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## down to earth



EDWARD GRINNAN'S NEW BOOK, *Always By My Side*, excerpted on page 6, is about his beloved golden retriever, Millie, whom so many of you prayed for when she was fighting cancer, and who taught Edward so many life lessons in the eight years she was by his side.

In fact Edward includes stories about all the dogs divinely placed in his life, from his boyhood beagle to his new puppy, Grace. Everyone loved Millie, but the one dog who is always in my heart is Marty, Edward and Julee's 100-pound Labrador.

Maybe it was because he seemed so misunderstood. Edward brought him to work (the boss can get away with that) when Julee, a singer, was on tour and he couldn't find a dog walker. One quit when Marty chased after a seeing eye dog. Another got dragged half a block when Marty tried to run down a carriage horse on Eighth Avenue. "I have trouble keeping them," Edward confessed.

Marty hung out in my office while Edward was in meetings. Once, when I was deep into editing, I heard a rustling. "Marty!" His lemon-white face was a mask of powdery brown. He'd gotten into a jumbo can of Ovaltine left over from when I was pregnant. Ashamed in a way only a dog caught in a forbidden deed can be, Marty tried to hide under a guest chair that was half his size. "Don't worry," I said, wiping his face. "Your dad will never know." Until now, that is.

Ostensibly Edward's book is about dogs. I think it's really about love, how we love these animals with all our heart and how they love us back. How they are by our side forever. Check out the illustration on page 7. That's Marty on the right. See what I mean?

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Colleen Hughes".

COLLEEN HUGHES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



To order Edward's book, go to [angelsonearth.org/millielessons](http://angelsonearth.org/millielessons)



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## WHAT'S NEW ONLINE

### They Deserve a Treat!

We asked you to tell us about the beloved dogs who have made a marked difference in your life. Meet one-of-a-kind canines at [angelsonearth.org/inspiringdogs](http://angelsonearth.org/inspiringdogs).

### Brothers and Sisters

They can be rivals, best friends, partners in mischief. Celebrate historical siblings who have changed the world in our exclusive slide show in honor of National Siblings Day on April 10 at [angelsonearth.org/famoussiblings](http://angelsonearth.org/famoussiblings).

### 40 Days

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, when we acknowledge our mortality. It ends with Holy Week, when we wave palms just as the people of Jerusalem did to welcome Jesus to their city. Lent is a season of reflection. Enjoy these rejuvenating Lenten prayers at [angelsonearth.org/lentenprayers](http://angelsonearth.org/lentenprayers).



You've known pet lovers and dog people. You might be one yourself. But the bond goes deep for Edward Grinnan, whose spiritual connection to the dogs he's loved made each seem like an instrument of heaven sent to guide him to being a better human being. All were teachers but...

# Some Were Angels

BY EDWARD GRINNAN, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, GUIDEPOSTS  
EXCERPTED FROM HIS NEW BOOK, *ALWAYS BY MY SIDE*

**T**HAT YEAR, 2009, Julee and I were having my family out from Michigan to our weekend place in the Berkshires for Thanksgiving, a visit that occasioned the planning and logistics normally reserved for visiting heads of state. That's because Julee wants everything to be better than perfect, which is an issue right there. Still, the pursuit of perfection can be a lot of fun—especially when it's for your family—in addition to being a lot of work, and we were having a good time running around like crazy people the weekend

before. Our big young golden retriever, Millie, knew something was up but couldn't quite figure it out except for the fact that it apparently involved large amounts of food, which was a promising sign indeed. Ask any dog.

I took the train back down to the city Sunday night, intending to come back up Tuesday to complete the assignments Julee had given me, which consisted mostly of deciphering with one hand endless hand-scrawled, food-stained lists of things like fresh cardoon and jarred



barberry while trying to drive with the other.

Then came the call Monday morning, just as dawn was yawning over the Manhattan skyline. Julee's voice seemed far away to my sleep-besotted brain.

"Ed, I broke my collarbone."

"You what? How? Where are you?"

"Home."

"I'll be right up."

"Don't worry. Millie's fine. She saved me."

Minutes later I was getting a new ticket for the next train up to Hudson, New York, and then a cab to Monterey, Massachusetts, another hour on top of the two stuck on Amtrak, by which time I'd begged God for help every way I knew how and was beginning to repeat myself. I was a nervous wreck when I jumped out of the cab and heard Millie barking from inside the house.

Julee was sitting in our recliner, her right arm in a fearsome medical contraption that looked like a cross between a sling and a cast. She seemed both relaxed and uncomfortable, which I figured was par for the course for a broken bone and strong pain relief. Tylenol with a number after it for sure, and probably something more. That arm situation looked painful. I'd broken my arm a few years earlier playing



Edward's niece Rachel, Julee and brand-new puppy Millie in 2007

for the Guideposts softball team, and it was not fun those first few hours in the ER. I was opting for amputation if it stopped the pain.

Millie was beside herself. She was trying to tell me the whole story. There was no doubt about that. She was circling me and woofing and darting back and forth between me and Julee and bouncing up and down on her forepaws and pulling me to the stairs: *I'm relieved you're finally here. What took you so long? She fell down the stairs in the middle of the night. I heard her...*

"Make me a cup of coffee and I'll tell you the whole story," Julee said.

I made us both coffee and Julee filled me in. She'd gotten up in the

middle of the night to get something to drink, no doubt a Diet Coke, which always struck me as a crazy thing to grab a sip of at that hour. But that's Julee. Coming down the stairs in the dark, she'd stumbled over an errant dog toy, lost her balance and gone head over tea kettle to the bottom.

"I knew something was broken right away, even though there wasn't any pain at first. But your whole body is shaking, like all sorts of messages are flying around: This is bad."

And it was. The pain came soon enough. So did Millie, who trotted down the stairs to see what the commotion was all about.

"She knew it was serious," Julee said. "She had this super-concerned look on her face, sniffing and checking me out. She sat on the landing with me. She wouldn't leave my side."

Julee managed to sit up, grab the phone and call 911. Then she lay back down, thinking about how she would tell the EMTs where the spare key was hidden so they wouldn't bust down the door.

"That's when Millie did the most amazing thing. She lay down on top of me very, very gently. She avoided putting any of her weight on my upper right side. By then I figured out I'd probably broken the right collarbone. Also by then I was feeling

cold and really shaky. Her warmth was incredible. Not just her normal body heat. It was like she made herself warmer than usual. She was like this big, living blanket. She slowed her breathing. I felt her heartbeat slow. Then my breathing slowed and my heart, which had been absolutely hammering out of my chest, slowed too. This dog was actually treating me until help came. She knew exactly what to do. Edward, she's only two. How did she know all this?"

Millie sat quietly taking it all in, her silence seeming to confirm the facts of the matter. She absolutely knew we were talking about her. I'm sure of that. Dogs know when they are being discussed.

"Then the EMTs got here, banging on the door until I told them where the key was," Julee continued. "Millie wouldn't let them near me. All these big guys in big coats and big shoes banging on the door, stomping around. She must have thought they were space invaders or terrorists. She stood over me, barking. Pretty ferociously too, for her. I'd never seen her so alarmed. And I couldn't believe these guys. They were scared to death of her, a two-year-old golden retriever, not much more than a big puppy! I thought they were going to tase her. 'Come on, guys. She's just a

pup, a golden retriever.' Finally, I coaxed her into the study and closed the door. It broke my heart to do that to the poor thing, and I said some stuff to the EMTs that I won't repeat. But they deserved it, making me lock Millie in a room like that! She was worried to death about me."

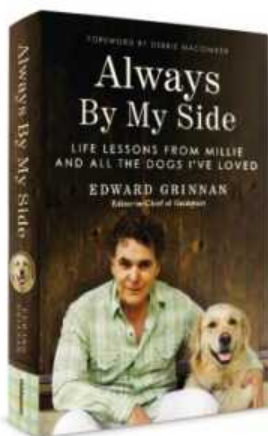
I gave Millie a pet and a squeeze.

"They wanted to put me on a stretcher, but I told them no way. I'd walk, thank you. I made them promise to let Millie out of the study before I would get into the ambulance. The last thing I remember is her face at the window, looking all fraught and concerned."

Julee called a couple of friends to run over and sit with Millie while doctors X-rayed and evaluated her shoulder. Yes, the collarbone was broken, which was a good thing, the doctor said, because it's like a circuit breaker that helps protect you from breaking your shoulder or neck.

"Evolution in action," he said. I reminded myself to say a prayer of thanks for collarbones.

But there was nothing much to be done except to keep Julee's right arm



Find Edward's new book at [guideposts.org/millie](http://guideposts.org/millie) or wherever books are sold.

immobilized and take another look in a week or two to see if the bone was healing on its own or if surgery was required.

