

Henry — The Goose Who Got To Love

Amadeus Vultznick

Published by Amadeus Vultznick, 2021.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

HENRY — THE GOOSE WHO GOT TO LOVE

First edition. May 1, 2021.

Copyright © 2021 Amadeus Vultznick.

Written by Amadeus Vultznick.



Chapter 1 - Home Sweet Home



It all happened in the summer of '76. My life would never be the same. I'm really old now and will be dying soon. I just wanted to share my story with someone...

To understand better, I must tell you a little about myself. I haven't had a very good life. I was born into and grew up a very large flock, with 53 brothers and sisters over all the seasons my parents were alive. Let me tell you, growing up was not easy, it was tough. My parents did the best they could with a flock that size, it was never really good enough though. There was never enough food in our pond to go around. Many days I'd be left to fend for myself, without even a smidgen of algae or plants. There were many a night I thought would be my last, yet longing to see that beautiful ball of fire coming up in the morning over the grassy hill next to our pond would usually grant me the courage to pull through. Everything would be better the next day, I'd keep telling myself. This would make me feel much better, even though I knew it wasn't really true.

We lived in a small pond, situated off in the corner of a medium sized park. Our pond was really quite small, the bank on the opposite side was easily visible from almost anywhere in the pond. From the air, our pond looked rather unique, almost like one of my brother's and sister's feet. The pond originated in the center of our park, more or less, expanding out towards the far corner of the park in several directions, as if it had claws with a toe nail on each end. Each of the claws extended for quite a ways into the corner of the park—like miniature creeks. A few of these creeks would wind around for quite some distance, making them rather difficult to see from the pond. I was particularly fond of these few creeks, since they gave me a way to escape from the other geese and people in the park. They were like my own little world of solace where I could hide and nobody could see me. I'd spend a majority of my time in the creek toward the left side. You can think of it as my brother's big toe, if that makes it any easier to

visualize. Back toward the far end of that creek was a large water plant, rooted half in the water and half on the bank. The long leaves of that large water plant draped over onto the water, forming a miniature cave like area. That's where I'd sleep each night. I remember feeling safe there.

The water in these little creek areas was rather cloudy due to their muddy bottoms, since they were much shallower than the pond. Their murky water made it quite difficult to see any algae or plants. When it rained, many times the water would reach the point where it was virtually impossible to see, forcing me to journey out into the pond in search of food. These were the days I'd dread the most, venturing out into the pond with all the other geese, hearing them whisper to each other and laugh. They wouldn't say anything to me, although many times it felt as though they were talking about me.

Our park consisted of mostly grass, with many small mounds spread randomly throughout. The grass had this unique mix of brown and green swirl color—like something that at one time was a lush garden and now is partially dead from lack of water. Concentrated in a grove near the opposite corner of the park were several trees which made up the only few trees the entire park had to offer. I always found it rather odd, a park the size of ours only having several trees. I never did figure out the reason why, though.

One of the trees in the grove was a gargantuan palm tree, towering high over top the other trees as though it was a look-out tower watching for seagulls returning from the sea. Nestled in the palm leaves adorning the top of the tree lived an extremely old owl. I'm not sure how old exactly; I know it was old though 'cause I'd overhear stories and rumors about him from long past. Even though it sounds kind of funny, it was always comforting thinking in some small way someone was watching over me at night when I was all alone. I always wanted to build up enough courage to talk to the old owl in his mighty tower above our world—I never did though.

Off in the distance, there was a neatly lined row of buildings bordering each edge of our park. The edges closest to our pond consisted of buildings with small square holes sealed with sheets of clear glass, allowing you to see through the holes. Light would turn on and off at all different times of the day and night illuminating the small square holes, creating many different amusing designs while gazing from a distance. It looked as though people were actually living in these buildings.

