

# Paws from Heaven

TRUE STORIES OF  
GOD'S AMAZING ANIMAL ANGELS



**SNEAK  
PEEK!**  
FREE SAMPLER  
from Guideposts

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# An Uncanny Cat Story

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One summer evening in Springfield, Oregon, a long time ago, a crazed-looking black-and-white kitten showed up at our kitchen door and started clawing furiously on the glass. Because we lived in a rural area with not many neighbors nearby, we were curious about the origins of this strange little feline. Why was it so intent on getting into our house?

My husband, Chris, opened the door, and the frantic kitten barreled in. Running in circles and bumping into walls and spinning about, it was obvious this creature was traumatized by something. Even when our young pet-loving sons, Gabe and Luke, tried to soothe the kitty, it was like an over-wound mechanical toy, unable to stop moving. I began to suspect the poor animal had been poisoned or drugged. After a while we enticed it to drink some milk, and it eventually settled down and fell into a deep sleep.

By the next day our boys had both fallen in love with our unexpected feline guest, and the previous night's crazy cat was replaced by a sweetly calm and loving kitty. Never mind that we didn't need another pet—we already had a re-homed terrier named Prince and a big yellow cat named Homer who'd adopted us. But Luke claimed the kitty as his own and named him Peppermint. He said it was because the cat's black-and-white stripes swirled around like peppermint drops. I immediately shortened his name to Pepper, because he'd been so peppy when we met him. Since we lived in the country, I assumed someone had dropped him off to find a good home—and it seemed he definitely had one now.

A couple days later I walked to my nearest neighbor's house to pick up some cucumbers and tomatoes that she wanted to share from her garden. Carla and I had just finished filling a bag when I noticed her son, Morgan, approaching us with a big grin. In his arms was a very familiar-looking black-and-white kitten. Had Pepper followed me over here?

“Hey, Morgan, it looks like you found our new kitten.” I reached out for Pepper, thinking I'd carry him back home. “That's our kitten,” Carla abruptly informed me.

“Really?” I gave her a doubtful frown and was about to ask why this cat had been eating and sleeping at our house the past few days if he really belonged to them.

“We got him last weekend from my mom,” Carla explained. Dumbfounded, I petted the kitten's head, thanked Carla for the vegetables, and headed for home. Hopefully I'd come up with a gentle way to break the unfortunate news to my boys that Pepper really belonged to the neighbors. But while putting away my produce, I felt thoroughly perplexed. Something about this kitty situation was fishy—and it wasn't just the cat food we'd been feeding little Pepper. Was it really possible that this cat had two homes?

When I discovered Luke playing with the kitty in our backyard, I felt even more perplexed. Had Pepper followed me back home earlier? And if so, maybe he was making it clear that he wanted to live here.

“Come with me,” I told Luke. “And bring Pepper with you.” As we walked through the field that led to the neighbors' house, I explained that there might be some confusion regarding the kitty's ownership. I was trying to prepare Luke for the worst, but at the same time I was reassured that since our neighbor Morgan was also Luke's best friend, we should be able to resolve this kitty dilemma amicably. Perhaps joint custody.

When we reached our neighbors' backyard, I was glad to see that Morgan was still outside, but I was stunned to see that he was playing with his black-and-white kitten—a cat that looked almost identical to ours. Naturally, Luke and Morgan compared their new pets with typical boyish amusement, and they thought it was funny that I couldn't tell the two cats apart.

“Our cat has more stripes than yours,” Luke proclaimed. “But our cat has this great white spot on his chest,” Morgan pointed out.

“See why I was confused,” I told Carla as she joined us. “Our kitten looks just like yours.”

“You're right,” she agreed. “How odd.”

Morgan and Luke put the felines down in the grass, and the kitties were attracted to each other like magnets. Soon they were tumbling and tussling like a pair of old buddies—as if they'd already met. We all

watched with fascination as I explained the bizarre way our kitten had shown up on Sunday night.

“Do you think they’re related?” I asked Carla.

“No,” she told me. “Not unless you’ve been to Portland. We got our kitty when we stayed at my mom’s house last weekend.”