It was quite a

Thanksgiving that year with Julee trying to do

everything with her left arm (she's a righty) and everyone trying to get her to sit down and relax. She insisted on doing the mashed potatoes though, left-handed, and some of it ended up on the ceiling under which Millie sat patiently waiting for its inevitable return to earth. Gravity in action. Finally, it came time to go around the table and say what we were thankful for. Of course, Julee's answer was not unexpected: Millie. "Do you know what the doctor said?" she added. "He said Millie kept me from going into shock, which made all the difference. He said he never heard of a dog doing that."

Neither had I. I reached under the table down by my feet and found a soft, furry neck to pat. Somebody had trained her to do what she did that morning, and it wasn't me. ■

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# *alone*

There was a generation gap  
in our church, but  
was I right to address it?

BY ANDREA ARTHUR OWAN  
TUSCON, ARIZONA

**t**EXT FILLED UP my computer screen. I'd read the words a hundred times, but the more I read them, the less confident I felt. "Why, oh why, did I decide to deliver this sermon?" I whispered. It was Saturday night, too late to change my mind and come up with something new. I printed out my final draft and handed it to my husband, Chris, to look over. "It might be one of the last sermons I'm ever asked to give."

It wasn't the public speaking that scared me. While the pastor of our church was taking a three-month sabbatical, certified lay speakers like me had taken turns filling in for him on Sundays. But this week I'd chosen a controversial subject.

Our church had a generation gap. Most of our congregants were older,

# *at the pulpit*

the average age hovering around 65. But some had started bringing their teenage grandchildren with them to church. And those kids brought along their friends. The kids weren't exactly being received with open arms. Our longtime members were used to things being done their way, and they weren't used to boisterous teenagers with ideas of their own.

As a leader of the youth group, I heard the kids' complaints about how they were treated at the gatherings we had outside the services. "They don't like when we play our music," one teen said during the last meeting.

"Everybody's always saying we laugh too loud," another said.

"And talk too much!"

"They don't like the way we dress."

"It's like they don't want us here," one summed up. "We don't even feel welcome in the service."

No wonder whenever we had a social gathering the kids wound up



## *Someone was standing there beside me. A man. No, not a man. An angel*

drifting outside, separated from the older folks. That wasn't the way a church was supposed to work. A church was like a family, and a family had to cater to many different generations. The lucky ones did, anyway. I'd struggled to figure out how to make the kids feel welcome and encourage the adults to be more patient with having them. I decided to address the problem straight on. What better place than from the pulpit? It seemed like the right thing to do. I knew how the kids felt. Didn't I owe it to them to make their feelings known?

But the closer Sunday came, the more apprehensive I felt.

"I think your sermon is great," Chris said, handing it back.

"You think it's too harsh?" I said. "Like when I remind them Jesus said it would be better to have a great millstone hung around their necks than to be found putting a stumbling block in front of a child? I want the older generation to know that when they shoot the kids a disapproving look, they're putting a stumbling block in front of those kids."

"They need to hear it, plain and clear," Chris said.

"Yes, they do," I said with a sigh. "I just wish I weren't the one telling it to them." I didn't want to be on the receiving end of those disapproving looks either!

"It's too late to back out now," Chris said.

I returned to the computer to print out a fresh copy. *Is this really a good idea, Lord?* I thought as I put it in my sermon binder. *Any chance I could get a sign that I'm doing the right thing here?*

The next morning I woke up feeling sick. My throat was sore and raspy. I felt feverish. *Is this my sign?* I thought. Maybe God was telling me I'd chosen the wrong way to address the problem. Or maybe I'd just made myself sick worrying about it.

I got out of bed, popped a throat lozenge, practiced one more time and drove to church early. As I checked to make sure the microphone was working I got weak in the knees.

I sat behind the pulpit during greeting time, gathering my thoughts and sucking another lozenge. The congregation strolled around the sanctuary, shaking hands and trading hugs. By the time the interim pastor started the service I

felt dizzy as well as feverish. *Give me strength, Lord! I need to know you're with me.*

The last song before the sermon drew to a close. The interim pastor leaned over to me. "I'm going to sit down in front so I can hear you better," he said, and left me to join the congregation.

*Great*, I thought. It was just me now. Just me. I did some last minute adjustments on the microphone. I took a sip of water. The water bottle made a snap as I closed the lid—

*You are not alone.* The words seemed to have been spoken right into my head and heart. I turned to my left and saw the words were true. Someone was standing there beside me. A man. No, not a man. An angel. A tall angel with sleek dark hair. Snow white wings rose up behind him, like ensigns above his head. A second pair of wings, feathered and resplendent, lay overlapping his body. His eyes were fixed not on me, but on the congregation. He exuded an aura of might and majesty. What's more, I felt the same aura on my right. I didn't even have to turn my head to know there was a second angel on my other side.

My doubts disappeared as I absorbed their strength. God was indeed with me. The audience looked at me expectantly. Just me, as if I



**Andrea doesn't regret speaking out.**

were standing there all alone at the pulpit. *Thank you, Lord.* Then I began my sermon.

The angels disappeared when I spoke the last word.

"You were great," Chris said afterward. Other parishioners thought so too. They were glad and relieved to have the problem brought out into the open.

Things at our church were different after that day. The generations mixed more easily, more respectfully. Everyone was more relaxed. But those were nothing like the changes inside me. I'd seen angels with my own eyes. ■



# just another thursday

My daily routine  
felt *way* too routine

BY JOHN JACKSON, WING, ALABAMA

**C**HILDREN PLAYED in the yards along the block. I waved to them as I walked by, delivering mail at houses along the way. Just an ordinary Thursday afternoon. I turned up the next walkway. The lady who lived there opened the door wide. “Hello,” she said. I knew what she was waiting for. “I’ve got your book club selection,” I said, handing over her package.

There were only about 700 people on my route. Over the years I’d gotten to know most of them, if not in person then by their mail. There were the folks who got magazines, or book after book, those who loved

their catalogues, some who had steady pen pals. Mrs. Dorman at the end of my route got a package from the Home Shopping Network almost every day. She was an older lady, and I liked being able to bring a little joy into her life with my delivery. Some mailmen preferred routes where they drove a truck and slipped the mail into a collection of mailboxes without seeing anyone face-to-face. Not me. I wanted to be outside talking to people. Where the excitement was.

Except to be honest, there wasn’t much excitement on a local postal route like mine. Besides a sudden

rainstorm or a white Christmas, every day was pretty much the same. I tucked a bundle into the next mailbox and noticed a postcard on top from Hawaii. *Maybe I'm missing out on the real action of life*, I thought, wishing I was there.

I continued down the block. I knew I provided an important service in my job. College acceptances, birthday presents, postcards from all corners of the world—they could all make someone's day. I also brought doctor bills and insurance notices. Mrs.

Dorman down the street got her blood pressure pills and blood test kits for diabetes in the mail. Convenient, yes. But I was just the messenger, showing up every day like clockwork. It wasn't me who was making a difference in people's lives. Not me *personally*. A friendly hello, a chat with a lonely person. That was the most I could offer. That should have been enough, but the routine was getting to me.

I dug in my bag for Mrs. Dorman's mail—and the inevitable Home Shopping Network package. She'd be glad to get this, whatever it was. Mrs.



**John never knows what will happen on his mail route.**

Dorman often waited for me at the door and we always had a nice talk. Once a few years back I'd mentioned I'd noticed she got a lot of cards each August. Turns out, we shared a birthday. Now we never forgot to wish each other happy returns. This year she'd turned 78.

Mrs. Dorman wasn't at the door today, but I heard the TV going inside so I knew she was home. *Probably watching her shopping shows*, I thought. I fit all the envelopes into her mailbox, then bent down to put the package by the door.

I froze. *What was that?* Something

## College acceptances, birthday presents, postcards—they could all make someone's day

like a cry, barely audible. I leaned closer to the door. Maybe the sound came from the TV?

"Mrs. Dorman?" I called.

No answer. But then—that same faint cry.

"Hello?"

I tried to open the storm door, but it was locked. So I pressed my ear against it. This time I clearly heard words: "Help me."

I pushed against the storm door until the latch broke. Luckily the wooden door behind it wasn't locked. I pushed it open and stepped into the house, not sure what I might find.

Mrs. Dorman lay face down in the hallway, not far from the door. An armchair had fallen on top of her. Her arm was caught in it.

"I...think..." she said weakly. She seemed to be having trouble breathing—probably from the heavy chair on top of her. I carefully moved it, gently disentangling her arm before calling 911. "I think I dislocated my shoulder," she whispered.

"Do you know if she has any medical conditions?" the operator asked me.

"Yes, she's diabetic," I said, remembering all those test kits. "And has high blood pressure."

The EMTs arrived fast. They lifted Mrs. Dorman onto a stretcher and carried her to the ambulance. I called work and told them I would be a little late finishing my route.