On the far edge of the park furthest from our pond sat a rather unique row of much larger buildings. They were much different than the other buildings; instead of small square holes sealed with sheets of clear glass, the entire front side of the building from top to bottom was one mammoth sheet of clear glass, the other three sides lacking any holes at all. Light would shine out through the glass all day long and only a small portion of time after darkness set in. Then, it would become completely dark for the rest of the night. When it was illuminated, people would enter the building and exit carrying brown paper bags crammed full of all kinds of various items. However, once the light ceased there'd be no more people entering or exiting the building for the rest of the night. The weird thing about those buildings; lots of people would enter and leave, yet it's as though no people actually lived in them. It was rather odd. What were they doing there if they didn't live in them? I never could figure it out.

One of those buildings distinctly stands out in my head. Unlike the rest, I remember the light would continue to shine out through the glass for the entire night, never ceasing. People would enter the building throughout the night, exiting with smaller brown paper bags with only a single bottle nestled snugly inside. The people would drink from that paper bag cloaked bottle and stumble around on the large flat concrete area directly in front the building. Man, was it weird. I often wondered what they were doing, yet was far too frightened to ever go over and find out. On windy days, when the strong winds were blowing from that direction, plastic bags which had been thrown into a small partially enclosed stall area behind that same building would occasionally tumble across the grass making their way over to our pond, as if to be embarking on a lengthy mountainous journey. Many of the plastic bags would still contain tiny remnants of small crunchy triangle pieces of extremely salty food. To say I'd intentionally watch for those bags would be an absolute understatement! They tasted like nothing in our pond—algae didn't have nothin' on them! They were absolutely delicious!

Many of the other flocks lived in ponds with remarkably clean fresh water being fed by an under ground spring and plenty of pond plants and algae decorating the pond's smooth glass-like surface. The water in our pond was essentially stagnant, with a light murky tint, smelling reminiscent of torpid water that'd been sitting dormant for quite some time. Although the stench was somewhat

foul on hot summer days, the rest of the time wasn't too bad. It was the best we could do, though. If my memory serves me correctly, our pond was fed by this rather large rust encrusted metal pipe, which looked as though its' very existence marked the beginning of time. Water would occasionally flow from the large opening in the end of the large metal pipe, draining into our pond.

Our park wasn't located in the best part of town. Although, I'm pretty sure it was close to the ocean, even though we never got to go, since I would see seagulls flying back with fresh ocean fish in their mouths. Many a day I spent, attempting to figure out just how far the seagulls must have flown to reach the ocean, wondering if there was any way I could ever make it. I always promised myself when I had become so hungry that death was now knocking on my door, I'd go for it, making a last ditch flight to find the ocean—I never did though. Often times, I'd attempt to muster enough courage to simply ask one of those brave seagulls if they would teach me how to make the journey to the ocean and catch a fish—I never did though.

A large majority of our park was riddled with small paper containers and swarms of paper wrappers of all different sizes and shapes, many decorated with colorful pictures of chickens, cows and fish. I never really understood what it meant. It made no sense to me why some of these other animal groups would be shown on these paper wrappers, while our flock was never shown on them. In reality, looking back at it now, our park was a real dump. Though, what's funny is how my childhood memories remember it as a beautiful place. It's funny how life has a special way of doing that for you. All my eyes would allow me to remember is those early mornings as the beautiful ball of fire was slowly rising in the distance, ever so slightly beginning to peek its' head over the horizon, assuring me warmth is only moments away as I'd sit there contently gazing at those rolling mounds of green grass cascading over the park with the morning dew still glistening on each blade of grass and the smell of moist dirt and crackling of worms crawling.

Enough about my home let me tell you a little about myself. Now, not only was I the ugliest goose in our flock, I was arguably the ugliest goose in all the ponds in the entire area for quite some distance. This award I did not receive by a slim victory—it pains me to say—it was by a very wide margin. I really didn't know it at the time when I was a little goose; however I sure know that now. It never ceases to amaze me how life magically works that way. When we're little

we simply accept someone for who they are—we don't know any better. It's not until we're older, in this cruel and vicious world, we learn to care so much how someone looks.

