it get stuck when he was born and didn't come out?"

"I don't know, honey," she answered.

"I want to pick him up. Can I, Mommy? Can, I!"

"OK, let me go get the lady at the counter to open the cage and make sure Lefty does not bite."

"Hurry, Mommy! He needs me to get him out of that cage. I love him. He is MY cat," the boy exclaimed.

The mom looked at her son with a strange expression, but broke into a smile as she went off to find a staff member.

"Happy ending - check! Time to move on."

"AHH, look at that little dog. He reminds me of Benji in the movies," Mary says, as she looks at the next scenario. Doesn't look as healthy, however. He's a little on the thin side, and his fur looks like it could use a few hundred brushings as well. Mary continues to talk to herself, as she scans. Let's see who we can find for - oh, no name yet. Guess the adopter will have to name the adoptee today.

Looking at many couples with and without children who were in the shelter, Mary focuses in on one particular man. He's in fatigues, and has kind of a sad, distant look to him.

Oh, a man in the military. Screen search shows just back from Afghanistan. He's single and really cute. She wonders how this one got away from all the girls.

Hmm, is he a cat or dog person, or both? He's looking in many cages in both areas, but hasn't stopped anywhere yet, she notices. Well, time for him to come to a screeching halt at the cage of the Benji look-a-like. I have a good feeling about this matchup.

Mary watches as he stops his walking around and plants himself right in front of the cage, holding who is going to be, his new best friend. The little dog jumps up, as if he knew him, and begins to frantically lick him through the cage.

"Hey, little buddy, how are you? You're really friendly, aren't ya? You know, you look like you need a good bath and some heavy-duty grooming. Kind of on the skinny side too."

"You remind me of a dog I used to care for overseas. I had to leave him behind. It broke my heart because he was my best bud. I always just called him Little Buddy, which I think would suit you just as well. Want to be my new, Little Buddy?"

Little Buddy just wagged his tail as fast as he could in reply.

Oh, this story is just getting better and better, Mary sees firsthand. Will you look at that! Mr. Military just asked one of the shelter volunteers out for coffee. They are going out the door together with Little Buddy. Wait! Did I do that? Nah! I'm not that good, or am I? The big grin did not disappear as she moved on to the next screen.

As Mary scans from screen to screen, she spots two multicolored, tortoiseshell cats with almost the same coloring, caged together. Frick and Frack -- how cute are those names.

Let's see what their story is. The profile says they are brothers and the shelter is trying to keep them together in one home. Well, with me on the job, you can believe this will definitely happen and today, she thought to herself.

Searching! Searching! Oh, I see just the family - twin girls with their mom and dad, each bickering over the cat they would share. This will fit the bill nicely, Mary feels certain.

"OK, girls - enough!"

"If you can't agree with each other, we will just go home. The cat we select will have to be unanimous ... GOT IT!"

"Yes, Daddy," they both agreed, as they trotted off to began their search. One twin went one way, and one the other. Their parents just shrugged their shoulders and decided to sit down in the reception area and let the girls shop a little. They could keep a close eye on them, so there was no worry there.

Twin number one came to a stop outside Frick and Frack's cage. "Hmm, brothers. They look alike, just like my sister and me. "They want to go home together, so they don't have to be separated," she read.

"MOM! DADDY!" She shrieked aloud.

Mom and Dad did come quickly mainly because of the sound of their daughter's voice. They were hoping they would not find a cat bite or scratch on their daughter. Upon their swift arrival and close inspection, they found their daughter with all her fingers in the cage, but no blood, only fascination, excitement and love for kitty on the left.

Following up in the rear was twin number two. "I can't decide," she said. "I think I want a yellow cat or maybe a white one." When twin number two saw what her sister and parents were looking at, she pushed herself in for a better look.

"Oh, they're cute! Look, Mommy, this one likes me. He's purring! I want the one on the right," she said.

The dad begins to study the profile. He reads that Frick and Frack are brothers, and that the shelter preferred to have them adopted out together.

"You girls are in luck. Both Frick and Frack are going home with us today. We wouldn't think of separating them. That would be as bad as separating you girls."

"Really, Daddy? We can take BOTH of them home?"

"How will we ever know which one is Frick and which one is Frack?"

"Easy, Mom," said twin number one. "Frick is my cat!"

Mary goes from screen to screen with similar happy endings at this particular shelter. Both cats, dogs and even a few pigs and a horse were matched with people who already loved them.

The new pet owners were destined to stop in at this shelter on this particular day, and take home their new family member and in some cases, members, she knew for a fact. She decides that being a matchmaker was definitely her calling. Already more shelters were showing up, and Mary's matchmaking skills would continue.

Sammy is also viewing his screens with great interest. He sees nothing but Lost and Found signs on telephone posts, in grocery stores, pet stores, vet offices, online, and even on billboards.

Well, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know what I'm going to be doing here. All I have to do is get the pets back to their owners.

Screen number one shows a collie named Lassie Two. Sammy knew that kind of name could only mean there was another one that was perhaps lost or had passed. A \$1,000 reward was also shown on the information screen. The fancy notice clearly says the owner has some money and is going to use it to get their dog back safe and sound.

Let's see where Lassie Two is hanging out these days. Okay, there he is, and not too far away from his home. Looks like a small boy and his mom found him. Sammy sees the dog sitting with them in their small apartment, eating lunchmeat out of a makeshift dog bowl. Wonder why he doesn't have a collar on?

He chuckles out loud. Oh, I see the answer now only too clearly. Guess this little boy REALLY wants to keep this dog. The collar, that included his ID tag, is hidden under the little boy's bed. "Pretty ingenuous there, young man," Sammy says to the picture on the screen.

"Blake, we have to at least put some signs up and include a picture of this dog, in case the owner is looking for him. He's so sweet and friendly, and must be someone's dog. You know too, honey, the apartment manager said no pets allowed. We can't afford to lose our place, as I don't know where we'd go."

What she wasn't telling him was they were alone because she was trying to get away from a very abusive ex-husband, who had no visitation rights or privileges whatsoever.

She had chosen to make it on her own versus having any financial help from her ex-husband's very rich family. She was also very careful about having a P.O. box near a cousin. This relative graciously forwarded the child support checks to her each month, no matter where she was.

Hoping beyond hope for a job soon, she was just getting by right now. Finding a reliable, trustworthy sitter and a job were her main focuses. Having to deal with a dog and especially one this big, that surely must require a lot of food, was not part of the plan.

"Mom, look how quiet he is," Blake said. "He never barks, and he loves being here with us. I can play with him and teach him how to play catch and maybe we could get a Frisbee or something."

Seeing her son so excited about something and so happy brought tears to her eyes, as he had never had anyone to play with or teach him how to play sports. Her sad recollections of her 'ex' was that he was real loser, and really didn't deserve to know this remarkable little boy, whom she herself, had raised alone almost from day one.

"Hey, hon, go get the dog and let's take him for a walk. He must have bathroom needs by now. Too bad there isn't a collar or leash on him. We'll just have to improvise and use a rope for now. I have one in the junk drawer in the kitchen. Want to go get it?" Her son jumped at the chance to go outside and to take his dog with him.

As they walked down the block and away from the apartment complex, they were happy to see a park not too far down the road. Both mom and son remembered seeing it when they were driving around looking for a place to live, but forgot about it until now.

"Let's head for the park. We'll let the dog run around a bit and stretch his legs. He is probably not used to be cramped up in a small apartment. She walked briskly, holding her son's hand.

"I wish I had a ball or something to throw for him. Mom, can we get a ball next time we go to the store?"

"Maybe -- but don't get too attached to this dog. I will be very surprised if someone isn't looking for him right this minute."

It felt great to be out in the sunshine, and to forget her cares, if just for a while. The great outdoors always felt good, no matter what the reason you were out in it. Seeing her son and this dog made her happy and sad at the same time. She knew in her heart that her son being a dog owner would be short-lived, and that soon she would have to take a job and be away from him, entrusting him to a stranger. She hated this aspect of her life most of all.

As they walked, talked, and laughed at silly little things, a tree with a big bright notice posted on it, caught their eye. There was no mistake. The picture on the poster had to be the dog Blake found wandering around their apartment complex parking lot, when he went out to the car to get the candy he left from their last grocery store excursion.

Every detail of the dog matched the photo, a real Lassie look-a-like, no doubt. What really shocked her about the notice was the amount of the reward. Who in the world could afford to give a reward like that, she wondered?

Blake tried his best to convince his mom that the dog in the poster looked nothing like the one they found. "Look, Mom, he looks smaller than this dog and his ears are kind of different. It's not him. I know - it's NOT my dog."

"Honey, admit it. You know in your heart that this dog is the dog in the poster. You also have to realize that some little girl or boy, or perhaps a whole family is heartbroken. They may be thinking that their dog is hurt, or has been stolen by someone who will mistreat it. We have to do the right thing, and call the number listed," she said. They sadly left the park, and walked back to their apartment.

The phone number listed on the poster was dialed. "Law office of Andrew Burke, this is April - can I help ya?"

"Hello, April, I think we found your dog," said the mom of the boy, who was in complete denial about this dog.

"Oh, that would be Mr. Burke, and his son's dog. His name is Lassie Two, because Lassie One passed away several years ago. They loved that dog to death. They love this one too. He's been missing for several days. They are going to be thrilled."

April continued telling the life story of the Burke family and their dog, Lassie Two, to a complete stranger that had simply called about the dog. She gushed on and on and on.

"Hold on a minute. I'm getting Mr. Burke on the line personally for ya, as there is a reward, ya know." Instead of calling Mr. Burke on the intercom, she yelled through the door, that there was a call about the dog. This not-so-great office worker's days were already numbered, and she continued to add to her negative column daily with just such unprofessional mannerisms.

The call was picked up. "Hello, this is Andrew Burke. I understand you may have our dog?"

"Yes, I believe we do. At least it looks a lot like the picture. My son, Blake, found him wandering around the apartment complex where we live. He did not have a collar or tags. I was getting ready to make posters of our own, stating "Lost Dog Found," when we saw your poster on the tree in the park."

"Would that be McKinley Park?"

"Yes, that's the park we were in. My apartment is not far from it, and we took your dog for a walk just now."

"This is REALLY great news! My son, Parker, was devastated when Lassie Two got out of the yard and wandered off. He usually doesn't do that. What is your address? I can come by today, if you don't mind. I would bring Parker, but his Nanny took him to a movie to get his mind off our dog. It will be a great surprise when he gets home."

"Ya know, I was planning to leave the office a little early today. Would it be acceptable to you if I came by in about thirty minutes or so?"

"Sure, that wouldn't be a problem."

"I'm sorry, I didn't even ask your name. You have such a pleasant voice at that."

"My name is Diana, Mr. Burke."

"Please, call me Andrew. I get enough of all the professionalism during the day. It's great to know that it's the end of the workday and I can be just Andrew, and not Mr. Burke. So please, call me Andrew."

"I have to warn you, Andrew, my son has already gotten extremely attached to your dog, and may not be the nice, little boy he usually is, when you arrive."

"How old is your son, Diana?"

"Blake is eight, going on eighteen. He is the man of the house and really thinks he is in charge of me and everything else in our lives," she further confided.

"Funny, I have one just like that, and he's the same age as Blake. When my wife died five years ago, Parker grew up too quickly, and he took it upon himself to be my therapist mostly. When I should have been the one doing the counseling, it was Parker who was worried about me. Having Lassie Two around is the only thing that has kept him a little boy. Gee, I didn't mean to give you a life story here on the phone. You are just very easy to talk to."

Diana had been listening to him talk and had lost sight of everything else. His voice was intriguing. His words were like music to her ears. Blake had been trying to get her attention for the longest, but she only had ears for Mr. Burke - aka Andrew.

She could not believe she was putting on more lipstick, re-combing her hair and straightening up the apartment for a stranger. She had almost forgotten about the dog, and how sad Blake was going to be in a few minutes.

"Honey, the dog is named Lassie Two. The owners are Andrew and his son, Parker. The dog wandered out of their yard a few days ago," Diana added to the new information. "Andrew is not sure what happened to the collar and tags they had on him. He is on his way over now to pick him up. His son is the same age as you, dear."

"I don't care how old he is. He lost his dog and now it's mine. Finders - Keepers!"

"You don't mean that, Blake. You are just sad that the dog will be leaving and not staying here with you, and I don't blame you for feeling hurt and sad."

The doorbell rang and Blake went in his room, slamming the door. He took Lassie Two with him. Diana stared at the closed door, and then hurried to answer the front door, after pushing back a loose strand of hair from her face.

"Hello! Are you Diana?" Diana just shook her head in response. "I'm Andrew, the one you called about our missing dog."

Both Andrew and Diana stood for a moment, staring at each other. Both were thinking about that old term of love-at-first-sight, as they stood, soaking in the very essence and presence of each other.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Didn't mean to keep you standing there. Come on in," Diana said. "Your dog is in the other room with my son. He is not being very gracious about this, I'm afraid. Blake has never had a pet, and he thought Lassie Two was his chance. Of course, we could not have kept him anyway as there is a no-pet policy here, which I have already mentioned to him. It fell on deaf ears, of course."

Andrew looked at her with a concerned look. "I am truly sorry to hear that this is so upsetting to him. I know this is not much consolation, but I don't live that far from here, and Blake could visit Lassie Two any time he wants. He is the same age as Parker, and my boy doesn't have many kids that live around us. He definitely needs more little boy time. Would you be open to the two meeting?"

Diana looked deep into his kind eyes. "Sounds like a great idea to me. I would never let Blake out in this complex to play alone. We don't know any of the other families or kids here since we are new in town."

"I know my son, and he will be hurt about the dog now, but would love to be able to at least play with him sometimes and having a new friend would make all the hurt go away, I'm sure."