**M**RS. DORMAN was back home within a few days, her broken shoulder in a sling. Some of her family members came to stay and look after her. I was sure happy the day she greeted me at the door herself again.

"I was watching TV on Thursday morning and lost my balance getting up," she explained. "I tried to grab the chair. Instead it came down on top of me. It happened around eleven-fifteen. What time did you come by?"

"Four-thirty," I said. "I wish I'd been here sooner!"

"That's okay," Mrs. Dorman said. "All that time I was praying. Praying for you. I knew you'd come just like you do every day. That's what gave me comfort."

It was just an ordinary Thursday. And that was extraordinary. ■



# *guided*

**A Beautiful Lady, a comforting vision and a surprising detail led this artist to a spiritual discovery**

**BY STAR SAINT CLAIRE, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**

ANGELS ARE A FAVORITE subject of mine when I paint. But the one I was about to create was special. Gazing at the blank canvas in front of me, I pictured the image in my mind and remembered the first time I had seen her. The woman I referred to as the Beautiful Lady.

It was 1966. My family lived in Seattle, in a pale green wooden house perched halfway up a hill. I was five years old, making mud pies in our yard. To me, the place was magical. Sitting in the square of green velvet grass bordered by red roses and a stone retaining wall felt like being in a secret garden in a fairy tale.

I patted my mud pie, smoothing it into shape. The air grew strangely still. I sensed something nearby. I couldn't say what. I left my mud pies baking on a sun-warmed tree stump and wandered to the stone wall.

From my perch I could peer down on the street below.

Walking serenely up the sidewalk was a lovely Asian woman. She was dressed in a traditional kimono, though at the time I didn't know what her dress was called. I just knew it was beautiful, made of flowing silk and covered in big watercolor flowers in purples, pinks and blues.

Her face was a perfect oval, pale and still as the moon. Her feet and hands were hidden in the folds of her kimono so that she almost seemed to glide up the street. She didn't notice me. Her gaze stayed fixed straight ahead. As she passed below I was surprised to see painted chopsticks holding up her shiny black hair.

I never told anyone about the Beautiful Lady. She was a treasure, I pretended, meant only for me. My family left Washington not long after

*Seattle Angel* is Star's latest portrait of the Beautiful Lady. "It's still wet!" Star says. The original, *Guided*, is at far right. Her *Garden Angel* painting is in between.

that, but thinking about the woman now I felt the same secret thrill. I could still see her in my mind and I was finally going to paint her. What, after all this time, had inspired me? I started to sketch, smiling about the surprising discovery I'd made just this afternoon.

I'd been painting since I was 17. Art made me feel at home no matter where we lived, especially after I ventured out on my own to Taos, New Mexico. One day I sat with a poet friend, Shelley, in the flowered courtyard of an old adobe home where several of us artists had apartments. Shelley was telling me about something called the Cube Game.

"It's a great way to learn things about yourself," she said. "And it's easy. The first thing to do is close your eyes." I did. "Now," she said, "picture a cube."

"What kind of cube?" I asked, seeing only blackness.

"That's up to you," Shelley said. "Let your mind create what it wants to create."

A cube took shape in my mind. "It's transparent," I said. "Floating in a vast space." I didn't mention that the vision gave me a mysterious sense of comfort. And not just a passing



comfort. I had the sense that this feeling of comfort would last for all eternity. "What does it mean?" I asked Shelley.

"The cube represents you," she said. "You'll have to work out for yourself what it all means."

I moved to California soon afterward and took the mystery of my vision with me. Now, in my apartment warmed by the San Diego sun, my Beautiful Lady took shape on the canvas before me. I glanced over to the jar where I kept my paintbrushes. Tucked in among the brushes was something else—a pair of painted chopsticks featuring a woman in a traditional kimono. Of course they always reminded me of my Beautiful Lady.



Earlier that afternoon, I'd pulled one out to admire it. Not for the first time, I held the chopstick up to the light to inspect the tiny painting. I squinted. *She's holding something.* How had I never noticed that detail before? Something small and square, held safe in her hands. I got out my magnifying glass.

The woman was holding a box. A cube. Transparent, just like the one I had envisioned. The one that represented me. A detail I had missed until this moment.

I ran to the phone to call Shelley. "Remember when we played the Cube Game?" I asked. I told her about the woman on the chopsticks and my surprising discovery. I told her all about my Beautiful Lady from

childhood, something I had never shared with anyone.

"You saw your guide," Shelley said simply.

*My guide...* The Beautiful Lady was my guardian angel! No wonder the glimpse of her had stayed in my heart all these years. No wonder the thought of that cube filled me with comfort, everlasting comfort. That transparent cube—me—was under her protection forever.

The painting I began that day now hangs over my fireplace. I gave the Beautiful Lady wings and a golden halo so there's no longer any doubt who she is. I'd thought I'd left my Beautiful Lady behind with my childhood, but in fact, she had carried me in her arms all this time. ■

## only human?

I RUSHED OUT THE DOORS of Best Buy and checked my watch. I was cutting it close for my four o'clock appointment. Then I saw it: a car parked way too close to the right side of my van. A massive delivery truck was in the spot right behind me, its back end jutting out into the lane. No room to maneuver—parking lot nightmare.

*Oh, boy.* I started my van and cautiously reversed toward the right, but there wasn't enough clearance behind me with that

truck in the way. I got out, evaluated the space I had to work with, and got back in to try again, this time nearly scraping the car next to me. *Lord, please help me get out of this spot.*

Back and forth I went, an inch back, an inch forward, jumping in and out of the car, wishing I could be both places at once. I looked around, hoping one of the drivers would return, but there was no one around. I bowed my head in defeat.

"Looks like you're stuck!"

I looked up to see a middle-aged man with a teenage boy. *Where on earth did they come from?* "I sure am," I said.

The man gestured for the boy to stand in front of the car, while he stood behind. They patiently coached me out. In my rearview mirror, I saw them walk on toward Best Buy. My eyes followed them as they navigated through a row of parked cars. I swung ahead and waited and waited for them to cross my path. They never did. Best Buy calls their helpers the Geek Squad. But that day in the parking lot, I believe I met the God Squad.

CHARLENE HEEREN, DAVENPORT, FLORIDA



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# make my day

I wasn't in the mood  
for chitchat

BY LOU DEAN  
DINOSAUR, COLORADO

"DO YOU MIND if I join you?" The young man's voice made me look up from my complimentary breakfast.

"That's fine," I said, motioning toward the chair across from me.

"It's really crowded in here," he said, flashing a nice smile.

Looking around, I realized there wasn't one vacant table in the hotel dining area. All my attention had been on me.

As I idly watched the guy put cream in his coffee and hot sauce on his sausage, my mind spun with the frustrations of my doctor's visit the day before. I'd traveled a long distance through a snowstorm to see yet another specialist, but even he didn't have answers for my growing inflammation problems.

My breakfast companion noticed me staring. "Traveling far?" he asked, giving me a friendly nod.

"I live about six hours north, up in

the Wyoming/Colorado corner of the state.” I hoped he didn’t have any more questions for me. He seemed nice enough, but I was in no mood for small talk. I dipped my head back toward my plate and stuffed my mouth with a bite of toast to signal the end of our conversation. *Lord, please help me deal with my fear.*

To my relief, the young man reached into his backpack and pulled out a spiral notebook. He wrote as he ate. After a few moments of complete silence, I started to feel bad about cutting him off.

“Are you a budding writer?” I asked, softening my voice.

“No ma’am,” he said. “I’m working on a list for my mom. She’s fighting lung cancer and she’s asked me to make her a smile list.”

“I’m sorry about your mother’s health,” I said, feeling even worse. “What’s a smile list?”

“Oh, just little blessings. She says reading my daily list brings her a lot of comfort.”

“What a lovely gift for your mom.”

“Thank you,” he said. The big smile flashed again. “It was my idea. I’m going to school back East. Mom’s condition is terminal.” He hesitated and I could feel his pain in the silence.

“I tried to come up with something I could do to let her know I think of her every day.”

“Would it be too personal to ask you to read a few of your ‘smiles’?”

“No, not at all,” he said. Then, looking down at his notebook and scanning the page, he read:

● *Driving last night with sleeping passengers*

● *Watching the sunrise*

● *Looking forward to my next visit home*

● *Finding a shiny penny*

● *Sharing a table at breakfast with a nice stranger*

His last entry caught in my throat. “I’m battling some health problems of my own,” I admitted. “You’ve been an answer to prayer.”

The young man’s smile lit the room. “Oh,” he said, grabbing his pen and writing. “Mom will love that one.” Then he stood up, gathered his things and took his coffee to go. “I have to meet my plane.”