A cool looking chin gobbler made of silky smooth feathers is supposed to be my distinguishing feature, making me look like I'm going to be somebody some day, so everyone will like me. However, something went horrifically wrong when I was born. My chin gobbler was hideously disfigured, protruding off to the side of my face and down my neck, lacking any feathers and turning out to be this disgusting red and black birth mark color on the skin beneath. However, I wasn't fortunate enough to get off that lucky. In addition, my entire face and the top of my head also lacked any feathers having that same red and black birth mark color skin, making absolutely certain any onlookers wouldn't escape the vomit rising in their necks as they began to gag. As an extra added bonus, the birth mark color skin was furrowed and crinkled as if it'd been burned by fire. It had never really occurred to me how truly repulsive I looked, until one day overhearing some of the other geese discussing how they would become sick to their stomach's when they would look at me. I hadn't realized before that time, this was probably the reason I was always alone. That's simply how life was, I thought. In the peak of the day, when the ball of fire was at its' highest point in the sky, I would notice a reflection of another goose on the surface of the pond. I remember thinking, I'm sure glad I'm not that goose. I was really young at the time, not realizing the reflection was actually mine. I always felt somewhat normal, even when looking at another goose or my brothers and sisters. As I became older though, I realized that was only because I couldn't see myself.

To make darn sure there was no risk of running out of excellent opportunities for making lemon-aid out of the lemons dealt by life; my right wing also turned out to be much smaller than my left wing and was slightly crippled as well. Helping to turn your stomach as you looked at my crippled wing were scattered patches of bare skin decorated only with the nubs of dead quills no longer producing any feathers. I could still fly, however it was extremely painful and I would end up flying in a large circle unless I worked extremely hard to compensate. I never really thought of myself as crippled, however all the other geese made darn sure I knew it. Everyone flew faster than me, paddled faster than me, looked better than me and had loads of friends. I didn't know I was

lonely, I simply thought life was being alone. I was always off by myself over on the opposite side of the pond or wandering around near the outer edges of the park by myself. I think it was because nobody liked me, I'm not sure.

Day after day I would venture further and further to the edges of the park, as far as my braveness would allow. I'd set out on quests to find new types of food, realizing death would visit me quickly if I was unable to secure any more food. Many times there'd be small tidbits of food remaining inside those paper wrappers. I'm not entirely sure what they were exactly, man they tasted good though! There was many a time I'd have probably gone to meet my maker, if not for stumbling across one of those life saving food encrusted paper wrappers.

Every once in a great while my parents would come over and peck me on the head saying why aren't you like all the others. Man, it really hurt! To tell you the truth though, I didn't care. At least they were paying attention to me. The pain was much less than never talking to anyone. Sometimes a day or two would go by without talking to anyone—sometimes a week. The sad thing was I liked all the other geese, they just didn't like me. I don't blame them, though. I wouldn't have wanted to be my friend either. Once I became older, I realized I was never going to stop them from laughing at me. I simply needed to learn to live with it, not letting it destroy me. I realized embracing them laughing at me hurt far less than no one ever talking to me at all, at least someone knew I was alive.

I remember over-hearing the wise old geese continuously repeating the meaning of life is simple; you fly south for the winter and come back to our pond in the summer. That's it! They'd tell all the geese to stop over-think things; it's just that simple! I recall how deeply that affected me. There's got to be more to life! If that's all there is to life, then I'm pretty much inescapably doomed to end up living and dying all alone in this pond, with each day being worse than the last. Worst of all, no one will know or even care!

I remember wishing I'd been born a fish, so I could swim up and down every stream to all the incredible places in the world for ever and ever, even all the way to the beautiful blue ocean. However, those thoughts are for young geese with there whole lives ahead of them. I was getting on in age, past my prime, already living much longer than my parents had expected. I think they thought I'd pass away my first season. Yet, I'd never give up, always believing life gives you back exactly what you put in, determined there was much more to life.



Chapter 2 - Then It Happened



Late in the hot summer season had arrived and I'd nearly surrendered to the notion maybe there isn't anything more to life. Most likely I was going to die right here, all alone, never leaving this pond, my life no better than every other goose before me and before them and before them. But then it happened...