"Was wondering, uh - since you are new in town, do you even have a bank selected yet? I was going to write you a check, but I can go to the bank and come back with cash, if you like."

"Yes, I have a bank, but you don't have to write me a check or give me cash. I am just happy that it all worked out." Diana got up from the couch to get the dog for Andrew.

Andrew stopped her. "Let's talk about the reward a little further."

"As it sounds like Blake really found Lassie Two, why don't we ask him what kind of reward he would like? Maybe there is something he has been dying to have for a long time, but may have never even told Mom about. Let's ask him, shall we?"

Diana's only thought was that he had perfect teeth ... perfect smile ... perfect EVERYTHING, and his wish was her command.

Blake and Lassie Two had already come out of the room. When Lassie Two saw Andrew, he came bounding toward him and nearly knocked him over. You could tell immediately how much this dog loved this man. He licked Andrew and wagged his tail in happy reunion mode. Blake saw this and went back into his room and shut the door.

"Honey, can I come in?" Diana asks.

"Why?" he yells through the door.

"Andrew would like to meet you, and thank you personally for finding his dog. He also wants to talk to you about the reward." There was no answer. "I'll take that as a yes." Andrew and Diana enter Blake's small bedroom.

"Hello there. I'm Andrew Burke. I wanted to thank you personally for taking such good care of Lassie Two. Looks like you two really have bonded."

"Yeah, he's a good dog," Blake said, as he looked down at the floor.

Lassie Two had already come back over and was sitting next to Blake. He immediately reached down to pet him.

"Blake, do you know there is a reward that goes to the person who finds our dog?"

"Yeah, I saw it on the poster. I heard Mom say no to it, though."

"Well, technically, since you are the one that found Lassie Two, I was just wondering if there might be something you would like to have? Your mom agreed that I could at least pose this question to you."

"A TV that works and cable," he blurted out. "I can't get anything on that thing." He pointed over towards a very old TV with a small screen with an antenna on top.

"Well, that settles it! Tomorrow, expect a delivery. That is, Diana, if you are not at work or something."

"No, not working yet. I hope to have a job soon, however," she added as an afterthought.

"If you don't mind me asking, what kind of work do you do? Or, maybe I should say, what kind of job are you looking for, specifically?"

"Well, I was a legal secretary for many years. The attorney I worked for handled family law mainly." She paused for a second and continued. "Working on divorces was always a little sad for me. There are far too many people in this world marrying the wrong person and too many children are being caught in the middle of it all," she remarked, as she looked over at Blake.

"I agree wholeheartedly. The children seem to always suffer the most."

Andrew looked at Diana, smiled and said, "This is quite a coincidence. I know you are aware that I am an attorney, from your initial call. What you don't know is that I practice family law exclusively, and that I am in need of an office assistant/legal secretary."

"The person who answered the phone is just a temp, and I was ready to put an ad in the paper because I felt she might be scaring new clients away with her unprofessional personality. Tomorrow, I had planned to let her go, and answer the phones myself if I had to."

Diana had to sit down. Andrew sat down beside her. "I know this is sudden and unexpected, but would you consider working with me? If tomorrow is too soon, and you need some time to get organized, I can be flexible on your start date. Temps are temporary. What I need is permanent."

Diana looked at him, as if to say, "I can and will be permanent in your life, Mr. Burke."

"Anyway, think about it and let me know what kind of starting salary you have in mind, and I'll work my numbers and see if I can afford you."

Diana laughed inwardly at his wonderful way of saying, I'll pay you whatever you want, because I want YOU! At least this is the thought she was hoping was in his mind.

The smile faded a bit as she remembered her circumstances. "My big problem, Andrew, is that I don't have a sitter for Blake yet. It scares me to death to think I may have to leave him with some stranger. I need to work, make that have to work, but leaving him with an unknown person, gives me cause for great concern."

"Okay - well, an idea. Yes, I guess I'm full of them today. My son is, of course, out of the school for the summer, as well. We already talked about Blake meeting Parker and coming over to play and visit the dog - right? Consider this arrangement, if you will."

"I have a wonderful woman named Nell, who has been with me even before my wife passed away. She is like family, and Parker loves her to death. She is an amazing cook, great dog walker, pal and buddy to Parker, and keeps my house looking like a Home and Garden magazine cover."

"You could bring Blake over and Nell will look after him, as well. I'm sure Parker would love having someone his age around. Blake would also be able to see the dog he rescued on a daily basis. It could be a win-win all the way around."

"Diana and Blake were BOTH sitting now, and Blake had a huge smile on his face.

"Mom, can we? PLEASE, PLEASE," he begged. "I want to see Lassie Two and I would have someone to play with. Nell sounds nice and she can cook." Diana laughed at this remark because her culinary skills were way below average and she knew Blake wasn't being mean, but just hopeful of good food, and truthful regarding her cooking.

The next morning at 10:00 a.m., Diana and Blake had a knock on the door. It was Best Buy. What they delivered was a 47-inch, flat-screen, high-def, Blue-Ray, 3D compatible TV with a DVD player. A little smaller version of the same TV and DVD player was also included for Blake's room.

At 10:45 a.m., the cable company showed up to install cable service for both sets. It was all signed, sealed and delivered courtesy of one Mr. Andrew Burke.

"I know - I know, quick saves. I am supposed to be doing quick saves," Sammy said out loud, as he pushed the next button on his communicator. He just could not help himself. As this magnificent love story began unfolding, he was hooked, and could not go on to the next screen. He knew Mary and Chris would love this save, and felt they would be surprised to know he sat and watched this much of it. He felt like he just watched all but the ending, of the greatest love story ever told.

He knew he had to get to work on other quick saves, but couldn't stop smiling as he thought about these three people, who found each other because of a dog.

All right, no more reminiscing. Time to move to screen number two. Sammy pushes the appropriate button and waits for the results to appear.

"This is hilarious!" Sammy is observing the words on a community sign inside a gated, golf community:

"Female Daschund Pup - Found.

Answers to the name of NO -- GO AWAY!

Call 505-2126 to claim."

Sammy knew he better find the owner quickly, as it sounded like this person or persons may not REALLY want a dog right now. He loved their sense of humor, however.

There's the dog. I see that this is a house with many cats. The little lost dog is definitely a minority in this home. The screen shows a young couple trying to keep the dog from being chased by their cats, but aren't having much luck.

Chaos is abounding, mainly from having a dog surrounded by four cats, in a cat friendly only, environment. Sammy could tell these people loved all animals, but just weren't sure how to break the news to the cats that they may have to share their home with a dog.

He does an on-screen search for the owner or owners, and quickly spots her driving around the area. Unfortunately, the elderly woman keeps turning before she gets down far enough, and has not seen any of the additional signs on the main roadway that the family put out.

Time for me to take control of the wheel, Sammy quickly decides.

He arrives inside the car with the dog's owner. A picture of the dog she was searching for is sitting on the passenger seat. The name written under the photo is Miss Dash.

"Um, okay, my dear, I am going to take you to your dog. Keep driving further down, and then look to the right, by the stop sign."

"Oh, my! There's a sign about a lost Daschund. Maybe it's my baby. I have to pull over, and write down that number."

"Where is that pen? I know I have one in here somewhere."

Sammy spots it wedged in the seat cushion. He tells her where to look.

She briefly looks around the car, searching for the reason she is hearing things, but quickly decides finding the pen is more important. She retrieves it and frantically writes down the number given on the poster.

Sammy knows this story is headed for another happy ending and a quicker save than his last one. Although screen two didn't take as long, it was just as rewarding, he felt.

After making sure Miss Dash was back in the arms of the person who loved her most, he relaxed a bit.

Daydreaming, he pondered these thoughts. Still can't believe I'm such a romantic. Wonder how Diana, Andrew, Blake and Parker are doing? Can't believe the size of the TV he sent for such a small apartment. I know! I have to get over it and give each screen my full attention.

Each lost and found screen turned out to be wonderful reunion stories for Sammy and the participants. There were also several that weren't reunions at all, but rescues of pets from abusive owners, who didn't deserve them in the first place. Getting the owners arrested for animal abuse was also a plus. Seeing the arrests play out on screen and seeing the animals go to deserving families was also part of Sammy's amazing quick saves. "I love being able to watch this kind of TV," he declared to his "Double C."

While watching all the happy endings unfold, he also had a flashback that was not pleasant at all. Abusing an animal is just what I did years ago when I left that injured dog, he suddenly remembers. Sammy tries to quickly clear his head and move on.

Walter was also trying to move on, and was looking at a completely different scenario for his saves. His communicator showed unknown feral cat colonies. His job was to match up rescue groups with feral cats. Hundreds of cats were helped by having them spayed and neutered. Their locations were noted by the rescue groups, so they could have their volunteers start leaving food and water for the many cats who call the woods their home, and humanely trap those who had not yet made their trip to the vet to be fixed.



First Meeting

Mary, Chris, Sammy, Nick and Walter all began receiving a flashing message on their “Double C,” as Sammy creatively nicknamed the device. Their screens show the caller as Rose.

“Hello, everyone.” Hellos all around, echoed back. “I don’t have to ask you how you are and how you are enjoying your assignment. I can see the saves when they are happening and I can feel your contentment and happiness after each one takes place.”

“You are all true animal angels now, with many saves under your belt. I felt it was time to get together as a group, back in your room; sit down with each other and reflect. Consider it a little break, if you will.”

“Please bring your room up on your screen. You know what to do after that. I’ll meet you there.” The angels were looking forward to seeing each other and Rose, as well.

Upon their arrival, they notice the room seems a little different now. The angels’ general impression was that it felt somewhat larger than before, with a more casual feel to it.

Each person instinctually knew where to sit. They felt at ease with themselves, and for the first time, really felt at home in this, their own, special room.

They all had noted the addition of more small seating areas. Nick was thinking, I wonder what kind of moving company delivers here? He smiled to himself as this thought entered his mind.

It still smelled like the most expensive bouquet of roses that money could buy. You could not help but sniff and smell the roses in this room. Chris’s

thoughts were Rose could have made a fortune on earth with 'Fragrance By Rose' at Macy's. Rose was not even in the room as yet, but the essence of roses filled the room. It was not an overpowering smell, but a rose on a vine in springtime, rose smell.

As they sat and continued to survey the room and the changes made since their last visit, Nick notices an area that looks like cubicles in an office, with dividers. "Looks like we might be in for some office work. I hope Rose doesn't think I can type."

Everyone laughed at Nick's sense of wonder and humor. Walter gave him a good-natured tap on the back. "Leave it to Nick to makes us laugh."

Nick just smiled at everyone with his boyish grin.

As Chris studied Nick, her thoughts were - what a good-looking kid he is. Too bad he just got his life straight on earth and then it had to end. He might have even made a decent husband and father.

As before, the lights went out in the room, and the vibrating started. Time for the strobos, Sammy thought to himself. No sooner than the thought entered his mind and everyone else's, the lights began flashing. When everything stopped, Rose was seated at the head of the table. Everyone still wondered how Rose entered, and if they would ever get to see it for themselves. Of course, no one was brave enough to ask about this particular subject.

All eyes and ears were glued to the amazing beauty of their mentor and spiritual guide. Rose, in her usual captivating presence, made every angel feel right at home. Knowing her as they did now, made her even more special to them.

"First, I want to say thank you for doing such a wonderful job of saving animals on earth. I can feel your happiness and see your commitment in each rescue."

"I guess you've noticed a few changes in your room." All heads nodded. "Each of you now has a workspace and a separate rest area, where you can continue to do quick saves on your communicators, or just take some time off when you need it."

Rose got up from her seat and pushed a button on the wall. A very large screen appeared.

"That's some big screen TV," Sammy said. "Does it have Blue-Ray, Hi-Def or 3D?"

"Yes, yes, and yes!" They all laughed at Rose's subtle and wonderful sense of humor.

"I have a pleasant surprise for each of you." Rose's statement got everyone's attention.

"Oh, I just love surprises," Mary said. Everyone smiled and agreed wholeheartedly with her.

"Each one of your saves, rescues and experiences are recorded. Now, you all have the ability to see yourselves in action, from your first save up until now. Sorry, but I am out of popcorn, however," she added.

Laughter filled the room.

Several of the angels began thinking about popcorn. It was then they realized there was no desire to eat. They realized for the first time, they had not had any food or drink since they first met in this room.

"We don't eat or drink anymore, do we, Rose?" Walter asks. Every face turns toward Rose.

"That is correct, Walter. There is no desire and no need for these earthly necessities any longer."

"I guess that means we don't need a bathroom break either," Nick said.

Rose just smiled, as she knew, he already knew the answer to that question.

Her personal thoughts were that this group of animal angels could not look happier or be more relaxed, as they prepared to see themselves staring in their new roles. She remembered the difference in their expressions the first time she met them, as compared to now. She loved watching the new camaraderie between them.

The screen came alive, and scenes began with the first rescue of Sammy with the sleepy truck driver. It ran like a movie, with each save, playing out in its entirety. The angels high-fived each other - laughed out loud - and cried during many scenes. Each, felt a new closeness with their kindred spirits.

When it was over, the lights came on. The angels looked at each other, admiringly. "Best movie I ever watched," Mary said.

"Worthy of an academy award," expressed Nick. All smiled, and equally agreed.

"Not sure what academy that would be, Nick," Sammy said, jokingly.

"Yeah, you're right about that."

Sometime during the showing, Rose exited. Everyone became aware of this when the lights came back on. However, in a blink of an eye, she was once again at the head of the table. They notice the entrance seems to be a bit abbreviated this time.

"Well, what do you think? Did watching yourselves in your new roles, give you a better idea of just how important your role really is to the animals on earth?" Suddenly everyone began talking at once, due to their on-screen overload.

"Our saves are pretty amazing stuff," Chris said. "Seeing everything happen, in living color, and for all to share, is really beyond description for me."