As he walked away, I took out a pen and pad and wrote:

● *Encountering an answered prayer*

And then I smiled. ■

# OPPOSITES ATTRACT

BY KAREN STRAUB, BUTLER, NEW JERSEY

My husband needed a liver transplant, and time was running out. Where was the donor we so desperately needed?

**O**RGAN DONOR CRITERIA: *Forty-five years of age or younger. Must be in good health. Same height and weight as donor recipient. Universal blood type. Nonsmoker.*

I sat at the kitchen table, re-reading the brochures from the hospital and feeling more and more hopeless with every word. The perfect donor didn't seem to exist. And without that perfect donor, my husband, Rich, didn't have a chance.

He was 52 years old and dying of liver failure. He'd been on the transplant list for almost a year. When Rich first got sick, I was

hopeful. Every time the phone rang, I ran for it, thinking it was the hospital calling to tell us they found Rich a liver. But that call never came. Meanwhile, every day brought more bad news, like the discovery that Rich had liver cancer too. My husband was an upbeat guy. He never missed an opportunity to tell a joke. But even he had lost his spark. His once lively green eyes held a look of defeat. Some mornings he had to drag himself out of bed. I barely recognized the man who had swept

**Rich is a Yankees fan, and Karen's learned to love the team flag that flies over their lawn.**

PHOTOS BY SCOTT JONES



me off my feet 12 years earlier.

I closed the brochure and thought of Rich back then. He was bartending at a restaurant in New Jersey where my friend dragged me for dinner one night. “Whoa,” Rich said when he approached our table. He blinked dramatically. “Your smile just literally lit up the whole room!”

It was such an obvious pickup line that I couldn’t help laughing. Rich found excuses to chat us up all night. He joined us after his shift ended. Turned out there was more to him than just jokes. He was easy to talk to. I felt like I’d known him my whole life. Like we just understood each other on an almost molecular level. I left the restaurant knowing my life would never be the same. I’d found my perfect match.

*Perfect match*, I thought, opening the brochure again. Rich needed one of those more than ever now. Friends and family had gotten tested, but no one fit the bill. The donor would have to give Rich sixty percent of their liver, no small feat.

*I’m going to lose my husband*, I thought. *And there’s nothing I can do about it.*

Then a new thought popped into my head: *Why don’t you become his organ donor?*

I shook the thought away. Me? A donor? *This* donor? It would never



work. Not one doctor or nurse had even entertained the notion. I was the *worst* possible candidate. I was 43 and barely met the age requirement. I rarely exercised. I had a heart murmur. Rich was six foot three and thin. I was five foot six and curvy. I didn’t even know my blood type. I closed the brochure. But the thought persisted. *Be his donor.*

It was a long shot for sure, but fantasizing about the possibility was better than feeling hopeless. So I drove to the hospital the next morning and got tested. I didn’t tell Rich what I was doing. There was no



**Rescue dog Charlie found a good, healthy home with the Straubs.**

reason to get his hopes up. Not even when I discovered my blood type was a match, which moved me on to the second round of tests.

More blood draws. Psychological exams. Running on a treadmill. But it was worth it, even if it all came to nothing. At least I was *doing* something.

“We’ll call with the results,” the nurse said. I listened for the voice to give me good news, but I heard nothing. I went home and tried not to think about the way things might turn out. I debated whether to come clean with Rich and put this fantasy out of my mind.

I was back at the kitchen again looking at my brochure when the phone rang.

“Mrs. Straub? It’s the hospital.”

I braced myself for the inevitable

disappointment. In fact I actually braced myself so well I almost didn’t understand when the doctor explained that I was approved for the transplant. *Me*. The imperfect donor!

Rich tried to talk me out of it—the process was just too grueling, he said. But the spark in his eyes spoke louder than words. “I don’t understand why you’d want to do this, Karen,” he said finally, with an elaborate sigh. “I have such a great life insurance policy!”

We both laughed that time. For the first time in ages. My jokester had returned.

And I have many more years of corny jokes to look forward to. The transplant was a huge success—for the both of us. Rich likes to say he always carries a piece of me with him. I remind him that he has always carried a piece of me with him. We have been a perfect match since day one. ■

## Afterglow

The road to recovery wasn’t easy, but eight years after their surgeries Karen and Rich Straub are healthy and happy as can be. When they’re not hanging out with their grandkids, or planning a trip to the beach, the duo are out walking their hound dog, Charlie. The transplant led Karen to a healthier lifestyle and she’s fitter than ever thanks to Zumba, Pilates and Yoga. “I’m more spontaneous and just appreciate every single day,” Karen says of life post transplant. Rich too now lives in a constant state of gratitude. “Rich will never forget how blessed he is,” Karen laughs, “because I won’t let him!”

## lost & found

VACATIONS FOR ME meant always traveling with the same tour business. Nothing had ever gone wrong. Then my friend tempted me into trying a new one to Scotland and Ireland. “They better be good,” I told her, “because I’m spoiled.” My usual tour people knew how to take care of me.

I took an eight-hour flight from Atlanta to Amsterdam to Glasgow, and waited patiently at baggage claim for my red suitcase—but it never came.

“Looks like it’s still somewhere in Atlanta,” the clerk said. “We’ll do our best to locate it and send it over.”

On the bus to our hotel, I clutched my purse, which held only my passport and billfold. A woman from our group approached me in the lobby.

“I have a change of clothes you can borrow—we’re the same size, I think.” Another woman came over. “What size shoes do you wear?”

When it came my turn to check in, the hotel clerk gave me all the toiletries I would need. For the next 48 hours everyone on the tour—from the guides to my fellow travelers—went out of their way to take care of me. Thanks to their warmth and humor I felt at home.

At the end of the second day, our kind tour guide came running through the hotel lobby with a big smile on his face—and my red suitcase trailing behind him! You would have thought a celebrity arrived the way everyone jumped up and cheered.

My new tour group had taken care of everything.

MARY HANSFORD, WATKINSVILLE, GEORGIA



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# Angels in Bloom

Everything's coming  
up new again

## Love's Azalea

Our 25-year-old son, Tim, thrust the potted azalea into my hands. “Do you think you and Mom could manage to keep it alive for ten months?” he said, only half-joking. My wife, Carol, and I don’t have such a great track record for indoor plants. They always seem to wither and die on us. Despite our best intentions. Too much water, not enough sun? We never knew which was the problem. Perhaps both? “We promise we’ll do our best,” we said.

Tim was headed to South Africa for 10 months of mission work—and 10 months of separation from his girlfriend, Henley. I can’t remember who had given the azalea to whom on Valentine’s Day, but he said now that it was a sign of their love. Would it last?

We did our best, watering the plant sparingly, but faithfully, singing to it, offering it muted sun not too close to the cold blasts by the window. Tim and Henley did their best too, Skyping regularly, keeping in touch, never forgetting whose they were. White blossoms like cherubs’ wings sprouted on the azalea, just in time for it to be set outside for the spring rains.

There it was in August when Tim came home. I couldn’t wait

to show him. “Come and look!” I said. “The azalea survived.”

“You and Mom did great,” he said. “Henley will be thrilled.”

But we couldn’t take full credit. Nature had done its work as much as Skype had. And yet, when love stays in bloom it’s hardly accidental. Love, like a plant, needs nurturing. Prayers were heard and said, and more than an azalea thrived.

RICK HAMLIN, GUIDEPOSTS EXECUTIVE EDITOR

## When the Grass Is Greener

From my bedroom window, the brown stuff piled high in the back of my daddy’s old pickup looked like dirt. Until I opened my window and stuck my head out into the spring air. “What’s that?” I called down. Pinching my nose, I gagged as the pungent, unmistakable smell of manure wafted up. I ran downstairs.

“We’re gonna lay down some fertilizer,” Daddy was telling my brothers when I got outside. Fertilizer—manure? Here? In the middle of a city neighborhood? What would people think? My brothers grimaced and groaned as they shoveled stinking heaps of cow manure onto our yard and spread it over the grass evenly. Neighbors walking by frowned and crossed the street.

“Wait and see what the lawn looks like after a while!” Daddy said. *Lord, is this really necessary?* I wondered.

Over the coming days our family was the object of unwanted attention, as well as some gossipy whispers and even shouts of disdain from passing cars. Would we ever live this down?

The smell subsided eventually, and tiny blades of grass peeked out of the covering. A few weeks later the sun shined brighter, and more grass came out to greet it.

One day I walked out of the house to a yard as green as a golf course. On either side, the neighbors’ yards were dried up and yellow. Everyone fell in love with our “parkland.” Suddenly those uncomfortable weeks seemed well worth it. Daddy taught me a great lesson that day he showed up in his smelly truck: Something that seems like a terrible trial can turn into a blessing.

CYNTHIA GOYANG, MIDLAND, TEXAS

## Not Just Any Rose

Who names a rosebush?