The summer temperatures this season were the hottest I'd ever felt. I'd already spent nearly the entire day hunting for food to no avail and was completely famished. Everywhere I searched—no food. Every paper wrapper was dry and sun baked, lacking even the tiniest remnant of food anywhere to be seen. Knowing that dying of starvation that night was a real possibility if I was unsuccessful at securing some sort of nourishment that day, I ventured further than I'd ever gone to the outer edge of the park. Near the edge of the park was a puffy paper wrapper which had been crinkled into a ball and appeared to be housing a rather large bounty of food scraps. No way, was it really true? I bolted as fast as my little legs would carry me to that paper wrapper. However, just as I arrived the wind kicked up, blowing the paper wrapper into the long straight flat black area with the yellow line running down the middle, which surrounded the park.

All four sides of the park had one of these black areas with the yellow line running down the middle, acting as a border separating our park from the buildings. Now, stories had been passed down from generation to generation. I'm not entirely sure if they were completely true or simply designed to frighten us. They recounted gruesome tales of large metal monsters with round rubber feet and piercing beams of light shooting from their eyes that were able to outrun even a cheetah at full stride, which would patrol the borders of our park smashing and killing any goose who even dared wander outside the park on foot. Many of our earlier relatives had met their demise at the hands of these

scary monsters. I had always told myself I would never test my fate wandering across the border or even into the border for that matter. However, when hunger has its' firm callous grip on your insides, you simply can't think straight. Your stomach becomes the all-powerful leader; common sense simply seems to evaporate. The only thing my mind could think is food...food...food.

Without even realizing, I had now wandered smack-dab into the middle of the long black border area chasing that paper wrapper like some kind of champion hound dog. Then, just as I prepared to plant my foot down on the paper wrapper, ending the pursuit—another gust of wind. Man you were so close, you nearly got it! You need to try harder I told myself firmly, attempting to bolster my resolve, the next time and it's yours! Making several large hops in hot pursuit, I slammed my foot down again—bang—I got it! Man, what a jackpot! Nestled down deep inside that crinkled ball of paper wrapper was a large crispy chunk of some type of food that tasted absolutely fantastic. I gobbled down that tasty morsel quicker than even thought possible, as if I was a hunter cat eating its' freshly killed prey. I couldn't even control myself, it's as though I was running on instinct alone.

Completely engrossed in eating my delectable treat, oblivious to anything around me, I was suddenly startled by an extremely loud bang. Glancing up immediately, I realized I was no longer in the middle of the long black border area, which only thinking about would many times send me spiraling into a petrified frozen state, to my horror I had wandered completely across that long black border area and was now standing smack-dab in the middle of the grassy area adjacent to the side of the building where people lived. What in the world! I'm surely going to die now!

Once my mind had the chance to begin processing my awful predicament, I realized the loud bang which had awakened me from my food induced trance had echoed from a swinging segment in the wood fence encircling the grassy area behind the building that had slammed shut behind a small person who was headed directly toward me. Now, you'd think a brain as small as mine would not be able to process much information at any one time. However, I'm here to tell you, so many thoughts passed through my brain I thought it was going to melt. I recalled the many stories passed on by my ancestors over the years, explaining what horrible fate awaited anyone wandering outside the borders of our park. They really were all true, I'm going to die—right here, right now! I

thought about the things I wish I would have done in my life. I haven't done anything! I never got to have my own flock. I never got to see that beautiful blue ocean. I'm going to breathe my last breathe, never having seen or done anything!

For a moment, the thought roared through my head—should I run? Only to be immediately squelched by an opposing thought—why run? I've really got no reason to live. What a bummer, I had so many regrets. I wanted to watch my own little flock grow up. I wanted them to have a much better life than mine. I needed to give them a better life than mine! Please don't let me die!

Looking back now, that moment was truly one of the most frightening moments of my life. I was sure my end had come. It's extremely difficult for me to accurately emphasize how truly awful it felt at that instant; when you believe it's your last moment on earth and there's so much more you wish you would have done. Regret's extremely painful, let me tell you. I remember thinking, if there's any chance I escape this terrible jam and survive, I'm going to do something with my life.