'Ya know, I haven't once thought about my girlfriend, or girlfriends, or the not-so-nice life I used to lead," Nick said. "I am totally into being an animal angel. So, yeah, guess that is my description, right there."

Walter spoke up. "I haven't felt so fulfilled and happy as right now. Helping animals and people, as it has turned out, is more gratifying than anything I ever did while I was alive."

ALIVE - those words struck a familiar chord with everyone. It brought them all back to the inevitable conclusion they were, in fact, all dead. They no longer existed on earth as mere mortals. Their existence now was dead on earth, but alive in heaven as animal angels.

"My pet-less life was so unnecessary, selfish and just plain stupid," Mary said. "I love animals with all my heart. My silly reasoning for not having pets seems so senseless to me now."

"I second that, Mary. I was just as stupid to think you could just toss animals away as I did. I was thinking only of myself. I wasn't pet-less, but should have been due to my stinking-thinking," Chris said.

"Stinking-thinking - cute, Chris. That sounds more like a Nick term," Walter was quick to point out. He nudged Nick, as it said it.

Sammy chimed in with similar thoughts and praise of animals and expressed his eagerness to get back on the job.

Rose loved hearing from each of the angels, and knew that soon their guilt would be gone. All eyes were on her, as she stood up. "Feel free to stay here and work from home, so to speak, on your quick saves. You have plenty of room to focus on your tasks at hand. Please remember, you can always come back to the quick saves, as you may be called away for an immediate need at any time."

Mary, Chris, Walter, Sammy and Nick picked out a space and sat down in the office chairs provided. The comfortable chairs not only swiveled, but rocked back and forth as well. Nick was the first to turn a few circles before getting busy.

All communicators started going off at once. Each acknowledged the call and were on their way to more adventures as animal angels. The Florida animal angels each had a new scenario, new challenge, and a chance to heal both animals and themselves. They were more than ready for firsthand, heavy-duty, frontline healing and saving.



Back to Work

Walter's scene is a horrific one. He sees two, large Pit Bulls cornering a cat, ready to attack. The small, little yellow cat in her best defense mode, standing tall on her little legs, is 'presenting' as much of her small body as possible to the fearsome looking dogs. But, one look at the dogs shows how hopeless the fight would be. He lands right in the middle of the ferocious looking dogs.

His presence affects them in a very strange way. They both stop growling and become absolutely quiet. The saliva drips from their mouths.

"Back! Back, you two!" he yells. "Leave this kitten alone and sit down - NOW!" They move back several steps away from the cat.

Both dogs obey the voice and the presence. Walter is able to summon an animal control officer by way of his communicator and the truck's radio. The truck is close by.

When the officer arrives, he can't believe his eyes. Two Pit Bull dogs are just sitting on the grass, as if they are waiting for a ride in his truck. Neither had a collar or tags, so they were out illegally. Walter stayed around to make sure the dogs behaved, and didn't give the animal control officer any trouble before attending to the kitten and its owner.

It bothered Walter that the dogs would more than likely be humanely euthanized, but he also recognized that dogs trained to be this ferocious were harmful to themselves and society.

The little cat ran towards home. Walter followed to see exactly where home was located. The owner was sitting on the porch.

"There you are, Pumpkin. I wondered where you went off to."

Walter talks directly into her ear. "There are many stray dogs roaming in this neighborhood. You need to keep Pumpkin in the house or she may not make it home safely one day."

Pumpkin's owner stood up as if she had a sudden thought. "Let's go inside. I don't think I want you to be an indoor/outdoor cat anymore. I don't want to ever lose you, little love." With a kiss on the forehead, she picked up Pumpkin and went inside. This was to be Pumpkin's last time to see the great outdoors, except through a window.

"Wow – it's really coming down," Walter remarks, as he looks at his next screen. He wonders if it is a tropical depression or hurricane. He knows they both can cause a lot of damage with high winds and rain. "Looks like this is one rainy storm, whatever it is." He talks out loud as he scans.

After studying the screen for a few seconds, he sees his mission all too clearly. There are animals at the shelter in Jacksonville that could possibly drown with the rising water. He also sees other animals in nearby cages that need to be led to higher ground.

He has a sudden thought about getting wet, and wonders if he will feel this same water beating down on him. He knew he would soon find out.

Walter takes quick note that there are several animals in the outdoor cages. The old saying "it's raining cats and dogs" comes to mind. Continual barking of several dogs also caught his attention. As he materializes, he sees a kennel with four puppies inside. They are whimpering and barking, almost simultaneously.

"Poor little guys. Don't worry. I'll make sure someone gets you out of there and into a dry area. Hang on." The pups are standing in about three inches of water. Next to this kennel are several cats and two large dogs, all voicing their fear as the rain pours in on them.

He knew that if the heavy rain kept up and no one moved these animals, they could possibly drown. His first thought was to find out what all the volunteers and shelter personnel were doing, and alert them to the situation outside.

He found that surprisingly enough, he did NOT feel the rain beating down on his face, nor was he getting the least bit wet. Walter knew this was going to be a real plus during this assignment.

Now aware of why the personnel are forgetting some of the animals outside, he notes the frantic activity going on inside. The building is partially flooded and the workers are moving the occupants to higher ground and taking files and paperwork out of the office to place in boxes on higher shelves.

Walter observes two men who didn't seem to look that busy. They appeared to be waiting for further orders from the staff. He goes over and speaks directly to them. "There are animals in the outside cages that are wet, scared and could drown if they are not attended to. Go to them now before it's too late."

Both men proceed to get carriers and leashes. They put on their rain gear, and rush outside to the kennels. "Get the pups, man. They are small and the water is coming up on them fast," he said to his partner.

"Yeah, you're right. I'm there. No way I'm letting these guys die this way." He got the pups one-by-one and placed them in the carrier on top of a dry towel.

"I'm moving on to the cats, and then we'll get the larger dogs. Here, hold the cage while I get this pup in." Both men worked tirelessly getting each animal out of the outdoor kennels and into carriers or led by lease inside the building.

When they had finished, they came back into the building and took off their very wet outer rain gear. "Good job, men," the director said. "I was so busy in here, that unfortunately, I had momentarily forgotten about these guys you brought in. You saved the puppies' lives. I doubt if they could have made it much longer out there with all that rain."

"Two local men save animals at shelter." This was the big headline in the local Jacksonville paper two days later. The men were interviewed, photographed and even given a commendation by the city. The men, who used to be nameless, were now known to all of Jacksonville.

Walter later learned they were unemployed brothers who loved animals and volunteered their time at the shelter. They were in construction and had been

recently laid off, due to the economy. The information gained also said that their employer had skipped town, taking with him their last paychecks.

The reporter who did the interview went into depth about their background, and made it a point to describe their circumstances. Within one day, they were both gainfully employed again and the entire town of Jacksonville viewed them as their heroes.

Walter smiled as he read the article on his communicator and learned for the first time the background on the two men he pegged to help with his rescue. He knew he had definitely chosen the right helpers, and at the right time for them as well.

Now to find more animals in distress because of this flooding. Walter searched the screens, looking for other areas of need in Jacksonville.

The storm raged on for days in and around Jacksonville. Walter was able to get hundreds of feral cats and strays to higher ground. By alerting the cat and dog rescue groups where these animals were, he was able to get human help as well.

On day three, the rain finally stopped. The Black Creek, near a suburb of Jacksonville, had crested and was over the banks. Many of the homes around this creek were now under water, and their occupants were still in shelters at the Middleburg High School. Since the shelters did not take pets, these people had to leave their animals either with friends or behind. Walter made sure no animal was left behind. He led the cats and dogs to safety, and was even able to reunite them with the families.

Whew, this one was pretty tense, Walter decided. He remembered how he never thought about what happens to animals during weather related emergencies before. He was always simply content to sit in his house and watch the weather guy tell him what was happening outside, but never really relating to any of the boring details.

Think I'll head to higher ground myself and do more quick saves from there. He laughed to himself with the thought. Hey, if anyone needs me, I'll be in my room. He pushed the appropriate button on his communicator.

"Hey, Nick, what are you doing here?"

"Hanging and saving."

"Want to hang together?" Walter smiled, waiting for Nick's witty comeback.

Nick was quick to 'get-it.' He gave Walter a thumbs up for response and let him have the last funny line this time.

"Just two angels working in our cubicles, side by side, and on the side of all animals on earth. What an amazing feeling this is," Walter said to Nick.

"Yeah, man, you can't beat it. Best job in the world, or out of this world, I guess we have to think," Nick said. They both grinned with that observation and began to study their screens for animals in distress.

Mary, watching her screen for animals in distress also, gets the call for help. She doesn't like what she is seeing on her screen at all. As she continues to watch and listen, the story begins to unfold before her eyes.

"It's so wonderful to get away from the office for a week, and see the grand-kids. We get to take a break from the clients' problems, and enjoy ourselves. Being a bankruptcy attorney isn't a fun job by any means," Harold said to his wife, Trish.

"No, but it's a service that is needed and a good, old-fashioned boy to handle things for the troubled clients is certainly of their best interest," Trish proclaims.

"What a wonderful way of putting my occupation into perspective for me. I don't feel like such a 'bad guy' now."

"Hey, Harold, know what - your driving isn't scaring me today. Guess that good breakfast at the hotel and the extra cup of 'real' coffee has put me at total ease."

"What do you mean, scare you? I drive like a little, old lady - or little, old man, I guess you'd say." They both laugh at his comparison.

"Just you, me and the road. Only 1,024 more miles to Indiana. Hope Carolyn has learned to make something other than hotdogs by now," Harold said, with a hopeful expression on his face. "Our daughter-in-law is a love, but cooking just isn't one of her strong points."

“Well, yes, we'll probably eat out a lot, but who cares,” Trish said. “We get to see Mandy and Ben, and that will make the trip all worthwhile, good food or not.”

Just as they were reminiscing about talking with and seeing their grandchildren by way of Skype, a movement up ahead caught Harold's attention. “Hey, look! That guy in the pickup dropped something out of his truck. He just slowed down and threw the box out, up there on the bridge we're coming up to. Talk about littering.”

Harold carefully pulled up on the bridge and notices a box sticking partly out in the lane and a small, white spot of ‘something’ lying nearby.

“Oh, NO. Is that a cat?” Trish asks. They now realize the guy in the truck had purposely thrown this box out, with the cat inside of it, while he was still moving. The box ripped open, causing the cat to fall out on impact.

Harold quickly puts the caution blinkers on and pulls over. He maneuvers the car off to the side, so as not to block traffic or put them in any danger. They get out of the car and quickly walk toward the cat. What lies before them is a solid white cat lying motionless on the pavement. There is blood everywhere.

“This poor little kitty hit the road pretty hard by the looks of it,” Harold points out. The kitten is bleeding in several areas, with blood showing up bright red on the solid white fur. “This side of the head is probably where it made contact with the road.” He shows Trish, as he gingerly moves the head just a little. “He or she is alive, but barely.”

Trish takes off and runs to the car, grabbing a towel from her suitcase. She hurries back and kneels down to the cat. She very gently, picks up the injured cat. The cat is limp in her arms.

“What do we do now?” Harold asks.

“Get on that fancy GPS thing of ours and locate the nearest animal ER. I just pray there is one near, as I'm not sure this little cat will last long without medical attention.”

Mary watches this unfold on her communicator. She joins Harold, Trish and the injured cat in the car and begins her examination. She is was very con-

cerned about what she is seeing and hearing, or not hearing. The breathing is definitely shallow. The cat has taken a really hard spill onto the road.

Mary decides to try her healing abilities, but something is telling her that the left eye has been damaged too much to save. She places her hands on both sides of the cat and immediately feels the spark of electricity. She knows in an instant she has been able to heal to some degree, as well as stop the internal bleeding and ease the cat's pain.

There were still obvious, head wounds and trauma to the left eye, in particular. Mary knew that the cat must be seen by a vet and quickly, even though she was able to heal many of her hurts. The eye would be a real problem, she knew just by looking.

The GPS showed an animal ER five miles down the road. "We're in luck," Trish said. "Keep heading down this road until we get to Front Avenue, and turn right."

"Harold, quit driving like a little, old man. We have to save this kitty. Speed it up, please."

At the ER, the vet gave Harold and Trish the good and the bad news. The good news was that there were no apparent broken bones or internal injuries. The bad news was they could not save the eye, and would need to do surgery to remove the entire eye. They were also told they didn't see any sign of brain damage, but that time would tell.

Harold and Trish explained the circumstances and described the truck driver who dropped the little cat on the road. They also explained that they were on their way to Indiana to visit family, but would pay for the ER services and take the cat with them, if the vet thought it could travel.

"Your kitty is a girl, by the way," the vet said.

"Any way you kind folks could stay one or two more days in our fair town? After today's surgery, we need to keep her for at least another day and night, in case there are complications. We would also like to do more X-rays and blood work to make sure we haven't missed anything."

"It's a miracle she even lived through being thrown out of a moving vehicle. I wish I knew who did this. I'd make sure the authorities knew about this animal abuse."

"Yeah, I just wish we had gotten the tag number and a description or something," Harold adds.

Harold and Trish look at each other and then back at the vet. Trish spoke first. "Sure, of course, we want Bridgette to get the best treatment and a chance to recover a bit before we hit the road again."

Harold looks at his wife with a puzzled look on his face. "What did you call her?"

"Bridgette! We found her on a bridge, so it's only fitting to name her Bridgette." Harold totally agreed.

"Well, I guess back to the hotel's great lunch buffet. Force me to eat - will 'ya?"

"Force you to eat is certainly something I've never had to do in our 34 years of marriage," Trish reminded, as she waved a finger in front of his face.

They return to the hotel and check back in, just in time for the lunch buffet. Harold is forced to fill his plate twice.