“What’s your cat’s name?” Luke asked Morgan. “*Salt*,” Morgan proclaimed.

Luke burst out laughing. “*Salt*? My kitty’s name is *Pepper*.” “*Salt* and *Pepper*?” Carla and I said almost simultaneously. “Why’d you name him Salt?” Luke asked his pal.

“Because it looks like he spilled salt down his chest,” Morgan told him. They both just laughed harder. But I was thinking this was getting weirder and weirder.

“Are you sure these cats aren’t related?” I questioned Carla. “Is it possible you brought home two cats by mistake?”

“No, of course, not,” she assured me. “We would’ve noticed a second cat.”

“Maybe Pepper slipped underneath your car somewhere, or up in the engine,” I tried. “We had a cat that used to climb into the motor area in the wintertime because it was warm in there.” “It’s summer,” she reminded me. I could tell her patience with my theories was wearing thin.

“But if Pepper rode in the engine, it might explain why he was so traumatized when he showed up on Sunday night.”

She seemed to consider this. “But it’s a *two-hour* drive on the freeway.” She firmly shook her head. “Impossible.”

As Luke and I happily took our kitten home, I wasn’t completely convinced it was impossible. First of all there was the timing—Pepper had shown up the same day the neighbors came home. Plus there was the odd way Pepper acted—like he’d been through an ordeal. Then there was how the kittens looked alike and bonded so instantly. It was all very uncanny. In my mind, those two cats were brothers. And if Pepper could talk, I’m sure he would have confessed to having stowed away in the neighbor’s station wagon in order to remain with his brother. Because, obviously, Salt and Pepper belonged together.

# When Scooter Met Scott

Max Parks

The rules were straightforward but extremely difficult to obey. My orders were to ask no questions, offer no opinions, make no suggestions, and impart no information. I could respond precisely to narrowly tailored questions, but only if specifically asked to do so. If my response was deemed “off subject” or in any way deficient, the phone call was abruptly terminated. If the call ended badly, and it sometimes did, I might not get another call for months.

The rules were crafted by my son Scott, who suffered from one of the most devastating forms of mental illness—paranoid schizophrenia. It is every bit as bad as it sounds. His mother and I had watched helplessly as the condition slowly took over Scott’s mind, transforming him from a successful student and college athlete into a haggard recluse who retreated into a darkened apartment in a bad part of town. He came out only at night once or twice a month to buy groceries at a twenty-four-hour store. He had not been to a laundromat or barber in years. He refused medication. And there was absolutely nothing we could do to help. He would not pick up the phone, read our letters, or answer a knock at the door. If we hadn’t paid his rent, he would have been homeless. Or worse.

Our only connection was the occasional phone call, and to keep that tenuous link alive, I usually did my best to follow the rules. I figured that if he was talking to me at all, even if the call came with a dozen baffling rules, it showed that he wanted some kind of contact with me. I took a small shred of hope in that fact. But there was so much I wanted to say, so much I needed to say. I longed for a way to give him his life back, and I knew I had to somehow move him beyond the strict confines of the phone and his rambling monologues. I needed to see him again. So one day I took a chance and broke a rule.

“I’d like you to meet our new dog.” Silence.

The seconds clicked slowly by. I braced myself, waiting for the line to go dead.

“You are never supposed to ask me anything or give me information I don’t ask for,” he said.

“I know. I’m sorry. I just really want you to meet Scooter. I think you would like him. He loves to fetch.”

Long pause.

“What happened to Buck?” Scott asked.

Buck was the abandoned dog Scott had brought home fourteen years earlier. That lovable and loyal old mutt had been part of our family most of Scott’s life.

“He died a year ago,” I replied.

There was another long, very long, pause before he spoke.

“You could have told me.”

“It wasn’t on the list of things you said I can do,” I said softly.

“True.” Long pause.

“Want to meet Scooter?” Silence.

I knew I was pushing the limits. But simply getting this far had been a staggering success. More seconds clicked by.

“How did Buck die?”