Sorry for rambling on and on, I'll get right back to the story. The small person who'd just come out of the swinging segment in the wood fence was briskly running toward me, looking directly at me. At first I thought, or maybe just hoped, he was looking at something behind me in the park. Yeah, that's got to be it, I told myself. I'll be okay. He's not trying to harm me; he's simply running over to the park. However, he just kept running toward me though, continuing to stare directly at me. I tried squawking for help at the top of my lungs; nothing would come out, though. I was so terrified, absolutely nothing would come out! Oh great, that's just my luck. As if being worthless and hideous wasn't enough, I've now magically become a temporary mute, even when my very life depends on it. What more could I ask for? My life's actually kind of comical, looking back at it now.

The small person made a beeline straight to me, stopping directly in front of me. I'd have run, however my feet simply wouldn't move. Hello feet...hello feet...nothing! He raised both arms and his hands high up into the air, as if to be announcing my demise to the entire world. I remember thinking; this is it, good-bye mom and dad! His arms and hands came crashing down like two falling tree branches and squeeze—a big hug. The biggest hug I'd ever seen, in fact. Gasp...gasp...I can't breathe! He's hugging my neck so hard, I can't even

breathe! Then, he picked me up completely off the ground, giving me another enormous hug. My little wing hurt so much with each mighty hug, to tell you the truth though, I didn't even care. I'd never had anyone hug me. It was amazing! It felt as though for a brief moment in time everything would be okay—life would be okay. All the bad things didn't matter anymore. I don't know why something as little as a hug can make someone feel so good, I've experienced it though and I am here to tell you it is absolutely true. I didn't want it to end, I'd never felt anything like it. I had no idea how it felt to be truly happy. I recall wishing there was some magical way to escape the return to reality and my dreaded life, only to be unhappy once again.

He began to carry me back toward the same swinging segment in the wood fence from which he had emerged. Now, normally I'd have been flapping and squawking for dear life, so terrified words can't even describe. However, I wasn't. I have no idea how I knew, yet I knew he meant me no harm. I literally can't explain it. It was as though being happy outweighed being scared, as if happiness simply erases fear.

I sat there calmly in his arms as he carried me through the swinging segment in the wood fence and into the large grassy area inside the fence, setting me down in the center of the flat smooth concrete area which extended from the back of the building. Now, this flat smooth concrete area was very large, accounting for nearly half the area, the other area consisting of lush green grass. The grass was much greener than the grass in my park, with no brown spots lurking amongst its' smooth surface, determined to interrupt and ruin the pristine visual image. The center of the grassy area was home to a gigantic plum tree; its' branches laden with the juiciest plums I'd ever seen and the ground below its' canopy littered with what seemed to be an ocean of heavenly purple plums. Oh my goodness, I can eat for days, I thought to myself! I believe I even uttered it aloud, with a big squawk. Oh that figures, my voice has decided to work again, now that my life doesn't depend on it.

The wood fence bordered this concrete and grassy area on all sides. A small strip of dirt area lined the interior of the fence, accommodating small *Camellia* bushes situated in a neat little row down the center. At the far end stood a smaller building, whose side acted as part of the fence. This smaller building had one large, very odd door from which access could only be obtained outside the fence. What made this door odd was the way it opened swinging from the

ground toward the sky, instead of swinging side-to-side like other doors. Also odd was its' rather large size; large enough to allow one of those metal monsters to be placed inside the building. I believe one of those scary metal monsters was actually being held captive inside the building, I'm not sure though. Anyway, I wasn't really worried, since I could clearly see there was a thick piece of metal and some kind of metal stuff securely attached to both the door and side of the building, ensuring the monster would stay safely locked inside and not escape.

Over next to the plum tree sat a large redwood barrel, full of water. Water dripping from a small metal pipe extending over the top of the redwood barrel kept it full to the brim with fresh clear water. While standing on the rim peering down inside the barrel, the water was so clear you could actually see the color of the redwood on the bottom. I remember thinking to myself, man what a perfect place. Plenty of food, plenty of water, a fence on all sides keeping you safe and guarded while you eat; it was heaven.

I whirled around to look back at the small person, who had now moved over and was sitting on a set of steps leading up to a door used to enter the large building. He was just sitting there staring at me. I didn't know what to say. I squawked to say hello. He stood up, walked over, hugged me and returned to sit back down on the steps once again. I called out again with another squawk, trying to say hello. Again, he walked over, hugged me and proceeded to carry me over, sitting back down on the steps holding me in his arms. Once again, I squawked loudly to say hello. He wasn't saying any sounds in reply. It was right then I realized—he actually has no idea what I'm saying—he's a people and I'm a goose.