Trish finishes her modest portion and gets up from the table. "I'm going to go call the hospital and check on Bridgette. You stay and finish your second slice of pie."

"Okey-doke. I'll meet you upstairs in a little while, and stop worrying that I will snatch another dessert from the dessert isle. I'm too full - really!"

Trish smiles at her wonderful husband, an animal lover and a terrific guy. Her heart swells with admiration for the man she adores.

As Harold finishes off the rest of his food, he realizes they have nothing for Bridgette. He quickly takes the extra napkin and begins making a list.

"Let's see, we'll need a small litter box, litter, bowls, cat food, bottled water, and of course, a few toys so little Bridgette won't get bored on the ride to see the relatives." He was not even thinking of the fact that she would not be in any

shape to play on the ride to see the relatives. "Better get a few treats for us, as well." Harold added them to his list. He quickly polishes off the last few bites; leaves the table and heads for the front desk.

"Hello, young man. I wonder if you might know where I can get some pet supplies?" Harold gives a detailed report of the incident on the bridge and the ongoing treatment at the ER before the trip to Indiana. As he goes into great detail about Bridgette, he notices a sign over the copy machine reading, "Be sure to administer to our strict, No-Pet Policy."

"Oh, don't worry about that sign," the clerk said, after he saw Harold reading it. "Heck, I'll smuggle the cat in myself if I have to." Harold laughed out loud, as he gave the clerk a knowing wink.

"I think Bridgette should be good to go maybe some time tomorrow. My wife is calling the vet now."

"Seriously, if you need to keep her here with you, let me know. I have four cats, two dogs and even a pet pig. What you did for that cat is wonderful, in my opinion. If they fire me, so what."

I love this guy, Harold decides. He looks up in time to see Trish coming around the corner of the lobby searching for him.

She locates her AWOL husband and hurries over to his side. "The surgery on the eye went well. Bridgette will be blind in that one eye, of course, but there are no further injuries from what they have seen. The vet is happy with her progress."

"Ya know, I decided to come looking for you when you didn't show up in the room. Did you get lost or what? I also needed to make sure you didn't go back through the buffet line again. That waist is moving east and west a little too much these days, I've noticed."

Harold and his new buddy at the front desk smile at her comments. He quickly explains to his wife about the need for cat supplies, and why he was, where he was. "My friend here knows just where we need to go and is an animal lover himself." Trish smiles her approval at both of the fine gentlemen in front of her.

"There's a Petco a few miles down the road. I'll give you the directions. They should have all the supplies you'll need. Here it is on this map." He points out the street.

"I have a \$2 off coupon on Fancy Feast wet food, if you want it."

"No, you keep it! With your crew at home, think you'll need it even more. Thanks, anyway."

"Ready to go shopping, Hon?"

"Lead on."

"Oh, I'm Jerry, by the way. I'll be here again tomorrow if you need anything."

"Thanks a bunch, Jerry. Appreciate your help and kindness," Trish said, as she waves to him from the door.

"That Jerry is one really nice guy," Harold acknowledged, as they walked out hand in hand.

Mary knew little Bridgette would have a handicap, but knew that these two fine people would love her unconditionally, and that Bridgette would love them back. Not being able to see, except on one side, would not slow this cat down. She viewed on fast-forward, the rest of the trip, including the visit with their family, the trip home and Bridgette's new life with Trish and Harold. Mary could not be any more pleased with what she was seeing. She was even able to see that Bridgette would live on to the ripe old age of 14, which is pretty old for a cat.

There were no worries about this little cat's future, she knew for a fact. This makes two cats now, with only one eye, that will have a great life. She looked up the other little cat from the shelter and saw a very gratifying family scene as well, with the cat and little boy that loved her at first sight. Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder, she knew.

Just as she was watching the outcome for Bridgette, she sees a red flag pop up on her screen. This was something she had never seen before. It was literally a red flag. A picture came on of a dog lying on a dog bed. The caption underneath got her attention. Jerry's dog is dying of kidney failure. She sees the cats and other dog nearby. They seem to know the dog is in trouble today.

She uses her device to get inside his home, and sees the Beagle, Jerry has named Rowley, after a deceased friend. Rowley seems to have no energy and doesn't look well at all. She reads that his condition is chronic and has progressed during the last month. His kidneys are shutting down, and he doesn't have much time. She wonders why Jerry didn't mention this to Trish and Harold. Perhaps he didn't want to burden them further was the only explanation she could come up with.

She notices a bottle of pills from the vet on the counter, and a note from his neighbor and friend, Val. She reads it. "Jerry, I took Rowley and Jasper out three times today for a walk. It took a lot of coaxing just to get Rowley off his bed. He didn't want to walk at all. He just did his business and went back to the door. I think he is getting worse. You may want to get an emergency appointment with your vet. Sorry for the bad news." Val

Mary sat on the floor beside Rowley. "OK, my darling, let's try to give Jerry one less thing to worry about in his lifetime. Don't move. Please lay perfectly still for me." She laid her hands on the dog's body and felt the contact. The spark comes and goes. Rowley is still lying perfectly still and does not jump when the treatment is administered.

She quickly goes to the communicator for the update, praying the treatment worked. "SUCCESSFUL" was the word she got. She let out a sigh of relief, and wiped a tear from her eye.

Sitting on the sofa, talking to the other pets, she watches Rowley. He is now up, and heading over to the food dishes. He looks over at Mary and then begins eating like he is starving.

Helping Jerry, by saving his dog, made her feel like his guardian angel as well. "I just love it when we help both animals and people," she said to the cats and dogs, which were now clustered around her. When she hears a door open, she knows it has to be Jerry coming home from work. She is excited about what he is going to see.

All the animals hurry over to greet him when he enters his house, including Rowley. In fact, Rowley is the first one there and the first one to jump on him. Jerry is startled.

“Hey, boy, where did you get all that energy? You look really good. Guess that medicine is finally working.” Mary knows she was the only medicine today and that other medications will not be needed. He was completely healed, and the disease would not return.

Another angel is going to be able to feel this gratification as well. Chris, who has been doing quick saves from the room, stops for a minute to relax. She feels happy about what she has been able to do thus far for animals, and recounts some of her favorite moments. The communicator brings her back down to the role she has been chosen for.

A scene all too typical for many vet offices, animal hospitals and shelters is being shown for her. Animals are put in boxes or crates and just dumped off, for someone else to worry about. Chris shook her head with displeasure at the pictures before her. What she was looking at was a momma cat and five babies, in a taped up box, with air holes punched in the sides. It’s amazing how I have sort of X-ray vision to see through that box, she thought. She immediately notices the momma cat is very weak and not even trying to fight her way out.

The screen is not showing her how long the cats had been out there, but she knows momma is not well, and the babies are suffering because of her condition.

I have to get help and fast for all of them, she knew. The Bengal cat and her mix of five, meowed nonstop. Mom moved around, trying to get comfortable, to get in a position where the kittens could nurse. Chris wondered if she even had any milk to give.

Thank goodness the ‘dumper’ at least dropped them near a vet office. However, not many people are going to think anything of a box in a grassy area. It’s even partially hidden by the tall grass, she notices.

“Time to get these guys noticed,” she said to the picture on the screen. She knew she had to get help for Mom quickly and the babies needed nourishment to even make it. She began surveying the general area for a plan.

"Suzanne, I'm going outside for my break and to smoke a cigarette," Dina said. "I know! I know! It's horrible that I still have this disgusting habit that most of the world has broken. I'll be back in fifteen."

Dina walked out the front door and decided to go even further away from the office to light up because she was embarrassed by her habit. Chris knew this was her opportunity to alert someone about the dumped, precious cargo. "Time to materialize."

Chris walks up to Dina and speaks to her. "Go check out that big box over in the grass."

Dina starts immediately walking toward the box in question. She put out the cigarette and threw it away, and opens the box. She already knows before the unveiling, what she is going to find inside. She could hear the nonstop cat noises, even before she got to the box.

"Oh, my goodness! Look at you guys! Momma, you look terrible."

She tapes the box back up so the kittens wouldn't get out, and runs back to the office for help. "Stay there," she yells back to them.

"See what smoking is doing to you, Dina," Suzanne said. "You are huffing and puffing."

"No! No! Not the cigs," she said in an urgent, almost breathless voice.

"It's outside. Come! Help me! Bring two carriers. Hurry, please!"

Suzanne gives her a puzzled look, but follows her orders. Dina runs back to the box, and its occupants, and reassures them that help is on the way. She pets Momma and assures her that no one will hurt her or the kittens. "Hold on, Momma. We are going to fix you right up and help you feed these little ones as well."

Suzanne arrives with the carriers and two other vet techs. They all pitch in to help get the kittens out of the box and into a carrier. They also gingerly take the frail momma cat and place her into her own carrier. "Let's get them into see Dr. Velasko," Dina says.

Fortunately, Dr. Velasko was in between patients and was more than happy to take a look at the new arrivals. After a thorough exam of Mom and the five kittens, he told the anxious Dina and Suzanne that the kittens all looked pretty healthy, considering the weather, and lack of proper nutrition. Mom, on the other hand, was very malnourished and weak. He also informed them she had a heart murmur.

"We need to give Mom some fluid by IV, and nourishment as well. Ladies, it will be up to you to feed the little ones, because she is not going to be any help to them for a while. We'll put her back with her kittens when she feels better."

The little meows and the kitty mix of colors brought smiles to Dina and Suzanne, because they knew they would get to be the momma. They went right to their duties by using eyedroppers to feed the babies.

"When they are old enough, I want those two," Suzanne tells Dina.

"What is it with you and black and white? You wear those colors a lot and now you want the black kitty and the white one. What's up with that?"

"Well, you should take that smokey one over there, since you love to smoke so much." Dina gives Suzanne a good-natured push and reminds her that if she had not gone out for a smoke, they may not have found the box so quickly.

"You're right. You're right! But, if you weren't a smoker, the run from the wooded area to the front door of the office would not have left you acting like you had just ran a marathon. Remember all the huffing and puffing?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Maybe I'll try the patch or something. Spending all my money on cigarettes is really bumming me out anyway. I do like the name Smokey, however," Dina said, as she reaches over to pet her new little cat.

Just as Dina and Suzanne were finishing up with the babies, Dr. Velasko arrives and gives them the good news. "There is already improvement in the momma cat. It is a mild murmur, and I don't see an advanced heart condition. I am going to take her home with me tonight to keep an eye on her and we'll get the warmers on for the babies, so they will have a warm body to sleep next to."

"I heard you girls are going to adopt three of the five kittens. That's wonderful! Guess I need to do my part and take Momma and the other two."

"Are you SERIOUS?" Dina asks. "I knew you were a great doc, but didn't know you were such a softy as well." All three laughed at her remarks.

"So, show me which of the two left are my new family members-to-be. I have to start thinking of names. I am going to call the momma, Daisy. My sister died at a young age and that was her name. She never got to be a mom herself. But, kitty Daisy, will be well enough in a few days to be a mom to her five."

Dina and Suzanne look at Dr. Velasko with a new respect and admiration and felt sad about his sister. No one in the office had ever talked about this before.

Chris also looked at him with admiration and respect, and was saddened by the story of his sister. Seeing Suzanne, Dina and Dr. Velasko have no qualms about taking in these cats reminded her of what a terrible thing she did, by taking in the two boys and then discarding them like they were nothing special.

She wondered how she could have been that heartless. She also wondered if they ever felt lost and afraid or if they missed the lady that gave them food and water. "Jerk, jerk, jerk," she said to herself.

Chris didn't get to feel guilty very long, as her communicator was asking for her full attention. She watched her screen for the details of her next challenge.

"George, be careful when you take Abe out to do his business. Too Much is getting curious about the outside and has tried to get around the dog twice today. Not sure why now, all of a sudden, she wants to venture outdoors. Guess she doesn't remember that we saved her from the great outdoors. Most cats will always have that yearning no matter what bad experiences they had in the past, I guess."

"Well, it's a full moon again tonight. Maybe that's it," George said. "All the animals act a little crazy when there's a full moon."

"True, but Too Much hasn't been out for over a year now, and wouldn't even know what to do out there," Betty said. She doesn't know the neighborhood like she did in the area where we rescued her. I'll never forget when we first saw her looking so dirty and that chewed up ear broke my heart. Guess another cat or dog took a bite out of her. Glad our vet is such a genius."

“Can’t even tell where that place was now,” George said, as he massaged the once injured ear.

“Well, I’m going to make sure this little kitty doesn’t get her way, and get outside for a peek at this neighborhood. Maybe I’ll get some of that cat grass they have at PetSmart. They say cats miss eating the grass.” Betty continues thumbing through her magazine.

“Guess it couldn’t hurt to try the grass. I’ll be careful though, when I open the door - I promise,” George said, as he crossed his heart.

Chris watches George and Betty sitting on their couch petting Too Much. Betty is brushing her ever so gently. Too Much, a Maine Coon, has long flowing hair. The whites and browns are a beautiful combination, she notices. She also notices how much George and Betty really adore this kitty.

“I know this won’t stay happy because I was called to watch the scenes unfold and render aid. I just hope the aid is sufficient for Too Much,” she said to the communicator.

“I need to fast forward this and see the save part,” Chris said to the screen. She forwarded through screens just like she did on her TV set at home, when watching a taped, favorite show. She watches George open the front door quickly and take Abe out for a walk. She watches him return and once again, he’s being very careful of the door. So far, so good, she notes.

Next she sees the neighbors, Margo and Frank, ringing the doorbell. Frank has a deck of cards in his hand. Margo is carrying a chocolate cake. Must be coming over to play cards with Betty and George, she decides.

George opens the door and starts a conversation with his neighbors. They stand in the doorway just long enough for the ‘great escape.’ Too Much, staying true to her name, saw way too much outside from her vantage point on the cat condo. She zips past everyone, and runs out the door to freedom. The full moon beckoned, inviting her to explore with the increased illumination it provided.