Me, and I named my rosebushes Avie and Clarence, after my parents. The bushes grew beautifully in the garden in front of my house. They belonged together, just as Mom and Dad had when I was growing up. Avie presented me with a gorgeous pink rose on Mother's Day weekend, a special gift since Mom herself was now in heaven.

When Dad joined her that June, I was devastated. His death had taken me completely by surprise, and I felt myself grieving for Mom as well, all over again.

I made the drive to my parents' house in Texas for the funeral. Dad had built the house by hand, pounding every nail, laying every pipe. The house I'd grown up in as an only child, the center of my parents' attention. Now our happy house would go up for sale.

I stood in 108-degree Texas heat to say my good-bye at Dad's graveside at the end of my trip. The long, lonely drive home to Tennessee deepened my sorrow.

As I finally turned into the driveway, though, something awaited me in front of my house. Avie greeted me with a new bloom. It was like Mom was sharing her joy at being reunited with my father.

*They're together again*, I thought. And that was nice. But I was left behind.

In October the real estate agent called to say the house had sold. I burst into tears, feeling the loss of this last connection to my parents. *Now I'm truly alone*. Then I looked out the window, and saw that Clarence had bloomed with a single red rose. It was big and lush, like a prize. I felt as if my father had wrapped me in his arms.

Avie and Clarence continue to bloom at just the right moments, their roses always offering me a fragrant message of joy and comfort sent from heaven.

PAM HIX, MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE

## *someone's in the kitchen*



**T**HEME PARTIES ARE MY SPECIALITY. For my daughter, Bethany, eight months pregnant, I threw a Cutie Pie Baby Shower. Savory pies, fruit pies, creamy pies, nut pies—everybody brought a pie. I made my Ham and Brie Brunch Pie, a recipe featured on my blog, [allthingsheartandhome.com](http://allthingsheartandhome.com), where I share my favorite food, crafts and entertaining ideas. This pie is perfect for any joyful occasion, like the most joyous of all—Easter!

ROBIN GAY, MARIETTA, GEORGIA

PHOTOS BY ANGIE MOSIER

## Ham and Brie Brunch Pie

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 9-inch piecrust
- 8 ounces of ham, diced into ½-inch cubes
- 5 ounces Brie cheese, without rind
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

### RECIPE

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Press piecrust dough into deep-dish pie plate. Prick sides and bottom of dough with a fork. Cover piecrust with foil and bake for 10 minutes. Remove foil and bake for 5



**Robin cooks to make folks feel welcome.**

more minutes. Remove crust from oven and reduce heat to 325. Use frying pan to cook ham until browned and a little crispy on edges. Spread ham along bottom of piecrust. Thinly slice the Brie, and cover ham. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top of Brie. In a mixing bowl, whisk eggs, cream and nutmeg. Pour over cheese and ham layers in the piecrust. Bake 45 minutes or until *mostly* set. Finished pie may jiggle in the center but it should be nice and hot. Let it sit for 15 minutes or until the cheese firms up. Serves 8.



**The recipes closest to your heart taste best. Send yours to Angels on Earth, 110 William Street, Suite 901, New York, NY 10038.**

## heaven's music

**N**O TALENT FOR SINGING. Couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. Accidental harmonizer. My voice has been described in many colorful ways over the years. So church choir was a pipe dream for me, until I was asked to perform in an Easter cantata. However, I would *sign* the words, not sing them!

That I could do. I learned the American Sign Language alphabet after reading Helen Keller's biography in the sixth grade. In college I took two years' worth of classes and used that training often as a school psychologist. Still, I had never signed at an event like this. As Easter drew closer I got nervous.

Nervousness blossomed into full-blown stage fright when family and friends realized they couldn't attend the performance for one reason after another. All understandable excuses, but what about me? I was finally going to be a member of the choir, and no one I knew would be there in the audience to see it.

Easter morning I stood on stage staring out at the congregation, everyone all dressed up. They looked so joyful. How I wished I was out there in the audience with them. I took a deep breath and tried to center myself. The song began, and my hands started to move. And rejoice. The joy of Easter had us all in its grip, and surely God was there to see it.

Now I'm officially a member of the choir, signing regularly during Sunday services. It's pure joy for me all year round.

**ANNAMARIE SOLLARS, YUMA, ARIZONA**



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# Springtime miracle

Two geese landed in our pond every year.  
Where were they when we needed them?

BY KAREN SARGENT, BELLEVIEW, MISSOURI

“THEY’RE NOT COMING,” my 11-year-old daughter, Randi, whispered.

I was loading the last suitcase into the trunk of the car. My daughter’s eyes were fixed on the small pond behind our house. The water was completely still, reflecting the trees that lined the bank. Randi looked to the sky, but that was empty too.

There was no sign of the two Canadian geese that landed in our pond every March. For years the pair arrived like clockwork, early in the morning, to swim all day and then fly off in the late afternoon. Just the two of them, Victor and Victoria. Our family had even named them. The

geese were our sign that spring was coming—a time of rebirth and renewal. No one waited for those geese like Randi, who God created to love all creatures big and small, almost as much as she loved her big sister, Kelli.

I closed the trunk. *Where are they?* It was the last day of March and the pond was undisturbed by even a ripple. It seemed Randi was right. Victor and Victoria weren’t coming this year.

We needed that sign of hope more than ever for the days that lay ahead. We were traveling to St. Louis Children’s Hospital, where Kelli was



**Kelli (left) and Randi migrated briefly to Florida in June.**

scheduled to have spinal fusion surgery for scoliosis. I knew how much Randi worried about her sister, but she didn't want to show it. She had no control over how Kelli's surgery would go. Or the fact that our family would be separated once the surgery was complete. I would stay with Kelli while she recovered; Randi and her dad would return home. We were all under stress. Kelli was her usual brave self, but I sometimes wondered if things weren't hardest on Randi.

As the four of us pulled out of the driveway, I glanced at the pond one more time, praying for a sign of feathers. Nothing. I could see the disappointment in Randi's eyes when I looked at her in the backseat.

Kelli made it through—with a few complications—but Randi and her

dad went home as planned. The next morning, I was sitting beside Kelli's hospital bed when our number lit up on my cell phone. It was 7:30—Randi would be getting ready for school—her first day back after the surgery. But our ordeal wasn't over. The next two weeks were critical.

"Please, Mom. Don't make me go to school," Randi begged. "Everyone's going to ask about Kelli. It will make me too sad."

"Kelli is fine. She's here with me, recovering like she is supposed to. Your job is to go to school. You need to get back into a routine," I said. "You'll worry less."

*Routine*, I thought. Victor and Victoria popped into my head. Why didn't they do their part?

"The nurse just walked in, Randi. I have to go. Please get ready for school. Your sister and I will be home soon. I love you."

Had I convinced her? Should I have let her stay home? The nurse motioned for my assistance. *God, please give Randi the comfort she so desperately needs.*

The nurse and I turned Kelli onto her other side. Just as we got her

settled my cell phone rang again. Randi. I'd have to give in and let her stay home. The situation was too scary for her to face by herself.

"Mom! Guess what!"

I hadn't even said hello. The unexpected joy in Randi's voice startled me. Was this the same girl who had been so upset all morning?

"I was looking out the kitchen window at the pond..."

"Victor and Victoria!" I almost shouted with relief. "They came!" I relayed to Kelli.

"Not just the two of them like usual, Mom!" Randi said. "They

brought their friends. I counted them twice. An army of geese. Twelve in all! They were honking as they flew in to make sure I saw them!"

It was the springtime miracle we all needed, not just Randi. I hadn't realized how much until it happened. And a miracle it was. In two weeks' time, we knew for sure that Kelli's surgery had been a complete success.

We spent many thankful days together by the pond. I think Victor and Victoria brought angels with them that spring. Angels that fly with both my daughters, wherever they go. ■

## Afterglow

Karen Sargent wrote down her story last fall, and sent it to us the very same week. The following Saturday morning, she heard honking outside her kitchen window. The geese? In November? "I jumped up to count them," Karen says. "Twelve. Twelve geese!" She hadn't seen such a sight since the spring when Randi called her in the hospital. What was the gang stopping by for now—and out of season? We think Victor, Victoria and friends knew ahead of time that Karen's story would be accepted for publication.



# Destination Angels

## The Netherlands

What do you think of when you think of the Netherlands? Wooden clogs? Windmills? Bicycles? At last count the Netherlands had more bikes than people! Perhaps the country is best known for its colorful tulip fields, but here are some of its secrets.



### ▲ DELFT BLUE

This hand-painted, blue-and-white pottery has been made in Delft since the seventeenth century, when it was popular among those who could afford the tin-glazing technique, which creates a porcelain look. These angels share the traditional characteristics, but are affordable Dutch souvenirs.