I'd always overheard people saying weird sounds communicating with each other while they were sitting in small groups in the park, never really giving it a second thought. Most of the time I simply tried to stay away from people, since they would normally take one glance at me and immediately initiate a hasty retreat trying to get away from me as fast as possible. Sometimes the small groups of people in the park would stand near the other geese throwing bread crumbs into the water, watching the geese squawk and flap their wings in delight while eating the tasty bread. It was as though the people were offering them the bread as a reward for performing an exciting show, dazzling the crowd with their beautiful large white wings. However, whenever I would meander over attempting to join in on all the fun and excitement, the smiles that were on

the people's faces would turn to shock and all the people would begin grabbing their smaller people pulling them back into the safety of their people groups, acting as though they were rescuing them from a horrible monster. When I was young, I thought the whole thing was probably a simple coincidence. However, as I became older I began to realize the people were never doing that when the other geese were around; they were only doing that when I was around. So, I eventually stopped even trying to join in. That way everyone could have fun without me ruining it.

Those weird sounds people were saying to each other were how people communicated to other people; my squawk was how geese communicated to other geese. We didn't speak the same language, that's all. What I find extremely interesting though is how the feelings of happiness I felt didn't need any sounds to be understood. I'd squawk trying to communicate with him; he'd reach down and hug me. It's almost as though he knew exactly what I was saying.

I remember the building where he lived as though it was yesterday. The building was an old building which had been updated, yet still maintained its stately charm. Several small square holes filled with sheets of clear glass which had thin metal bars running through the glass for decoration were arbitrarily spread around the outside walls of the building. At night when it was dark the light from inside the building would shine through the glass, splitting the light into separate beams, casting interesting designs onto the bushes below and across the grass alongside the building. The designs were absolutely mesmerizing as the bushes gently fluttered in the breezy night air; sometimes they resembled a bear, sometimes a horse, one time even another goose. I could gaze at them all night, completely captivated by their intricate brilliance.

On one side of the building was a rather unique square hole, different from all the others, consisting of many smaller pieces of different colored glass. At night the light from inside the building would shine through the glass shooting multi-colored beams of light all across the ground, as though it was some sort of magical rainbow. At that moment, many times I'd catch myself remembering back to the first time I saw a rainbow. The ball of fire had nearly reached its highest point in the sky, when a light misty rain began to fall. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a beautiful rainbow appeared stretching across the sky ending directly in the center of our pond. It was magnificent!

Perched atop the building sat a fairly large square column, which at times would bellow smoky white colored stuff bearing a rather striking resemblance to the clouds in the sky. The smoky white colored stuff would gently rise, slowly making its' way high up into the heavens as though it was joining the other clouds. I've never been able to figure out who actually creates all those clouds suspended high up in the sky, yet I have a strong sneaking suspicion the building where my friend lived may have had something to do with it. I don't know for sure, it sure seemed that way though. Although on the other hand, it could have possibly been related to the outside temperature in some way, since the smoky white colored stuff would gush from the top of the large square column on the days when it was bitter cold, while days of warmer temperatures seemed to bring a cease to all their cloud making operations. I'm not really sure though, I never could figure it out.

The entire top of the building consisted of these really cool looking small half-rounded pieces of dried clay, all neatly layered atop one another in an alternating pattern, making the building seem almost impervious to water. Along the top ridge were half-rounded pieces of dried clay that were carefully aligned in a neat little row, creating what appeared to be the perfect resting spot for seagulls and other birds. Many days I remember watching those amazing seagulls perched there elegantly side by side on that top ridge, as though they were high on top a mountain looking down over our little park.