George screams to Betty that Too Much is out, and Betty screams back at George a remark she will probably regret later. The neighbors feel it is their fault since they were the ones who came to the door in the first place. Betty

and George grab flashlights. Margo and Frank go next door to get theirs, so they can join in on the search.

Betty sits down on the front steps and begins to cry. “George, I didn’t say anything before, but I had a horrible dream about Too Much the other night. It has to do with the pond behind us.” Chris immediately zooms in on the pond. It is directly behind their house and covers about three acres.

“Betty, don’t think about it now. I am sure it was just a dream,” George assures her.

“It was very real! It was an alligator!”

“Betty, you should not be listening to the kids on the other side of us. You know they are always exploring, trying to find hidden treasure and they love to make up stories about the pond. I am sure there are no gators back there. To set your mind at ease, we’ll go there first. Look, here comes Frank and Margo to help.”

Hearing Betty’s dream and the remarks about the pond, Chris fears the worst for Too Much. She zeros in on the location of the cat, and materializes next to the pond. She immediately sees a lot of splashing going on out in the middle of the pond, and a quick look at the screen, confirms her worst fear. The predator is a huge 8-foot alligator, and the prey is indeed, Too Much.

Without hesitation or delay, Chris goes into the water and stands directly next to the alligator. “Drop the cat now and move away from it. Go back to the river that empties into this pond - now!”

The alligator immediately drops Too Much and swims off in the direction of the river. Too Much is lifeless and bleeding. His little body sinks quickly to the bottom of the pond.

“Come on, baby, let’s get you out of here.” Chris quickly picks up the cat, and heads to a grassy area. The healing process is started, as she knows Too Much does not have much time to survive.

The lungs are cleared out first and the pain is taken away. Next the bite marks are closed up. Chris knows that Too Much is still in shock, and needs human help as well, and she knows just where to find it.

“Flashlights are headed her way. With the extra light from the full moon, this extra illumination is not needed at all.

She goes to George and tells him to go to the left of the banks of the pond. She further adds, for him alone to hear, that it was an alligator that attacked the cat and that Too Much is in shock and needs immediate emergency care.

“Let’s head this way,” George shouts to Betty, Frank and Margo. They all look at him and then take off in a full run in the direction he is suggesting.

Betty quickly spots Too Much and kneels down beside her. “Is she dead, George?” She doesn’t wait for the answer, but gets up and starts pacing back and forth, looking at the pond. “It was an alligator, just like my dream. This is all too familiar. Too Much was hurt by an alligator,” she screams at the water. “My dream played out. We can’t let her die,” she continues screaming at the pond, and now George and the others.

Betty finally gets hold of herself; runs in the house and returns with a blanket and carrier. She scoops Too Much up and tells George to get the carrier in the car. Margo and Frank agree they want to come along as well. The four take off in the direction of the Animal Emergency Room. Too Much is alive, but still in shock.

Chris sits down on the ground next to the pond and watches the screens for updates, wondering if this is one that will not make it. She remembers that Mary had already lost a cat. All she could do was sit, watch and wait for the outcome.

She quickly goes to the final screen and holds her breath before she pushes ‘final update.’ She closes her eyes, and then opens them again. Chris is now looking at the outcome.

What she is seeing brings a big smile to her face. Too Much does live and George and Betty now take even more special precautions any time a door is opened in their house. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission posted Danger Signs at the pond and are making sure there are no more gators calling it home.

After this very dramatic save, Chris decides a little rest and ‘whew moments’ are something she needs in the room. She pushes the button and heads for a break.

Walter is just leaving the room as Chris is arriving. They talk briefly before his attention is diverted to his communicator.

He is receiving a picture of an injured dog laying in a heavy brush area of the Lake Talquin State Park, in Tallahassee. After reviewing the other subsequent screens, he sees that the dog was trying to protect a little boy who is shown huddled under a tree. The boy, named Andy, wandered off from his campsite and is lost.

Further notes indicate a black bear and three cubs are still nearby, and the mother bear has already injured the dog.

Walter knew this could turn very bad, very quickly. He decides he needs to relocate Momma and the cubs first. He would then concentrate on Andy and the injured dog, he so creatively named Fetch. He knew Fetch was injured, but also know it was not life threatening. With the realization that the bears could come back at any time to attack again, he wasted no time getting there.

"OK, momma bear, listen to me very carefully," Walter said, to the leader of the pack. "You need to get up right now and lead your cubs to a more remote area, over by that stream. Follow me."

He resumed talking to the mother bear. "Another reason I need to relocate you guys is some people overreact when they think a family member is in danger and I don't want anyone getting hurt in this save."

The mother bear got up and stretched, and in all her 265-pound glory, she stood up full height for an even better stretch. "Whoa, you ARE big," Sammy took notice. She also looked very fierce, as all momma bears probably look when they are defending their cubs, he surmised.

"OK, here we go." He led them to an area about two miles away, complete with a stream that held plenty of fish. He knew this was the perfect spot for them. "Stay here, and don't leave this area unless danger comes your way." The bears seemed to settle right in after that final directive.

Sammy quickly returned to the area where he left Andy and Fetch. He sat down by the dog and began talking to him. "Fetch, you are a good dog, and are very brave for protecting Andy against the bears. Looks like you got a nip here and there, but I don't feel any major injuries. You will be just fine after your wounds get cleaned up and treated, so they don't get infected. I'm going to bring Andy over to sit by you now. Stay there, buddy."

"Andy, don't be afraid. Your dog is not hurt badly and the bears have gone away. Your dad and uncle are close by and they are looking for you. They'll be here soon, I promise. You have to be brave a little longer. I want you to get up now and follow me. We're going over to see Fetch. You can sit with him until they get here. Come on now; dry your eyes off with your shirt tail. It's going to be okay."

As Sammy and Andy start their way over Fetch, Sammy sees an unexpected creature making its way to Fetch as well. The rattlesnake swished through the grass, moving rapidly toward its target - Fetch. "Not on my watch!" Sammy tells the snake.

He points to a grassy area nearby and tells Andy to sit down, and not move a muscle. He then partitions himself in between the snake and Fetch. Sammy wasn't quite sure how to talk to a moving snake that had the ability to strike at any moment and with fatal consequences, but he was willing and able to do just that.

"Stop!" Sammy commanded. "Do not strike this dog! Turn around and head the other direction. You are NOT to strike," he said in a booming voice that even he didn't know he was capable of producing.

The snake stops moving and looks around, before hightailing it off in the direction Sammy is suggesting. Sammy lets out a sigh and chuckles to himself. I can even make a snake think twice about their actions these days. How funny is that?

He moves away from the snake's last location and towards the boy. "Andy, let's go see Fetch. Follow me. It's OK now."

Fetch is very happy to have Andy so close now. Even though the tree was in eyesight for the dog, he didn't have the energy after the attack to move from his current spot.

As there was still some bleeding, Sammy knew Fetch must be taken care of quickly to avoid infection. He put his healing hands on the dog and took away the pain from the wounds and then closed them up.

Time to go find the search party and end this search, Sammy decides. Andy's dad and uncle are already close to the correct location, he knows. He materializes and positions himself between the men. "Keep going in this direction for another quarter of a mile." They look at each other, as if one of them had given directions, but knew it never happened. They take off, running in the same general direction.

"Dad, Uncle Sid!" Andy cries out after spotting them. "There was a bear, then a snake, and then they left, and then I came over here."

"Hold on! Slow down, son. What is this about a bear and snake?"

"Fetch and I got lost and a big bear and some of her babies were here. The big bear scared me and starting coming after me. Fetch jumped on the bear and barked and barked. The bear hit Fetch and hurt him and made him bleed. Then the voice came and made the bears go away and took me to sit with Fetch, after the voice made the snake go away."

"What voice?" Andy just shrugged his shoulders. Both Dad and Uncle Sid were now looking at each other with the same look. "Think we might have heard that same voice, son. Thank goodness you and Fetch are all right. We need to get him back to the vet and get him cleaned up and checked out though."

The now 'happy campers' left the scene.

Boy, this has been some day. Let's see, on this save, a dog, four bears, and a snake survived, not to mention the human element of little Andy, Sammy recalled. He couldn't wait for the other angels to see this rescue on screen later. He put the communicator away and decided to just sit and look at the beautiful blue sky for a while. His first thought was how the sky reminded him of the color of Rose's beautiful blue eyes.



Everything's coming up Roses

The angels stop 'dead in their tracks' when their communicators suddenly go off. This time there wasn't the usual ring strobe tone they were accustomed to hearing and seeing. All communicators were flashing red over and over, accompanied by bleeps.

The angels press the Rose on the screen. She immediately appears, prepared to explain the new sights and sounds of their communicators.

"Hello, everyone. I know I've piqued your interest on this call. Unfortunately, it's not a hello - how are you call. We have a very big task ahead of us." The angels are quick to note the word WE.

"Please look at your screens with me now." On the communicators appeared a huge looking creature that resembled a seal, but was much larger, with gray, wrinkled skin. "Anyone know what this mammal is or anything about it?" They all studied the picture Rose was showing them.

"I know they can weigh a ton, and are called the gentle giants or sea cows," Walter spoke up, saying. "I saw them on a TV special once, but I've never seen a Manatee in person before." The rest of the angels echoed the only on TV response, as well.

"Correct, Walter, what you are looking at is a 1,500 pound Manatee," Rose said. "They can weigh up to 3500 pounds and grow upwards to 13-feet in length. In Florida, however, they usually weigh between 1,000 to 1,500 pounds, and grow to anywhere from 10 to 13 feet. They have been known to live as long as 60 years or longer."

“The Manatees are found in the warm, shallow waters off the Florida Coast. It is documented that the Florida population of Manatees is the largest in the world. However, they are now on the verge of extinction.”

“Unfortunately, one of the real dangers to the Manatee is man, with risks from power boats and illegal hunting. The young Manatees are always at risk from alligators and crocodiles,” Rose further explains. Chris took note, especially after her last save from the alligator.

“As the Manatee feed on sea grasses, underwater plants, algae, and other floating vegetation, there is plenty for them to eat,” Rose said, as if she were a professor telling her class about the history of the Florida Manatees. “In ancient times, the people would mistake the Manatees for Mermaids, and that is where the tales began. They have quite the history, and people have always been fascinated by them.”

“I’m going to be the ‘lead’ on this save today, as it will involve some areas you have never experienced before. Let’s meet at the dock in Crystal River, and I’ll fill everyone in on the details. We have no time to delay,” she said, to the excited, but nervous group of animal angels.

“Wait! I can’t - I can’t swim,” Mary blurted out, before everyone hung up.

“See you on the dock,” is all Rose said, as she signed off.

The angels, plus their mentor, stood on the dock in Crystal River, looking out into the beautiful crystal clear water, that people from around the world come to enjoy. “It’s nice here,” Sammy said. “I always loved the water.” Just as he finishes that statement, a huge Manatee swam up, just below them. It looked up at the group, and then gracefully glided away.

“WOW! That’s one magnificent creature,” Nick said. “Now I know why they’re called the gentle giants, as they are plenty BIG. People even come here to swim with them, from what I’ve seen on TV. I never dreamed I’d be here, ‘swimming with the fishes’ today.” Everyone smiled at Nick, except Mary.

“You used that word I dread, Nick.”

“What word, Mary?”

“SWIM - I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SWIM - WITH PEOPLE OR FISH,” she added in a higher than usual tone.

“Unfortunately, we have no more time to enjoy the sights, and Mary, your worries are unfounded,” Rose assured her. “Today you won't be ‘swimming with the fishes’ as Nick put it, which I think is a little disturbing way to put it,” she scolded Nick, with a sweet Rose grin to go along with it.

“We are all going into the water, but you don't have to hold your breath. You don't have to swim, and you won't get wet at all. We will merely walk up to these beautiful creatures,” Rose informs them.

“Our mission today is to heal the wounds on three of the Manatees. They were each wounded by boat propellers. Their injuries are severe enough to cause infection and possible deaths, if not attended to.”

“Even though there are plenty of signs for motorized boats warning the drivers to watch for the Manatees, they are often ignored and injuries occur. Unfortunately, some people have no problem disobeying the laws of the state.”

“The Manatees are nearsighted, and have limited depth perception, so the boats can be right up on them before they have a chance to swim away safely. They get cut mostly on their flippers and tails, but sometimes other body parts are hit as well. It's just very sad.”

“Look at your screen now and it will show you the kind of injuries I have been referencing. The three mammals you are looking at are the ones we will attend to today. I will take the largest one first. We'll call her M-1 for Manatee No.1. The next will be M-2 and then M-3.”

“It's now time to enter the water. The temperature of the water today is a comfortable 72 degrees, which really won't matter to you, as you won't feel the water at all. Each of you now, please press the picture of the first injured Manatee. We should all arrive at her side at the same instance.

Mary looks at Chris with a still skeptical and somewhat apprehensive look. “Mary, come here. Take my hand! We'll non-swim with the Manatees together,” Chris said. Mary grabs Chris's hand, and they are off.

“Oh, my gosh! Look at all these colorful fish,” Nick said.

“I feel like I’m in a Jacques Cousteau Special or something,” Walter remarks.

“Who is this Jack Custow?” Nick looked genuinely puzzled.

“OK, you might be a little young to know him, but is it amazing down here or what?” Walter adds.

“Is that a shark or just a fish with a pointy nose?” Chris asks.

“I don’t know, but I wouldn’t put your fingers in his mouth, if I were you,” joked Sammy. “Chris, there aren’t any sharks here - alligators probably, but not sharks.”

He wasn’t sure why Chris looked so glum with that statement. “I didn’t mean to scare you,” he said.