### ▼ GLASS ANGEL

In 2005, the city of Zwolle commissioned a sculpture of Archangel Michael, its patron saint. Artist Herman Lamers built a “modern transparent Michael between people,” a 10-foot-tall angel made of 350 plates of green glass. The *Glazen Engel* stands in the *Grote Markt*, the main square of the city.



### ► CITY ANGEL

Maastricht is one of the Netherlands' oldest cities, and hosts a march of enormous puppets, called the Giants Parade, every five years. Here, a new “giant” is introduced to the festivities. The *Stadsengel*, or “city angel,” carries Maastricht’s coat of arms, a red shield with a white star.

LEFT: ROBERT PAUL VAN BEETS/DREAMTIME; CENTER: WORLD NOMADS; RIGHT: FRANK WIJSMULLER/FLICKE

## from your lips...

GOOD FRIDAY WAS A SPECIAL DAY and I wanted to wear my special necklace. It was a longtime favorite: a small gold and silver crucifix on a delicate chain. So just before I left for work I opened my jewelry box and fished it out.

“Darn,” I said. It hadn’t been long since I last wore it, but somehow in the meantime the chain had gotten tangled. I counted six knots. *Just my luck*, I thought. I was already running late, but I didn’t want to drop it into my wallet to fix at work. I’d only make more knots. And it *was* Good Friday, after all. I could spare a few minutes to fix the chain before I left.

I started with a toothpick, trying to tease out the first tangle. The toothpick was too big to be much help, so I got a needle out of my sewing kit. *Maybe it won’t take too long. It’s just a few simple twists.* I sat down and got comfortable, squinting at the needle as I tried to work out one of the knots in the chain, trying ever so carefully to tease them apart. Minutes ticked by with no success. But I couldn’t give up now. Just the right gentle tug and—

“Finally!” I muttered as one knot came undone. But there were still five to go. There was no way I could get them all untangled and still be on time for work. This wasn’t going to happen. “Lord, I really wanted to wear my cross today,” I said. And with that, the chain slipped out of my hand, slithering through my fingers and falling to the floor.

Probably adding another knot! I sighed in frustration and bent to pick it up. I held the necklace from one end and let the chain dangle to see. *All* the knots were gone! Every last one. My Good Friday miracle. Now it was time to get to work.

ATHETA JANUARY, LYONS, KANSAS

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81059

# Ever Watchful

BY HEATHER SMIRNOFF, LAKEVIEW, ARIZONA

I STOPPED TO ADJUST the bouquet of Easter lilies in the foyer on my way to take out the trash. White lilies, pastel-painted eggs, little girls in frilly dresses—Easter was the season to celebrate miracles. I thought back on a miracle from my own childhood. A miracle that occurred before I even had memories of my own. The story was told often to my sister and me by our mother, and in many ways it was really my mother's story.

It happened on a calm spring day in April 1965. My father was the new pastor in town. Occupied with seemingly endless rounds of visiting his new parishioners and composing

Our encounter  
with a winged  
guardian couldn't  
have happened  
at a more perfect  
time of year

sermons, most of the housework was left to my mother.

"Heather," Mom told me as I played in the kitchen on that monumental day, "watch Audrey while I run outside with the trash. Don't answer the front door and don't go down the stairs. I'll be right back."

My sister, Audrey, was four years older than me, but she was severely disabled, unable to walk on her own or speak, so in many ways I was the big sister.

Just then the wheels of Audrey's metal walker came rolling across the linoleum. "We have to stay right here," I told her.

My mother smiled and smoothed



my hair. Then she bent down and kissed Audrey's cheek. "My two angels," she said. She stood on tiptoes to reach the box of matches she kept on a high shelf. "I'll just be a minute in the backyard," Mom called as she carried the trash downstairs to the basement door that led outside. "You two stay put, now."

Taking out my own trash, I

pictured Mom at the burn barrel, lighting a match and dropping it inside. "I was done in a flash," she always said, "and headed back inside through the basement door."

But how was it that she immediately heard giggles, almost as if we were both down in the basement too?

Mom stopped short at the basement stairs. She covered her mouth to stifle a scream. She didn't want to scare us, in case we might lose our balance. I was standing at the very edge of the top stair, and Audrey with her

walker was close behind me on the landing. We were both laughing—at what, Mom couldn't say. But the important thing was we were in danger of tumbling down!

Mom had never moved faster than when she sprinted up those stairs. Once she had both us girls safe in the kitchen, she scolded, "You girls know better than to even go near those

stairs. You both could have fallen!"

"The lady made sure we didn't," I said sheepishly.

"What lady?" Mom asked.

I glanced around and pointed to one of Mom's ceramic figurines, an angel with wings cascading down her back. Audrey smiled. Mom said she would never forget our encounter with our watchful guardian.

I finished my chore, grateful that the season of miracles was upon us again. Audrey and Mom were gone now, living with the angels in heaven. Only my father and I were left. I wondered if Dad remembered the

story. The way Mom had always told it, there had been just her, Audrey and me that day. I called him up.

"Of course I remember that story," he said. "I was there. I was in my basement study preparing a sermon, when I heard a woman's voice in the house. It was not your mother's voice. I came out to investigate just as your mom was coming in from burning the trash. We heard you giggling and raced to the stairs. Luckily you two weren't alone."

I always thought it had been my mom's story, but in fact it belonged to our whole family. ■

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# he makes winds his messengers

PSALM 104:4

I KE WAS A SIX-YEAR-OLD golden retriever we got on a two-week trial from a rescue group. My husband, Mike, could barely hook on his leash for our first walk.

"I guess he's anxious for his first walk," Mike said.

We'd been trying to adopt a dog for months, after our sweet golden retriever, Brooks, went over the rainbow bridge. Brooks had really been Mike's boy.

The long process of finding a new companion for Mike had grown very frustrating. Again and again, Mike would fall for a furry face on the rescue website, only to find out that the dog was promised to someone else.

Ike had Lyme disease, ear infections, and needed to be neutered. He had no training but tons of energy. We decided to meet him and hope for the best.

Mike called him Ike. It seemed to fit. But would Ike fit with us? How would he get along with our spaniel, Kelly? How would we know this was the right dog?

Mike opened the door and Ike lunged outside. Kelly bounded along beside him. Ike looked up at us with a crooked smile, his tongue hanging out of the side of his mouth. *He has so many issues*, I thought. *We need to be sure*.

As we headed on our way, Ike pulling with all his might, I spotted a piece of litter blowing across the sidewalk. I bent and picked up the empty candy box, then burst out laughing. "Look!" I said, showing Mike. Mike and Ike, for sure.

PEGGY FREZON, RENSSELAER, NEW YORK



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# Dave Grace

## FEDERAL AGENT

The facts added up to a different kind of evidence

BY DAVE GRACE, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

**I** WAS SUPPOSED TO testify in court that morning. I'd worn my best suit and everything. But at the last second the case was continued. So it was back to the office, where I worked as a federal agent. The place was abuzz. A woman, the co-owner of a local auto dealership, had been injured in a bombing. The explosive had been packed into a flashlight and left on top of her car before she left for work.