The building itself was positioned almost directly in the center of a large square area of ground which was situated on one corner of an intersection between two long black border areas, my park was on the other corner. One side of the building and a long portion of the wood fence faced directly toward my pond. Sometimes in the dark of night while sitting in precisely the right location on the pond with the breezy night air gently wafting the smoky white colored stuff in the right direction; the light rays beaming through the glass in the small square holes on the side of the building would penetrate the smoky white colored stuff creating a dazzling reflection on the pond so beautiful I can't even describe. For that brief moment in time, you felt as though you were actually inside a beautiful picture. It was literally breath-taking!

Right then, the door at the top of the steps swung open. A big person emerged, bearing a rather serious expression on her face. She stood there in the small square area in front of the door at the top of the steps, as if to be a moth-

er goose commanding her flock from atop a grassy mound. She uttered several weird sounds to the small person; the small person then hugged me while saying several weird sounds to me, ran up the steps and into the door, which closed behind him. I just stood there staring up at the door, squawking every so often, hoping at any moment he'd return. After quite some time, with no sign of him returning, I slowly stepped down off the step onto the ground and turned around quickly to stare at the door once again, hoping that was the very moment he'd return. No luck, still no sign of him. After standing there waiting for what seemed to be an eternity, squawking periodically for good measure, still no sign of him. Finally giving up, I sat down on the ground in silence. For a long time, I just sat there motionless on the ground in total silence, simply trying to take in everything that had just happened to me. It was too much for my small brain to process.

Then, off in the distance, echoed the faint squawks of the other geese in my pond, rather abruptly snapping me back into reality. Yikes, I'm outside the border of my park, on foot, in uncharted territory! I'd better get back to safety! I quickly ran back across the long black border area, through my park and into my pond as fast as my little legs would carry me, not even realizing I'd actually jumped a tall fence in the process. Without delay, I paddled directly to my brother's big toe creek, sitting there panting under my large water plant where I slept at night. I didn't eat anything the rest of the day—I wasn't even hungry! I didn't quite know what to think! Everyone else would do their best to stay away from me; carefully trying to refrain from even looking at me. This was the first time in my life someone didn't mind being close to me and holding me, or even looking at me for that matter. I'd never really felt any emotion quite like this; I think I was actually happy! For the very first time in my life, I think I was actually happy!



Chapter 3 - Dawn Of A New Day



The next day I awoke to the sounds of seagulls returning from their early morning journey to the beautiful blue ocean. Eagerly, I swam from beneath my large water plant, all the way into the center of the pond. Somehow, this day seemed different than all the others; the colors seemed brighter, the sounds in my pond seemed crisper and the smell of the early morning air seemed fresher. I was so happy and wanted to tell someone. There was no one to tell, though. Why was this day so much different? Why were all the colors so bright? Normally, everything's kind of gloomy and dull—every day just like the last. I couldn't figure it out. Nothing's changed; I was still the same ugly goose. So, why was I so happy? Why was this day so good? Then, suddenly it dawned on me, something I never forgot; life's not good or bad because it's actually good or bad—my perception of my life's what truly makes it good or bad.

Right then, two people were jogging around the bank of my pond in the brisk early morning air and as they caught sight of me immediately stopped, reversing directions, as if they'd just seen a monster. The other geese, already awake searching for food in the middle of the pond, began laughing at me. However, today it didn't even bother me. I just kept swimming around in the middle of the pond all morning long, happily enjoying life.

A little after mid-day, I noticed the same small person from yesterday walking across the long black border area into my park, directly toward my pond. As he drew closer, I noticed what appeared to be a loaf of bread tucked under his arm, which resembled the same bread people would feed the other geese to reward their dazzling performances. As he reached the bank of the pond, he began tearing the bread into small pieces, wadding them up into little clumps and throwing them as far as he could toward me in the center of the pond. The other geese were all much quicker than me, paddling over and snatching up the bread clumps before I was even close. As I paddled closer to the bank of the pond, he

began tossing the bread clumps directly at me, ensuring I'd be the only one able to retrieve them. That was the first time anyone had ever done something kind like that for me. I ate so much bread that day I actually thought I was going to explode.