“Scare me -- no way. Alligators are a ‘piece of cake.’” Sammy gives her a questioning look.

As Rose watches the angels get accustomed to being under water, she feels the urgency of their visit. “I know this is an amazing experience for all of you, but we’ve got to get serious now and attend to these injuries. We certainly want to do our part so these beautiful creatures DO NOT become extinct.”

Rose and the angels walk up to the first injured Manatee that Rose called M-1. The flipper on the right was pretty chewed up from the propeller blade of the boat that hit her. There were dark patches around the injury that indicated an infection could be starting to fester.

“Everyone, stay in your positions and observe. She then proceeded to the head of the Manatee and said something in her ear that was not audible to the angels. Next she moved to the injured flipper. The Manatee stops its moving around and seems to be in a trancelike state.

Rose places one hand directly on top of the wound area at the top of the flipper. She then places her other hand under the flipper in the same area. She moves her hands rhythmically back and forth over the area several times. After the fifth movement of her hands, there is a pop sound, kind of like a sparkler used for Fourth-of-July celebrations. Next there are several sparks, like electric-

ity from someone being shocked. The Manatee does not move a muscle, but continues in the trancelike state.

The injury begins to heal up right before everyone's eyes. The areas that looked infected also immediately clear up. Rose goes back to the head of the Manatee and says something in her ear. The female Manatee opens her eyes, and looks at Rose before gliding away.

"Rose, I've got to ask you, what did you say to the Manatee when you started and ended the healing process?" Chris asks. "We couldn't hear what you said, for some reason. We are all dying to know what it was."

Rose smiles and says, "Go to sleep and wake up now."

"Look, I have fish moving all around my arms and hands. I think they are using me for a roller coaster," Sammy said.

"Look at me," said Walter. "I have a fish in my hand and it's just staring at me. I guess I look like some big monster to the fish."

"You ARE a big monster to the fish," Sammy assures him.

"Hey, Rose, can these fish see us?" Walter asks.

"Yes," Rose said, over her shoulder, as she begins to search for M-2.

"M-2 is just over there," Rose tells the group. "Who wants to be the healer this time?" Mary was busy making wave moves with her hand, the one not still holding Chris's hand. Walter was breaking up what he considered to be a 'fish fight' and all three seemed to be preoccupied by their new surroundings. Rose was not at all upset, as she knew how totally captivating this underwater experience always was for new angels. She watched Sammy Walter, Mary and Chris, and smiled at their observations.

Nick, the usual 'clownfish' of the bunch, was now the most serious. He was very troubled by the fact that the Manatees may be headed for extinction.

He spoke up. "I want to do it, Rose. I watched you carefully and think I have it down." He further pleaded his case, by saying, "Let me give it a try."

“OK, Nick, I will sit back and watch, and will only step in if I feel you have missed something or if something goes wrong.” Nick shakes his head, as an OK with that.

He wasted no time. He went to the head of M-2, and whispered in the huge Manatee’s ear. “Go to sleep now, my friend.” The Manatee settled down and went into the trancelike state, similar to M-1.

Nick then moved beside the Manatee to get a good grip on the injured flipper. He successfully copied the movements of Rose earlier. The hands moved from side to side and the pop and electric snap came. Everyone was awestruck as they witnessed the wound heal up immediately. Nick went to the tail and did the same maneuver. The wound on the tail was not quite as bad as the one on the flipper. He looked up at Rose and gave her a big thumbs-up-sign. He next travelled back down to the head and spoke into an ear. “Time to wake up. You’re good to go,” Nick said to the Manatee. The Manatee opened its eyes and looked directly at Nick, Rose, and the other angels, before departing.

Nick got pats on the back and praise from his fellow angels and Rose was especially pleased with how well he did. “Well, two down and one to go. Let’s move on, shall we?”

Mary, Chris, Walter and Sammy stood back a little from the last Manatee. They all wanted to be next, but didn’t want to take that away from each other. There was only one Manatee left and there were three of them.

“Time to get everyone else involved now. Mary, I would like for you to be the one to talk to M-3 at the beginning, and end of the procedure,” Rose instructed.

“Hey, Mary, you are going to be kind of like the anesthesiologist during surgery. You put ‘em to sleep and then wake ‘em afterwards,” Nick told her. Mary gave him a serious look and then a little smile.

“Chris, you will stand on the right side of the Manatee, and work on the right flipper. I saved this Manatee for last because he has the most injuries. I knew it would be a chance for several of you to work together,” Rose said, as everyone waited to take his or her positions.

“Walter, you will be working on the injured flipper on the left and Sammy, you will take care of the small cut on the underbelly. Nick, you are free to go and play with the fish, if you like.” Everyone laughed at Rose’s comment. Nick smiled, and did decide to leave in search of fish to play with. Everyone waved at Nick as he left the immediate area.

“Everyone, please take your places. Mary, go ahead and start the procedure. Chris, you will start the steps on the right flipper first. After completion and healing, Walter, you will go next. The final stage will be yours, Sammy. You will then heal the cut on the underbelly. Ready?”

All answered in unison, which was a resounding “YES.”

Mary went to the Manatee and spoke into the ear. “Time for you to take a little nap, my dear.” Within seconds, the Manatee was ready for the angels to perform their miracles on its massive, injured body. Chris heard the pop and felt and saw the electricity. Walter followed with the same results. Sammy then moved to position his hand on the underbelly. The pop and snap also came and he was able to see closure of the wound. Rose looked at Mary, and nodded to her to let her know to go ahead with the final step.

“Time to wake up, my beauty.” Mary spoke softly to the soundly sleeping Manatee. M-3 woke up with knowing eyes. This time when the Manatee swam off, he made a squeak and squeal sound, as if to say, “Thanks guys.”

“Congratulations, everyone. Great job! You were all terrific,” Rose added to her praise.

As Rose studied the faces of this group of Florida animal angels, she felt a special bond with each of them. They all looked so happy and excited at what they were able to do for these Manatees. Their love of all animals showed in their faces, which were now lit up like the brightest stars in the sky.

“Ready to go up?” Rose asks the group. They all look at their screens and push the ‘up’ button.

“That wasn’t scary at all,” Mary said. “I have finally lost my fear of the water.”

“Oh, yeah? My hand is still a little sore and red from your death grip in the water. Got ‘ya - just kidding. I don’t feel pain and neither do you, but you were gripping my hand pretty tight there, girl.” Everyone laughed at Chris’s narration of Mary and her water adventure.

Rose and the angels sat on the dock, looking at the crystal clear water, talking and joking just like friends out for a day of sightseeing. The angels loved having Rose with them and were happy to have her instruct them in such a big undertaking, as they had on this day. They all sat and reminisced about the day’s events.

Suddenly, there is a loud clap of thunder. The angels look up at the sky. Rose looks down at her communicator. For the first time, the angels witness Rose looking troubled. They had never seen this expression on her face and they were all very concerned, and more than eager to know what she was looking at on her communicator.

Rose looks down at their faces. “Once again, I am going to assist you today. Everyone, please look at your screens.” The angels quickly tune in for a firsthand look at what has her so troubled.

“What you are looking at is the Miami Zoo. It is 740 acres of land, of which 327 is developed. The zoo houses over 2,000 animals, including 40 endangered species and 70 species of birds.”

“That’s one big zoo,” Sammy said.

“That it is,” Rose confirms. “Now, if you will look at the screen, you will be able to see the cause for my concern.” Everyone studies their screen with disbelief at what they were seeing.

“What is that man doing?” Mary asks.

“He’s starting a fire,” Walter answers.

“Yes, if you’ll notice, he has already set some small fires in various areas of the zoo,” Rose also brings to their attention.

“Look, he’s wearing a zoo uniform. Perhaps he is a disgruntled employee or ex-employee,” Chris said.

“We’ll know soon.” Rose stands up; looks up to the heavens, and then back at the angels.

“This is going to be a massive undertaking. We have to stop this man from setting more fires; put out the ones he has already started, and calm the animals so they don’t injure themselves or other animals. I will be alerting the Dade County Fire Department, but we can put the fires out faster than they can. I have also decided to call in some reinforcements for this massive save.”

Rose begins to scan her screen and announces her choices. “The other animal angels joining us will be Paul, he’s an ex-firefighter, who is my on call fire extinguisher for all areas of the world. He’s my ‘floater’ so to speak.” Everyone laughs out loud. Rose just looks at them, not even realizing why calling an angel a floater is so hilarious to them.

“I’m also going to call two new Florida angels for this save. You will all love Dorothy and Annie. Annie was born on a small island called Yap, which is part of the Micronesian chain of islands. As the result of being swept off her feet by a charming missionary pilot, she relocated to the US and settled in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Dorothy is a sweet, sweet lady with a wonderful sense of humor. She was born in Palestine, Texas. “Sammy, you will have a fellow Texan around to swap stories with.”

“Yeah, I know Palestine. It’s in East Texas and is about a three hour drive from my hometown. Can’t wait to meet them all.”

Rose immediately gets Paul, Dorothy and Annie on the line and explains the situation to them. “We’ll be leaving Crystal River now, and will all meet at the front gate of the zoo in Miami,” Rose informs the eight angels. “We have no time to waste.”

Mary, Chris, Sammy, Nick, Walter, Paul, Dorothy and Annie join Rose at the front entrance of the Miami Zoo. Rose does a quick introduction of everyone and hugs her newly arrived reinforcements.

“I am so thankful it is evening and the zoo is closed. We won’t have to worry about visitors also getting hurt from the fires. We have to work fast, however, to get the fires contained. Chris, your observation was indeed correct. Our fire

starter was terminated two days ago for drinking on the job. He is an ex-employee who is seeking vengeance.”

“I will personally find him and suggest strongly that he turn himself in, and will instruct him not to start any more fires.” Everyone knew that Rose meant business and that her suggest strongly would be just that, STRONGLY. This guy has no idea who is he up against, was Nick’s immediate thought.

“Paul, of course, I’d like for you to be in charge of getting the fires out. Sammy, Walter and Nick, you will go with Paul, and he’ll instruct you on the proper fire extinguishing methods. Nick, I know you have had some experience already putting out wildfires, so that experience should prove to be helpful to you. We all have to work together as a team, so no animal is hurt or injured.”

“Chris, you and Mary take the primates, small animals, such as the deer and elk, as well as the huge bird population. Annie, you and Dorothy, take the larger animals. Paul, when you get all the fires out, please help the ladies calm the animals. What they will be doing today is calming the fears of the animals, as animals can sense danger and, of course, smell the smoke. Their fear could cause stampedes of animals trying to escape the fire. We have to put their minds at ease that they are safe from harm. It will be a huge undertaking.”

Everyone headed off in the direction of their assigned duties.

“So, Paul, how long have you been dead?” Sammy asks.

“What? Wait! Am I dead?”

Paul slowly goes over and sits down on a concrete bench, hanging his head down. Nick, Sammy, and Walter look at each other, and then at Paul. No one says a word. Suddenly, Paul looks up; stands up; and roars with laughter. Sammy, Walter and Nick join in with the same robust laughter. “Looks like we have another Nick in the bunch,” Sammy is quick to point out.

“Come on, guys. We have some fires to put out,” Paul reminds them. “Nick, how did you put out the wildfires? What did you do first?”

“Well, I just took a big breath and blew mostly,” he said.

“Yeah, that’s pretty much all it is, except for what you do after the fire is out.”

“What did I NOT do?” Nick immediately wants to know.

“You didn’t spit on the fire, or maybe you put so much breath into it that the spit came out on its own. Did you smell fire afterwards?”

Nick looked dumfounded. “No, I didn’t smell any smoke afterwards, but I didn’t realize I was supposed to spit on the fire either,” he adds, with a big grin on his face. “Spit - really? Kidding us - right?”

“Nope, I’m dead serious. I love using that term.” Paul smiled with the dead mention, as did Walter, Sammy and Nick.

“Think about it. You’ve blown it out, but underneath the ash might be a teeny, tiny bit of ash that could continue to smolder and then start up again.”

“Oh, I got ya,” Nick said.

“Makes sense to me - I guess,” Walter also acknowledges. “But, do we really have that much spit?”

“Believe me, you no longer have ordinary saliva. Rose would prefer that I call it saliva, instead of spit. As I was saying, we have an invisible hose in our mouths now, when needed. Kidding, guys, but really any fire will be doused with just one good projection, and the smoke smell will disappear completely, as well.”

“Chris, let’s start over here,” Mary said, as she points to the gorilla habitat.

“Well, okay, but you know I used to be afraid of gorillas. My fear as a little girl was that the biggest gorilla in the zoo would climb over the wall and get me. I even had nightmares sometimes about those scowling brown eyes as they came for me.” Chris shuddered as she told the story to Mary.

“Come on, Chris, time to get over that fear like I did my fear of the water. Let’s start with that fellow over there.”

Mary and Chris enter the habitat. They immediately notice a huge, grayish colored gorilla, who sat, picking invisible things off his huge, muscular shoulders. He rocked back and forth, as he lifted his face upwards, sniffing the air.

The gorilla looked very nervous and fidgety. "Can't I start with just a small monkey?" Chris asks.

"NO - It will be all right, Chris," Mary assures her.

"I'm going in closer. Come on, Chris! We have a job to do - remember? Hey, he looks kind of like King Kong, only shorter and meaner."

"He looks REALLY big to me," Chris exclaimed, as she held back a few steps from Mary's position.

Chris and Mary sided up to the gorilla, and sat down beside him. He looked at them briefly, and then went back to sniffing and picking invisible things off himself. He continually looked around, and smelled the air.

"Hey, Mr. Kong, it's OK," Mary assures him. "The fires are being put out and there is no danger to you or any of your friends in here. You need to be calm and go about your normal routine. Go and tell the others not to worry. Oh, and Mr. Kong, never and I mean never, climb over that wall and go after any little girls on the other side." Mr. Kong stood up and stared at Mary, and then Chris, before he headed over to a group of two other gorillas.

