

Cara Jan Hamill



Animal Angels



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. It's a carry around book that will win your heart. If you love animals, you'll love Animal Angels. Life and death are often minutes apart. Sometimes, the healing starts AFTER death. Five individuals find death was not at all what they expected. Animal Angels is a heavenly read.

Animal Angels

by Cara Jan Hamill

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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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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.

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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.

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After getting Racer secured in the back and his fresh cup of coffee settled into the cup 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

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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.

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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.

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Chapter One

The End and The Beginning

The room is exceptionally bright and cheery. The wall coloring, a light honeysuckle 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.

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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 that this was indeed the last date they remembered.

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"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 described as just shiny. Her light blue eyes were the color of the best blue-sky-watching-

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day, you could ever remember, with lashes that were long and dark, framing her blue eyes like a painting. Her petite frame 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 you're 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.

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"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."

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

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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 seems 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. I must ask that you do not discuss this conversation or anything you just viewed with the others."

He looked deep into Rose's eyes and shakes his head as a response.

As Rose stood up, preparing to bring the next person in, she notices how distraught Sammy seems. "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.

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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

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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 adjourning 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 her. "Would you like to add anything before joining the others?"

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

Rose advises Chris not to discuss the meeting. They stand up at the same time and walk back into the larger room. 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.

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"Are you all right, Sammy?"

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

"She gives him a smile he cannot resist. He cannot help but smile back. He suddenly has no control over that part of his face.

"Nick, you're next."

He gets up quickly and stands 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, indicating his displeasure at what he is seeing.

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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."

"Please do not talk about what you saw in this room, Nick. Ready?" She 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.

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"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

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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?"

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"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! Yes, I would love that." Mary had a new bounce in her step as she left the room with Rose.

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."

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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.

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"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.

"Gee, that was some vanishing act," Nick said, as he looked at her empty chair.

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?"

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"Even though I was still bartending some, I had given up drinking all together. 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

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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

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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 travelled 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

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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

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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 would 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

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transferred. So, I am also responsible for the fate of her pets as well."

As Chris was finishing, Rose appeared 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 that moment on.

"This room is your room. 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.

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"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.

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"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," Rose advises.

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

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

Cara Jan Hamill

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.

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"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?"

Cara Jan Hamill

"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 are 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."

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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 watched 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.

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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.

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"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." He takes one last long look at their faces.

Nick then pushed the button that would take him back outside with the others. He turned up next to Rose. The look on his face and the smile said it all.

Cara Jan Hamill

"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

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are here 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 is sitting by his side. She stops and smiles at the grandson, her world traveler, whom she adored. "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.

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"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, here in Japan, but when I was 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 usually 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.

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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 back on her feet now 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

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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 he is 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 be sad, 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.

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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 meant 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 going 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.

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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 on 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 day*. 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,

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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'm here! Look, 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

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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 answers while looking straight ahead.

"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."

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

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

"No, Uncle Phil, IT IS 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 says quietly, "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.

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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 at crush on in high school and

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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, without 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.

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“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 were 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

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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. The boys 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, Jo Ruth, and Dolly all contribute their fondest memories. They get many laughs from the gathering as they share their little

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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 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 continues looking into the eyes of her soulmate, her prince charming, the love of her life and knows the loving memories they shared will always be with them - now and forever.

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Chris 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 to go on with our lives. 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.

Chris hears the conversation and knows that her husband will do a great job with 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 feels 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."

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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 - can't believe I just did that," she said 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 mutters to herself.

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

"Well, 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.

"Hey, that's a major plus there! In this day and time, you have to have a college education to even

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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."

Cara Jan Hamill

"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 are 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.

Animal Angels

"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.

"Walter, we'll wait for you here. It's time to go inside now." He looks at her, without saying anything. "The words will come." Rose gives him the reassurance he so desperately needed.

Cara Jan Hamill

Standing meekly at the back of the church, he finds it difficult to comprehend the representation of law enforcement gathered in the huge Sanctuary. Seeing officers he recognizes and hundreds he does not, he realizes they are in attendance anyway, for a fallen brother. He is very humbled by the experience.

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 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 watches lovingly as he listens in on their conversations. He wants to talk to his family, but is not sure the timing is right, so he decides to wait until after the service.

Animal Angels

Nadine looks so pretty, were his only thoughts. Her red and swollen eyes were troubling to him, however. He decides to stay near her 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 leaves his hand there during the entire service.

Walter studies Josh. He looked 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. 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

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of yours. We lost one of our finest when that fatal bullet struck Walter."

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 sits by his wife, still hand on hand and enjoys every minute of the service and cherishes every word said about him. He is very moved by what is being spoken.

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 okay. 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. 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.



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. It's a carry around book that will win your heart. If you love animals, you'll love Animal Angels. Life and death are often minutes apart. Sometimes, the healing starts AFTER death. Five individuals find death was not at all what they expected. Animal Angels is a heavenly read.

Animal Angels

by Cara Jan Hamill

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