“He just wore out with age, Scott. He had lost his sight and most of his hearing. One day he couldn’t eat or drink, so we had the vet put him to sleep. They made it painless.” “He was a good dog. I am going to go now. I will call you later,” Scott said.

“Okay. When do you think you will call?” Click.

I had broken too many rules for one day.

But Scott called a week later. He began to launch into another one-sided speech about a scientific theory I could not understand, and I broke a very major rule and interrupted him.

“Scooter wants to meet you.” Pause.

“No, he doesn’t. He doesn’t know I exist. You are using him as a means to persuade me to come over.”

“Is it working?” I asked.

He did not hang up, and I may have even heard a laugh.

*Please God, keep him on the line.*

“If I came over, your dog might attack me,” Scott said. “No, he wouldn’t. He loves people. He is always happy to meet new people,” I replied.

“He would sense that you fear me.”

“I don’t fear you,” I replied, lying through my teeth.

The truth is that my wife and I feared what Scott’s condition could lead to. There were indications that someone had tried to break into our

home on more than one occasion, and one night when I could not sleep I saw Scott’s car parked in front of our home at 3:00 a.m. Yes, I feared him. But I also deeply loved him. That is the tension and dilemma of a parent who has a mentally ill child.

“Your dog would sense your anxiety. Dogs are pack animals. He would try to defend you as the pack leader.”

*We are still talking! Thank you, God!*

Scott negotiated elaborate terms and conditions but agreed to come over. The meeting would happen after dark. No one could be in the house but me. Scooter would have to be in the backyard and could watch our interaction through the sliding glass door. If the dog seemed hostile, Scott would leave.

We had a deal!

We set the date. And then my wife and I prayed. Hard. On the agreed day, the knock came. Scott was two hours late, but there he was. The Red Sea had actually parted, manna had fallen from heaven, and I was walking on water.

His hair was far too long and way too greasy, and his unkempt beard made him look like a wild man, but it was a beautiful sight to see him on the front porch.

Although Scooter is an extremely friendly dog, Scott’s words had been haunting me. What if my dog perceived the tension? What if he smelled fear? What if he could tell my heart was hammering the walls of my chest? One bark and it would be over.

Scott stepped into the living room and found Scooter on the alert, staring at him through the glass.

“I’ll hold his collar while I let him in, and then I’ll bring him slowly over to you,” I told Scott.

“Okay. But hold him tight.”

I slid the door open, reached down for Scooter’s collar, and clutched air as my dog bolted past me at the speed of a bullet. I gasped, powerless to control whatever happened next.

Scooter is a good-sized hunting dog, and he was barreling toward Scott as fast as four legs can move a canine. Scott stepped back into a corner by the front door and found himself trapped by the happiest dog on earth. Scooter’s tail banged the wall with uncontained joy at meeting my son.

If my dog had sensed any of my fear, it must have been drowned out by the more intense sense of love.

Scott petted Scooter's head, then his back, and soon we were all outside playing fetch.

It was one of the best days of my life.

Scooter made sure we had no time to talk of awkward things, of lost years, of missed Christmases. He wanted to play. Again and again and again. So we laughed, and chased, and threw the ball until Scott felt the need to leave.

But we made plans for another visit, and Scott kept the date.

The dam had broken. The earth had moved. We were in a new world, and Scooter was making it safe for both father and son. The dog was the diplomat. As my son and my dog played for hours in the backyard, Scooter asked no questions, offered no opinions, made no suggestions, and imparted no information. And that is what Scott needed at that point in his life.

That was two years ago. A lot has happened since then, some good, some terrible, and much great. Scott was eventually hospitalized by order of the court and given medication against his will. Slowly but surely he emerged from the fog of his madness.

Today he is again in college, making up for lost time, pulling straight As, celebrating every holiday with us, and having dinner with us most weekends. Scott hugs his mom again, goes to church again, rides a bike in broad daylight again, goes out to dinner with friends, travels—and plays with Scooter regularly.

They say that God works in mysterious ways. I firmly believe that God used the love of a dog to help begin the process of pulling Scott out of his mental illness and reconnecting our family. And I am deeply, deeply grateful.

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