"You just had to do that - didn't you, Mary?" Mary just smiled and then hugged her. They both got a huge chuckle out of their King Kong episode.

"Let's go. Time to go calm other animals. Let's finish with the primates and then head over to the big bird exhibit," Chris suggests.

"Lead on," Mary said, as she took one last look at the gorilla habitat. All was calm there, she noted.

"Look! It's over there. There it is. We'd better hurry! I can already hear bird sounds and that can't be good," Chris said. When they enter the open area for the birds, they notice it is total chaos. Birds are flying around everywhere, and even into each other.

"Looks like that Alfred Hitchcock movie, where the birds were going crazy and attacking the people. We need to get them calmed down fast," Mary says, excitedly.

"Want to do the booming voice, or shall I?"

"Be my guest. Boom on," Mary said.

OK, here goes. "Stop flying all over the place and perch somewhere! There is no need to panic. You are all safe."

After hearing Chris's voice, every bird changes its demeanor and becomes calm. Those that were flying around aimlessly, perch on branches, and others go into their specially made cages. Their normal behavior returns.

"Good job, Chris." Mary congratulates her. "Thank goodness we have that volume when we need it."

"Oh, look! There's Annie and Dorothy, on their way to handle the large animals," Mary notices. The four angels wave, and then hurry on to their tasks at hand.

"Listen to all that noise. The giraffes are running around all over the place," Dorothy points out. "They say animals can smell smoke even from a long distance away, and they also sense danger. I'd say they are smelling and sensing right about now, wouldn't you?"

"Definitely," Annie agrees.

"Since neither of us are 8-to-15 feet tall, guess we'll have to improvise on our usual mode of getting our point across. That giraffe looks at least 8 feet tall to me. I've heard from some of the other angels that we all have a loud booming voice, when we need it."

"Yeah, I heard that too," Annie said. "Let's try it out, shall we."

"Everyone, can I have your attention, please! OK, scratch that. That sounds rather silly to say to giraffes. How about this?" Annie clears her throat, and says to the entire giraffe population, "Stay calm. The fires are not going to hurt you. Rest now."

"Was I loud enough? I think they responded to me pretty well."

"Oh, yeah, they all stopped what they were doing and listened. They heard you loud and clear and heeded what you were saying. Look at them. They're not running around and they even look fairly calm now. Good job, Annie."

“Well, I think we have this down now, as we will have to do the booming voices for most of the big animals. It's really quicker as well, because we can hold the attention of a large group faster. Let's do the rhino's next. Glad we don't get wet. Their pond looks very murky and I don't think I'd like to know what else is in there with them,” Dorothy adds, with a scrunched-up face.

“Look! There goes the fire patrol. Wonder how Paul is getting along with his helpers?” Annie asks.

“Oh, I'm sure, they are getting along just fine, and doing a bang-up job of putting out those fires,” Dorothy assures her. “I just love Paul. He's got such a great sense of humor. He always keeps me laughing and smiling. He kind of reminds me of my husband a little bit,” she adds with a glint in her eyes.

“Nick, you and Sammy head east,” Paul said. “Walter and I will go west. When the fires are out in your area, come back to this spot and we'll go north and south. The fire department is five minutes out now, so they will get what we don't.”

“You know, I haven't seen Rose since we got here,” Nick said. “Have any of you seen our elusive mentor?”

“Yeah, she's over there talking to that guy,” Walter answers. All eyes immediately turn toward that direction. Rose looks at Walter and Nick with a silent shake of the head that tells them to go about their own business at hand.

They watch, from afar, as Rose stands behind the man everyone saw on their screens, as the person responsible for starting the fires. She is observing him soaking a rag with gasoline, preparing to light it with a match.

She moves alongside the ex-zoo employee, and talks directly to him. “Blow out the match now!” The man jumps and spins around. The match goes out on its own from his movement. He turns and begins to search for the woman he heard talking to him.

Rose continues her instructions. “You will not set any more fires today, or ever. What you have done could have injured or killed some or all the animals in this zoo. Taking your anger out on defenseless animals is inexcusable.”

"You will go to the front entryway of the zoo and wait for the police to arrive. You are to confess to the crime of setting these fires. You will regret this day until the day you die, because not only will you serve jail time, but you will never be allowed to have a pet again. Your actions today will affect the two dogs and three cats you have at home, as they will not have a caretaker after today. They will be taken to shelters. You were not thinking about them today either," Rose adds.

The man begins to cry. "I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt any of the animals. I love these animals. I'm a zookeeper, for pete's sake. My job is to take care of animals. I was just mad because they fired me. I know drinking on the job is not good and I was stupid enough to think I could get by with it. I am SO SORRY!"

When he got to the entrance, he sat on the curb, and totally broke down crying even more. Rose came up beside him again and said, "You know, you can ask for help for your addiction and straighten out your life. It's not too late. Perhaps someday you will even lose the guilt over what happened today. You never know what's around the corner. You might even see me again someday."

The police car came screeching up, and two officers jump out. The suspect is sitting on the curb with the gas can and soaked rag in his hand. The tears are now dry and he looks almost eager to go with the police. As they place him in the squad car, he turns, looks behind him and smiles at the voice from heaven. He knows after today, his life will never be the same.

Rose taps into a dispatch radio for the closest no-kill shelter near the suspect's home. She reports the abandoned animals at the address and asks for immediate assistance. She would send one of her angels later to make sure that all the animals are adopted out to good homes. Rose has a soft spot in her heart for the misguided zookeeper, and hopes to see him again one day.

Four fire trucks are now on the scene, as well as several police cruisers. The firefighters jump down from the trucks, preparing their hoses and equipment to put out the reported fires.

"Spread out, guys." The Chief is anxious to see what they are up against. "We need to check every inch of this zoo for fires. The call said the suspect

had already started several. Glad the police have him in custody. At least, we know more fires are not being started. Let's get to the ones he did start."

"I'm sure the animals are very upset and sense danger as well," one of the firefighters added.

"Yeah, I'm sure it's going to be pretty 'hairy' in there," another firefighter chimed in, with his thoughts.

"Just make sure you have your radios on, and notify me of what you find," the chief reminded everyone.

As the firefighters scatter out over the entire circumference of the zoo, the angels watch and listen in on their conversations. The calls started coming in to the chief and other supervisors from the various fire departments. Truck one, two, three and four all had reported in with their findings.

"Chief, none of us know what to make of any of this," the second-in-command said. He had stopped to call in on his personal cell phone. "There were only a few fires still burning, but the men found several burned sites that looked like they had been extinguished. The odd thing is that the locations where the fires had been put out had no smoke smell whatsoever. There was not even a hint of a smoke smell. There were no ashes around the fire, just a clean extinguish."

"So, where is this invisible fire department?"

No one had an answer for the chief, nor could anyone think of a reason the fires would go out all by themselves and then not have a lingering smell afterward.

The last group of firefighters showed up with their report. They announced that all the animals were accounted for and that they looked strangely calm. Their report also showed several fires already extinguished before their arrival.

"So, what do you make of this, Chief?" His best friend and fellow firefighter looked perplexed, as he posed the question.

"No clue. Guess some big wind beat us to the punch. I'll take any and all the help we can get," the Chief said. "OK, guys, pack it up. We're done here."

Rose and the invisible fire department watched as the last fire truck left, as well as the news stations and camera men, who thought they had a big story to report. They were not happy at all, that the fires were all out before they even got to the scene.

Dorothy, Annie and Paul visited a while, with Rose, and the other Florida angels. They talked about their lives, and they talked about their deaths, as well. Rose loved watching the angels mingle and get to know each other. She was so proud of each of them.

Rose stood up and asked for everyone's attention. "I have to leave you now, but you will hear from me very soon. I have some new arrivals to meet with, and some arrangements that need to be made. Paul, Dorothy and Annie are going to continue on with more saves here in the Miami area."

Immediately after her announcement, their communicators starting sounding off. The three angels bid their fellow angels goodbye, and wished them well.

Rose stopped them momentarily from leaving. "Before I leave you, I want to say how proud I am of each of you. I want to thank you for working together as a great team of animal angels. The save at the zoo could not have gone any smoother, and that is because of your excellent teamwork. We'll talk soon."

"There she goes with that vanishing act again," Nick said. "I wonder if that's how we look when we materialize off somewhere?"

"Interesting question, Nick," Walter said. "I wonder what we look like to the animals as well? Do they see us as we are?" He continued with his searching questions.

They were all a little surprised their communicators had not started going off. Not one of them had anything showing up at all. The other three angels were already long gone, and working.

The remaining five went back into the zoo, and sat down at a table at one of the outside restaurants. "Waiter, please bring me a cheeseburger, fries and a ROOT BEER," Nick said to the nonexistent wait staff. "And, make sure that is a LARGE root beer." His fellow angels laughed at his request.

“Hey Nick, are you really hungry?” Mary asks. They all wait for his answer.

“Nah, that’s just what I usually ordered. Couldn’t afford too many steaks or bottles of wine.”

“I used to make a great lasagna,” Mary announces to the others. “My recipe was handed down by three generations. Now I can’t even remember what it used to taste like, but just that it was very, very good.”

“My specialty was anything that fit into a microwave,” Chris said. “My husband did most of the cooking. I cooked because you have to eat. He cooked because he loved to cook. Can you guess whose food tasted the best?”

“I have a serious question to ask the group, as a whole, and it’s not about food,” Walter said. “What do you think will happen to us after we’ve saved all the animals that Rose has instructed us to save?” He studied everyone’s face, after he posed the question.

After a few moments, Nick spoke up. “We are doing something good for the animals and people on earth. I am not thinking about any kind of reward, because it is a reward to be an angel to those animals. I will never forget any of my saves and the people affected by the saves. If I had known how wonderful animals are back when I was living, I would have had a house full of them.” Mary, Chris, Sammy and Walter all agreed.



The Beginning and the End

Everyone was still trying to gauge what their answers would have been to Walter's question, when their communicators all started going off at the same time. "It's Rose," Sammy said.

"Hello again. I know you are surprised to be hearing from me this quickly, but I concluded my business sooner than I anticipated."

"I thought you might be interested in a progress report. As a team, you have saved not hundreds, not thousands, but millions of animals so far." Everyone on the line was amazed that the numbers had added up that quickly.

"Must have been all those squirrels, Mary, that you got across the street at 1:30 p.m. in the entire state of Florida," Nick said jokingly. This was the first time the angels had actually heard Rose laugh out loud. They all loved the sound of her laugh.

"Well, the squirrels certainly added to the number," Rose agreed. "Each of you has done your share to make this possible. Anyone notice that you also helped some of the people on earth as well?" All chimed in with instances. "You have all been a part of the big picture."

"We are going to meet in your room now, and view another feature film. Afterwards, we will discuss your options." Mary, Chris, Sammy, Nick and Walter were totally silent, for the first time on a call from Rose. "See you in a few minutes." Rose had signed off.

The animal angels were both looking forward to hearing what Rose had to say, but were each a little apprehensive and more than a little curious about what she meant by 'options.'

“Walter, did you know this was coming?” Chris asks. “You were kind of asking about what happens after, and now we get a call from Rose.” Walter looks at Chris with a blank expression.

"Well, we won't find out what she has in mind by sitting here, and they are taking way too long with my cheeseburger," Nick said. "Bet you can't beat me there," he tells the group - and then disappears.

Nick was the first to arrive in the room, just as he anticipated, and just as the other angels anticipated as well. They all smiled at him, when they took their seats. This time, Rose was already at the head of the table.

The angels observed that she had folders, notes, and other material sitting in front of her. This made them even more curious about this meeting.

"I promised everyone another movie and I'm keeping my word. The rest of the saves by each of you will now be shown, so each of you can share in the joy of the moment. After it's over, we'll talk."

Just as before, the saves began. Rose stayed this time and loved watching the expressions on their faces, as they watched. She loved seeing their excitement, joy, and compassion for animals and people on earth. The angels watched the movie. Their mentor and spiritual guide watched them. They were in for a big ending, she knew, as she anticipated their reaction.

Just as the last save ended, the screen went blank, but then resumed. On the screen was Sammy driving in the pickup truck he described during the very first time the angels were together. As everyone sat up a little straighter in their chairs, the scene unfolded. A look of shock came over his face.

On the screen, Sammy was driving down the highway and hits the dog he described. Sammy looks away, and hangs his head down, not believing he has to endure seeing this happen again.

"Sammy, it's OK," Mary said. "Look up!"

In the movie, a car comes along behind him, and does stop for the dog. The Good Samaritan lifts the dog off the highway and takes him straight to his vet.

“See, Sammy, the dog did make it after all,” Chris assures him. As the angels continue watching, they learn the final outcome. Sammy was finally able to look at the screen again.

The dog had internal injuries, but survived. Since there was a chip, they were able to locate the owners, and the dog Sammy thought died that day, did not. She was reunited with her family the very same day. Sasha did not lose her dog, Ameer, on that faithful day.

Sammy tried very hard not to cry, but his emotions got the best of him and he lowered his head and wept openly. Chris felt it was amazing that they did not have to eat, drink, sleep, or use the bathroom, but could still cry. She was glad that capacity still remained for them.

After this scene played out, they all knew what was coming, and were very reluctant to even look at the screen, but were also curious to know the REAL outcome of their individual stories.

Mary looked up with amazement to see two of her grandchildren and daughter on the screen. Everyone, including Rose, has tears in their eyes. Mary watched with fascination at her earthly family. Just to see them again, gave her pure joy.

"Mom, wasn't that nice of the shelter to call and tell us about the kitty and dog Nana loved the best," Hannah said.