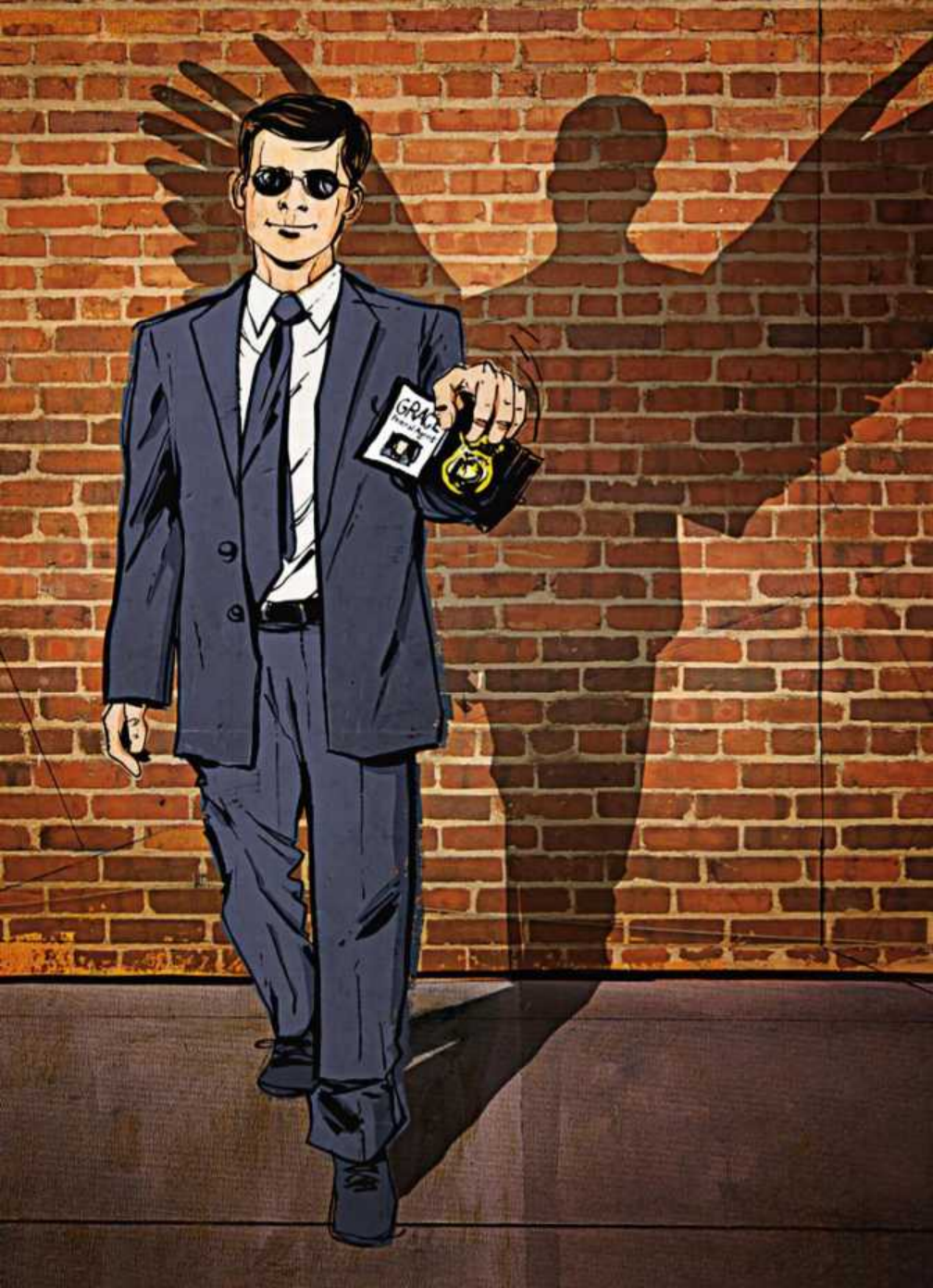
"Dave, get to the hospital and find out what you can from the victim," my boss barked.

Bombings. For nearly 30 years that'd been my specialty. I'd investigated some blockbuster cases, the Weathermen, the Black Panthers and the Unabom investigation. But bombs were small-time weapons too.

At 52, there wasn't a lot that got past me, not much I hadn't seen. I would have liked to have gone right to the scene to gather evidence, but I was dressed for court, not for field work.

I arrived at the hospital stat, accompanied by two local county detectives, and made my way to the victim's room in the trauma unit. She was younger than me, dark hair, with the look of someone who had lived a quiet, ordinary life. Until now. Part of her face, near her chin and mouth, was blackish red from the powder burn. Her hands were bandaged. I could see the fear in her eyes. From what I gathered, she had no idea who had done this to her or why.

"Ma'am, I'm really sorry to bother you at a time like this," I said as I approached her hospital bed. "I'm



Grace—Special Agent Dave Grace—and, well, my boss sent me here.” That’s my style—quiet, wanting to put people at ease. I’m six foot two, a big guy. For some, just the sight of me can be intimidating enough.

But not this woman. Her eyes met mine and before I said anything else, her whole face seemed to come alive in a dazzling smile. As if she were thrilled to see me.

“Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?” I said.

She sat up in her bed. “Of course not,” she said. “Whatever you need.”

She told me how she had found the flashlight, the kind that sits upright, on the hood of her car that morning. Not sure what to do with it, she’d just taken it with her to work. There she showed it to a colleague, idly curious about where it had come from and why it had stood upright on the hood of her car. “Odd, isn’t it?” she said to her colleague, and flipped the on-off switch—*boom!* It seemed a miracle she was even alive.

“Who would want to hurt you like this?” I asked.

She couldn’t think of anyone.

I excused myself to talk to her husband out in the waiting room. He said there was a customer at the auto dealership she’d talked about. An extremely disgruntled customer, who didn’t seem quite right.



**Dave is retired now, but still a patriot.**

I went back to the woman’s room to confirm the information. A doctor was treating her, suturing her badly burned hands with a long, sharp needle. I’m supposed to be Mr. Tough Guy and I could barely watch.

The woman was dealing with it surprisingly well. Her eyes never left me. As if, in her mind, she was holding on to me. If my presence offered her any comfort, I was happy. She confirmed what her husband said and agreed to let me take some of her clothes and jewelry to test for explosives residue. Something told me we had our guy, but I needed to secure the evidence.

Outside the trauma room, through the glass window, I could still feel the woman watching me. I couldn’t imagine the pain she was going

through. I was determined to track down the person who did this, but I was sorry there was nothing I could do for the woman now, no way to comfort her. How could I?

A few days later I was at the trailer home of the suspect with a search warrant and a team of agents. Inside we found drugs and were able to immediately arrest him while we continued our investigation.

It was about two weeks before I talked to the woman again. I wanted to return all the valuables she'd lent us: rings, earrings, two chains with Catholic medallions and a cross. She was out of the hospital and healing well. We met at a restaurant for lunch with her husband and her priest.

**T**HE MINUTE she spotted me across the restaurant a smile spread over her face. The same smile I'd seen when she first saw me at the hospital. She leaned over to the priest. "Here comes my guardian angel," she said loud enough for me to hear.

I laughed to myself. No one's ever mistaken me for an angel. "I'm sorry it's taken so long to get your jewelry back," I said. "But thanks to the evidence, we got our man."

She introduced me to her priest. "Mr. Grace," he said. "Perfect name for an angel."

They must have noticed all this angel talk was making me uneasy. The woman gazed up at me, now serious. "In the ambulance I prayed for God to send an angel to watch over me," she said. "For his grace to protect me. I needed to feel his presence. Then, not five minutes after I got to the trauma room, you walked in and introduced yourself. When you said your name was Grace, my fear disappeared. That one word was more comfort to me than you will ever know. But more than that, you bear a striking resemblance to my late father. I realized you were not him, of course, but the two events, combined with the timing of my prayer, could hardly be called a mere coincidence."

For a moment I was speechless, weighing the evidence. Evidence was my business, my trade, my currency. I came to conclusions based on cold hard facts. I thought of how I was supposed to have been in court that day. My suit, my name, my resemblance to her father. All the pieces fit together. Perfectly. God's hand at work. It was humbling, and I knew that this would always be one of my most important assignments. The evidence was overwhelming.

"Thank you, ma'am," I said. "Glad to be of service." To her, and to her prayer. ■

## the collector

**F**RIENDSHIPS ARE BUILT AROUND shared interests, and one unique thing my friend Carol and I had in common was our passion for bunny figurines.

Carol kept hers in a china closet in her dining room. My favorites were a porcelain pair who seemed to be enjoying a country picnic—a boy bunny in blue trousers, playing violin for a girl bunny whose pink skirt flares as she offers a blossom from her bouquet. They never failed to make me smile.

After Carol was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, I called and dropped by more often than usual. I knew I would soon lose my friend.

“Carol’s selected some of her cherished possessions to be given as mementos,” her caregiver told me on one of my visits. I knew what she was telling me. It was time to say good-bye. Not even Carol’s bunny figurines made me smile that day.

At her funeral, the promised keepsakes were handed out. Nothing for me. *Were we not the good friends I thought we were?* I wondered. Of course leaving me a treasure wouldn’t have made me miss

Carol any less.

Weeks later I got a call from Carol’s church. The secretary had found a package for me. “It must have gotten pushed aside after the funeral,” she said.

At home, I sat with the package in a quiet spot, afraid the gift would make me cry. I unpacked the contents—the bunny couple she knew could always make me smile. My friend wanted to be sure that’s what I’d do every time I thought of her.

ANN SHOREY, SUTHERLIN, OREGON



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## *earning their wings*



Prom king and queens: Lauren and Justin Etherton; Camille and Frankie Galli

### **Everybody Dance Now**

JOANNA SANDUSKY  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

**K**ennedy Krieger School in Rockville, Maryland, is not your ordinary high school. All our children have developmental disabilities.

When student Camille Galli watched her big sister get ready for prom, she asked why she didn't have one at Kennedy Krieger. Her

younger sister, Frankie, wondered too. Camille's classmate Justin Etherton waved his sister Lauren off, and she wondered the exact same thing for her brother. The siblings came to me, the principal. It was a good question.

Parents supported a fund-raiser, and the dance floor was packed. Kennedy Krieger isn't an ordinary school, which makes our prom extraordinary.

## Sent From Above

KELLY GALLAGHER, SCOTIA, NEW YORK

Rowdy teenagers filled Riverlink Park, and I'd come for quiet time with baby Hudson. I was looking forward to a walk around Mohawk River, and we'd worked to get here, even taking an elevator down to water level. Now I needed serenity.

*Annoying, disrespectful...* my mind was loaded with choice adjectives for a group of kids distracting us. Hudson started to get fussy. "We'll go back to the car," I said. *Lord knows you're not going to get any sleep here*, I thought as we walked away from the same rowdy teens.

At the elevator, I pressed the button. I pressed it again. Nothing happened. I'd have to climb four flights of stairs with a baby carriage!

"Excuse me, ma'am? This elevator can only be activated from the top." It was one of the teenage boys. "Let me send it down for you." He bounded up the stairs and rode the elevator down for me to catch. It seems my son wasn't the only one who was fussy that day.



Young Hudson rides in style.



Lunchtime angels Josette and Dylan

## Two for One, and One for All

JOSETTE DURAN

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Adolescent boys have big appetites, but I was still surprised when my 15-year-old asked me to make him *two* full lunches for school. "Hungrier than usual?" I asked.

"It's for another boy," Dylan said. "He only eats a fruit cup. I don't think he has money for lunch."

I didn't know the other kid's mom, but I could relate. Dylan and I had been homeless not so long ago. So I made two lunches instead of one.

Six weeks later, I met the other boy's mother at school. She had a new job and wanted to repay me for the lunches. I refused. It's a privilege to help others just like others helped us. And I'm very proud that Dylan feels the same way.

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# A FAMILY TREASURE

For the first grandson, Nona's last quilt

BY REBECCA DeMARINO, YACOLT, WASHINGTON

**D**ISAPPOINTMENT was all too clear in my husband's eyes when I came home from the store empty-handed. "I just didn't come across anything special," I said. "Don't worry. I'll try again tomorrow after work."

Tom nodded, but he was out of ideas too. This gift was important for both of us. The very first birthday present for his very first grandson, Vito. But I felt added pressure as Tom's newlywed. Tom was a widower when we married. I wanted so badly to please him, impress him, to be the kind of loving, capable wife he was used to. Vito had been born on the third anniversary of his Nona's death. Now, as Tom's wife, I was stepping into his grandmother's shoes. I didn't want to fall short.

"Maybe we could get him another

book?" Tom suggested. Vito and his family lived in Northern California, 500 miles from us. For Christmas, we'd sent a treasury of nursery rhymes that seemed to go over well.

At times like this I realized how little I knew this family I'd married into. Tom and his wife Bennie had been married for 34 years. I was still learning his tastes and idiosyncrasies. His children's likes and dislikes, their parenting styles. It wasn't like buying a gift for my own grandkids. I knew them inside and out. But little Vito... There had to be something else. Something *inspired*. But what?

"We should get something to eat and then sleep on it," I said to Tom.

The next morning, while I was dressing for work, worry rose inside of me. I sat down on the edge of the

bed. *Lord, point me in the right direction, and help me to feel like a real member of this family.*

I forced myself to get on with my day. I'd recently taken a position as front desk manager of a grand, historic hotel, with its gorgeous gardens, elegant restaurant and a sweet gift shop filled with unique items.

Just before lunch the manager of the gift shop came by to introduce herself. Her name was Sally. "I know your husband," she told me. "I was in a quilting group with Bennie."

"Oh, yes," I said. "I know all about Bennie's quilts." They were truly beautiful. She liked to focus on creating the tops, Tom had explained to me, and let others add the bottom and finish up.

"She stayed active with our group up until she died," Sally said. "She was so weak from the cancer, but there was still work she wanted to get done." Then she hesitated, as if she wasn't sure that she should go on with the story.

"When Bennie died, I had one of her quilt tops to finish," Sally said. "But I just never got around to it. The quilt top is still in my sewing room. Do you think Tom would want it?"

Of course I knew he would want to



**Newlyweds Rebecca and Tom got a special blessing.**

keep Bennie's last quilt. But when Sally described it, I realized it was meant for a little boy instead—yellow, tan and blue colors with animals scattered about.

I told Sally about Vito's first birthday. "Can we get the quilt finished right away?"

A week later I showed Tom the finished product. He ran his fingers over the stitches. "You know, maybe this is the reason we couldn't think of anything else."

Tom wrote a note to go with our gift: "Dear Vito, this is the last quilt top your Nona ever made. She is the grandmother you will never know personally, but you will learn all about her from the loving family that surrounds you." And that family included me.

We sent the quilt by express mail. The return label said from Grandpa and Grandma DeMarino in Washington. But we both knew it was a gift from heaven. ■

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## *angel sightings*

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**A**T MY MOTHER'S YESTERDAY, we decided to sit outside to soak up some sunshine. I wanted to enjoy every minute I had left with her. We got to talking about how much God loves us. "If he cares for every little bird, just think how much he cares for us," I said. "He even knows the number of hairs on our heads!" Mom looked at me and nodded. "And every feather counted!" she said, pointing to the sky. I looked up, and this is what I saw.

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# letters & messages

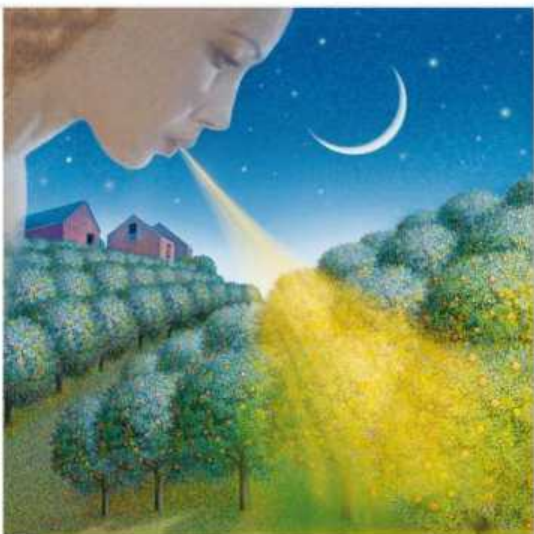
## My Prayer for the ORANGE TREES

Grandpa's orchard was our pride  
and joy. Now we were in danger  
of losing it to the weather

BY CAROLYN WERLY-WILDER, BAILEY FLAT, CALIFORNIA

"I'VE NEVER SEEN cold weather last so long!" Mom said when I arrived at the family ranch near Mariposa, California. Since Dad died she was on her own up there. Normally she was able to manage the place by herself, but this January had brought unusually frigid weather for California.

"I'll find more wood in the w orangens." The small orchard exide and joy. It had withered ne like this. Any temperatures



APR 2014

ILLUSTRATED BY DAN CRAIG

ANGELSONEARTH.ORG 29

**Carolyn Werly-Wilder  
prayed for “angels with  
hot breath” to lift the  
frost and save the  
trees. It worked!**

Carolyn's way. Turns out, this angel picture was actually featured with her original orange grove story in the March/April 2014 issue of *Angels on Earth*. A good picture really is worth a thousand words.

**MARTHA ELIZABETH TUCKER  
MILAN, MISSOURI**

Of all the entries in Guideposts' collection *The Best Angel Stories 2015*, Carolyn Werly-Wilder's story, "My Prayer for the Orange Trees," was my favorite. Then I received a Someone Cares greeting card from Guideposts, with an illustration that seemed to tell the story. I even sent it

**LISA SCHUMACK  
FORT DODGE, IOWA**

It was months after my mother's death before we were able to make the trip to visit her brother and his family. We were sitting around visiting when Dad's cell phone rang. It had stopped by the time he got it,

so he checked the missed calls. Mom's old number topped the list. We called back, but the young girl who answered said she hadn't made the call. Mom always was a fan of that ad, "Reach out and touch someone."

**TOM BARLOW  
MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT**

Drawing angels has always brought me peace, even in the most trying of times. After 30 years of fighting fires for the town of Manchester, I suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But when I have a pencil and paper in hand and start sketching, it brings me comfort. Each angel I draw feels like getting a hug. Kind of like reading the stories in *Angels on Earth*.

So many people in these pages have inspired and uplifted me. So I wanted to spread my own joy and give a big "hug" to all my fellow readers, my angels.



This is just one of the many adorable angel drawings Tom has sent in for our pleasure.



Mary (far right) in 1961 with her father, sister, Linda, and brother, Alan

**MARY SPIEGEL  
WASILLA, ALASKA**

Dad raised us to trust and serve God. But after he passed away suddenly, I found trusting hard. I asked God for a sign, reassurance that Dad was in heaven.

For months none came. I waited, I trusted as best I could.

Then, standing at my kitchen sink, I saw a dove sitting on our back fence. I heard a voice: *This is me*. Another dove landed alongside the first. *This is your dad, and he is safe with me*. Dad had raised us right.



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