"It was, love, and I'm so happy they are here with us now. I know your Nana would be very happy that we adopted them and learned of her secret."

"I love my dog the best," Aaron said. "The kitty is OK too, and she loves Hannah the most."

"I am just so pleased these two get along so well," Mary's daughter, Sherry, remarked. "You know, kids, it's very unusual to see a dog and cat get along so well, without being together from the beginning. They really enjoy being around each other. We are fortunate to have a part of Nana with us, through them."

"Mom, do you think Nana is watching us from heaven?" Aaron asks.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised."

Aaron looks up, smiles and then waves.

Mary was literally beaming at that scene. "Yes, my darlings, I am watching you right now," she said out loud, as she blew them a kiss. Her happiness at seeing them, with their new pets, had made her life and death worthwhile, in her mind.

Everyone was still recovering from this emotional part of the This Is Your Life movies being played, when another family visualizes on the big screen.

"I can't believe it, those are the cats I put out," Chris said. "That's my old neighborhood all right," she confirmed, as the screen panned a shot of the neighborhood, complete with street name. She watches with anticipation.

"Dennis, pass the sweeteners, please," Marsha said to her husband of 32 years.

"The sweets to the sweet," he shot back. Marsha smiled at her favorite person in the world, as he handed her the requested packets.

"I see that Bo and Bo-Dee are still asleep. Guess breakfast and all that playing we did with that wand thing you bought, wore them out. Kind of wore me out too. Don't think I'll run my five miles today," Dennis added.

Marsha laughed. "Five miles, huh. You mean more like five minutes, don't you?"

"OK, you got me, but I don't see you pushing anything more than that broom. Ya know, it's ashamed we can't walk the boys around the neighborhood, like dogs."

"No way, I don't want them anywhere near outside. There are far too many stray dogs that would scare them," Marsha points out.

"Yeah, you're right. The boys are indoor cats now all the way. Speaking of the boys, they really like that condo/scratching post we got for them. Thought I'd be getting my new Lazy Boy this year. Guess Bo and Bo-Dee deserve their comforts first," Dennis conceded.

"You are such an old softy." Marsha poked a finger in the direction of his heart. Both Bo and Bo-Dee were now awake and clamoring for his attention, as he sat in his worn, but still favorite chair.

"We are really fortunate the boys came to our house, and weren't hurt by the stray dogs around here," Dennis said. "I'll never understand why people have pets and don't follow the rules. They let them roam the neighborhoods at will. It's sad for the dogs also. It means they don't have responsible owners. They probably jump fences because they are looking for food and water, and maybe even companionship. It's a sad state of affairs."

"Well, we did the right thing when we posted signs picturing the cats," Marsha said. "Maybe Bo and Bo-Dee accidentally got out the front or back door of their house, or perhaps the owner or owners were sick and couldn't care for them, and put them out. Guess we'll never know. No one ever called about them, so they are ours now."

"Sick in the head all right," Chris said to the screen. Mary patted her arm, and looked at her sympathetically.

"I'm glad the vet put Bo on that medication for his chronic kidney problem. Have you noticed there hasn't been anymore spraying and using the bathroom outside the box lately," Dennis added.

"The vet told me that Bo has probably had many crystals or stones in his lifetime," Marsha reminded.

"Ouch! You know, I have friends who have passed those things, and they said it was one of the worst things you can imagine," Dennis said, as he moved around to get comfortable, still thinking about that particular condition.

"Just look at how good the boys get along. You can really tell they are brothers. They play so well together, and never really fight-fight. It's more like a play-fight, like cowboys and Indians, when kids play. It's all in fun," Dennis added.

AHH, how cute is that! Look, Bo and Bo-Dee are asleep side-by-side with back paws touching. Where is my camera?" Marsha asks. "I need to start a photo album of our new family, beginning right now."

Chris was happy to see the brothers were loved, and adored even. She knew they were going to have a great life, from now on.

"I knew I should have taken the bigger one to the vet," Chris said to everyone.

"It's all good now," Nick said to her and the other angels. "We are ALL good now."

Walter turned to Nick to comment. "I know my turn is coming up, and yours as well. I hope – I." Before he could get the next sentence out, Walter's wife and son appear on the screen.

"Mom, is Daddy in heaven?" Josh asks.

"He sure is, love, and I know for a fact, he's watching you from there, right this very minute. He is very proud of you for taking such good care of Racer." Racer snuggled up against his leg and sat down, as if to be included in this family conversation.

Walter sat speechless, with dazed eyes, but a happy heart. The movie continued, and the animal angels watch the scenes unfold for Walter.

"Mom, I'm going out in the backyard and throw the Frisbee with Racer. He's getting really good at catching it, and I'm getting really good at throwing it," Josh said.

"I know you are, dear. Have fun, but don't go out of the yard. Lunch will be ready in about 30 minutes. How about a mini pizza and a salad?"

"The pizza sounds good, but the salad is for a bunny," he quickly added.

"Well, you, little bunny, need the salad, as well. Perhaps ice cream after, will make the taste of the salad a little more bearable." Pete smiled at the mom he loved so very much.

"I miss Dad," Josh yells as he goes out the door. "Racer misses him too," he added.

"Me, three," Nadine said to herself.

Walter notices an article framed on the wall about the capture of the fugitive. It depicts how Walter captured one of the FBI's 10 most-wanted, before

being shot. It mentioned how Racer was also instrumental in the capture and the fact that he tried to protect Walter from the criminal. It goes on to describe how dedicated the dog was and how he stayed with him after he was shot, before backup arrived. The article was shown as a big blow up on the screen, so Walter and the angels could read every word.

Everyone was still looking at Walter, trying to gauge his reactions, when Sammy spoke up. "Wow, Walter, mighty impressive. Almost forgot what a hero you are." Walter just smiled, unfazed by the attention.

"Hey, we got more police scenes," Sammy said to the group.

The next scene is a police car driving down a road in a rundown neighborhood. They pull up and stop in front of one particular boarded-up, abandoned house. "Let's check this crack house and make sure it is not inhabited again," the officer said to his partner. "The no-trespass and condemned signs sometimes only welcome squatters."

"Yeah, you're right," the second officer said.

Nick immediately recognizes the house they are referring to. "That's the house where they had the fights." He could not believe his eyes. It was boarded up, and the neighborhood looked almost empty of the bad news boys that always seemed to be lurking in this neighborhood.

Heavy, construction equipment and dirt being cleared, indicated something new and afresh was about to take place. "We have to keep the riff-raff out of here until they can come in and level these old houses and make way for the new community center and dog park," the officer said.

"I heard that they used to have illegal fights in that house, trained and bred dogs all in one place. The strange thing is that I also heard the guy who is fronting the money for this new project is a rich uncle of one of the bad guys. Believe it or not, he's a good guy that wants to do something meaningful for this area. Rich, huh?"

"Yeah, guess he is." They both laugh at the pun.

Nick sat, shaking his head. "I can't believe it. A park and a community center, and the dogs aren't being hurt anymore."

The usual talkative animal angels now sat quietly, reflecting on what they had just seen, that pertained to their old lives. The rush of feelings and knowledge of how things DID turn out meant everything to them.

Rose's sudden reappearance, startled the angels, as they were each in their own little world, and never realized she left the room. Rose studied the faces of the angels and knew the hurt and guilty feelings they all had prior to death had now been washed away. They no longer felt the guilt. It had vanished from their memory.

"Well, good movie?" Everyone started to respond to Rose all at once. They each, in turn, had a comment or two about what they had seen regarding their lives.

"Want to know what's next?" Rose looks at the anxious faces before her and knows what they are feeling.

"Sure, lay it on us," Nick said.

"You always have such a way of putting things," Rose acknowledges, as she smiles at Nick, always aware of his unique charm and personality. "OK, time to lay it on you."

Nick caught Rose's eye and smiled from ear to ear. Boy, she is great, Nick thought to himself. She even likes my personality. Whoops, think I just read her mind.

Rose stands before the group and begins. "As you know, when you first arrived, we talked about the fact your mission was to rescue, comfort and save animals. This has now been accomplished."

"As we also discussed at our first encounter, you are but a small group, in my large group, so to speak. There are animal angels all over the world, with the same goals and missions."

Sammy interrupted. "Don't think I'd have any arguments with anyone in this room, if I said you always made each of us feel like we were the only angels on earth. None of us, until this very minute, even thought about the scope of your responsibility, I'm pretty sure. You're worldwide and we're just statewide. Big difference there." All the angels agreed with his thoughts and comments.

Rose thanked Sammy, smiled, and continued. "Each of you has more than fulfilled your obligation in Florida. Now, you have some options to consider."

"This statement definitely got everyone's full attention. The room suddenly grew very, very quiet.

Rose noticed the anticipation building. "You may continue your role as animal angels in any location you prefer. It can be where you grew up, or a place you always wanted to visit, etc. The second option is that you may train with me to be a mentor to newly arriving animal angels. The third option is the ability to proceed to the next level, for Judgment."

This last statement drew some questioning looks all around.

"I am sure you will want an explanation of the third option."

"Your time with me was just a first stop. However, the service from you was required before moving on, and will be counted in your Book. What I mean by judgment is just that. You will be judged by your Maker. Your Book of Life will be revealed. God alone, will decide your next step."

The angels are speechless, except for Sammy. He seems anxious to be heard, even though his voice sounds a little shaky.

"Rose, there is something I have wanted to ask you since arriving in the room, but didn't know if it was the right time." He looks at Rose and the other angels before continuing. "How do we know if our family and friends who have gone before us are here, and will we really get to see them again?"

"That is a very good question, Sammy, and I'm surprised no one has asked it before now. You have always had the ability to look this information up on your communicator. Of course, I purposely did not show you how to use the application. It would have been too distracting for you and would have hindered you from your tasks."

"Before anyone makes their decision, I will now show you how to research the information on your family and friends. By putting in your name first and then the person you are requesting information on, it will bring up this data. As this is a very personal matter, I suggest that each of you go to one of the cubicles."

“The screen will either show a yes or a no. If it is a yes, you will be able to see that person after you pass through Judgment.”

“One thing to keep in mind, If you decide to become a mentor to other angels or continue your service as animal angels, the third option will always be open to you when you decide to take it.”

All five angels could not contain their curiosity any longer, and took their place inside a cubicle. Rose gave everyone plenty of time to let this information soak in.

"I'm going to leave you alone for a while. Feel free to discuss your plans or thoughts with each other, if you like. This will be an extremely important decision, and only you can make it." No one noticed Rose's exit this time, as they were all consumed in the knowledge they now had before them.

Nick finished up first and went back to sit at the conference table. The others followed shortly thereafter. Some looked happier than others.

"Mary, what are you going to do?" Chris asks.

"I honestly and truly am torn. I want to see the people I love, but I also now have a true love for all animals as well." Mary pulls her chair back a little from the table and continues to sit quietly.

Rose had been out of the room for quite some time, the five notice. They sit, reflecting, waiting for her to return. They have made their decisions.

The room is exceptionally bright and cheery. In this room, you felt safe - tranquil - and secure.

JD, Steve and Judy are seated on one side of the table. Annette and Tom are opposite them. The table is a beautiful, cherry wood conference table with a sheen that is almost mirror-like.

The large bay windows go from ceiling to floor. There is some kind of coating on them, like tinting. JD, Steve, Judy, Annette and Tom cannot determine if it is day, night or in between, from just looking out the windows. They all sit quietly, looking from one to the other, at the windows, and around the room itself.

"Wonder what this room is about and where we are exactly?" Tom makes the statement as he looks from one person to the next.

"I don't think it's anywhere we've been before," Steve spoke up saying. All agreed with his observation.

"The last thing I remember is being in the hospital," Judy said. Everyone is now looking at each other, and realizing they may very well be DEAD.

Just as the room occupants are trying to come up with what they remember to be their last thoughts, the room begins to vibrate and lights begin to strobe. Suddenly, the entire room goes dark. When the lights come back on, there are six people in the room instead of five.

The man at the head of the table can only be described as handsome beyond description. His sandy blond hair and intense hazel eyes give way to a presence that glows with knowledge and caring. All eyes are transfixed on the person now sitting at the head of the table.

"Bet you're wondering where the heck you are - right? Stop wondering. I can tell you, it's definitely not anywhere you've ever been before," Nick said, to his new animal angels.

"Now, get ready for the ride of your life - sorry - make that death."

About the Author

Cara Jan Hamill and husband, David, live in the Sunshine State of Florida. Cara is a Texas native.

The idea for Animal Angels and inspiration came from her love of all animals. Rescue cats, BT (for bushy tail), Cal-Lee (a true feral), Squirt (because

he does just that - and not in the box sometimes due to urinary tract problems), Faye (came to them during a tropical storm named Faye), Hannah (adopted at PetSmart), Shadow (previous owner died at age 35) call the Hamill house their home as well.

“I always have food, water, bowls and cat milk in the car. You never know when you’ll see a stray,” Cara said. She says she has always felt the need to feed.

Cara, a Mrs. New Orleans titleholder in 1983, is a former private investigator and freelance writer for several publications in Texas.

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“ANIMAL ANGELS takes you on a fascinating journey into the lives of people, their pets, and the angels who make a difference in their lives.

Get ready to smile, laugh out loud, and even shed a few tears.

It’s a carry around book, that you won’t be able to put down once you open it.”

— Jerry Roquemore



“Angels with a ‘twist’ best describes ANIMAL ANGELS. It’s all about the animals. This is the most original book I have read in quite a while.

The rescue descriptions will transport you right into the heart of the action, and the final page will leave you wanting more.”

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“I found ANIMAL ANGELS to be a delightful diversion from what’s happening in today’s world. And, it only takes a little imagination to believe the rescue stories could happen just as they’re written. If you

love animals, you’ll fall in love with ANIMAL ANGELS.”

— Alan Neace