Then, bread supply completely exhausted, he turned and ran back across the border of my park, into the building where he lived. As suddenly as he'd arrived, he was gone. I didn't know what to think. Why did he only throw bread at me? Has he seen me? It's as though he's blind. That day was a good day. I wasn't even hungry the rest of the night. I remember telling myself, don't allow yourself to be happy. If you allow yourself to be happy, it will only hurt that much worse when you're back to your normal life. It's only a matter of time before he'll realize how you look, seeing you just as all the other geese. It's not worth the risk of getting hurt. It'd be much safer simply not allowing yourself to be happy. That way you won't get hurt. Yeah, that's the answer, that's probably best. I was so happy, though! I remember thinking to myself—I don't care—it's better to risk being hurt than to never be happy at all!

I couldn't wait until the next day! What would happen that day? Normally, it was so lonely sleeping in my water plant cave. I'd dream these wild dreams where for a brief moment in time I'd be allowed to escape the shackles of my life, becoming someone else. I'd dream I was living their fabulous lives, having fun and being happy. Somehow, this made it a little easier to make it through. Sometimes I was a fish, sometimes a duck and sometimes even an eagle. Fish had it made, their lives were easy. They didn't have to worry about anything. I remember wishing I'd been born a fish. Now that I'm much older, I realize everyone's life seems much better from the outside looking in. Those dreams seemed so real. I remember them as if it was yesterday. That night, I couldn't even sleep a wink! I couldn't wait until tomorrow; tomorrow would be so good!

The next morning finally arrived; the twinkling snowflake specks of light in the night sky giving way to the magnificent ball of fire which was only beginning to peek its' head over the large mound of grass off in the distance. I didn't even wait for the ball of fire. I paddled out into the center of the pond, eagerly waiting in anticipation. I hope he comes today, I sure hope he comes today. Then, after what seemed to be an eternity, I spotted the same small person off in the distance, coming toward my pond from the building where he lived. Although somewhat difficult to distinguish, he appeared to be carrying

something different today. What could it be? I couldn't wait to find out, paddling even closer to the bank of my pond than last time. When he arrived, he began eagerly tearing open the plastic bag he was carrying, tossing these small white puffy things directly at me as if wanting only me to retrieve them once again. I can't believe it; he's actually doing it again! I just don't get it; most people can't even look at me. Not only is he looking at me, he's also being nice to me. Man, those little white puffy things were delicious; extremely sweet and mushy, as though I was eating miniature sweet white puffy clouds. He seemed to have an endless supply, as he fired them at me one after the other. It was great! I squawked loudly, trying to express my gratitude, even though I knew he probably couldn't understand what I was saying. Somehow though, I think he knew how much I appreciated it. Then, just as yesterday, with the supply in the bag completely depleted, he turned and ran back across my park, into the building where he lived and was gone.

This went on for many, many days; each day something different. One day it was a different kind of bread, the next day something crunchy, the next day something sweet. It was absolute heaven! Each day he'd toss the food directly at me, making sure only I could retrieve it. My absolute favorite days were the days he'd bring these extremely salty, flat crunchy things which tasted very much like cheese. What they were is still a mystery to me, I loved them though. I squawked so loudly trying to express my thanks that I'm almost certain he could understand what I was saying. I was so happy during that time! I didn't want it to end!

This is where it becomes rather difficult for me to talk about; this went on for so long that for a moment I actually forgot I was me. I don't know if that makes any sense. I hadn't even noticed I was no longer having any dreams at night. I no longer wanted to be someone else—I wanted to be me! I didn't want someone else's life—I wanted my life!

I recall those days he'd toss his shoes on the grass and wade out into the pond; reaching down scooping the pond water in his hands and flinging it high up into the air so it would shower down on me like rain. The other geese didn't know what to think; they'd frantically paddle to the opposite side of the pond in hopes of placing ample safe distance between them and the giant people monster who just entered their pond. I don't know why they were so worried; he'd never harm any of them. Oh well, I'd tell myself, it's their loss. Seeing him

standing there in my pond was so funny; he looked so out of place. Ponds aren't for people—they're for geese, silly. To tell you the truth though, I could care less how it looked; 'cause I knew he was doing it to be my friend. I still remember it to this day every time it rains.

Some of my most vivid memories were those days he'd come over to my pond, scooping me up in his arms, carrying me back to the building where he lived to play fetch with the plums from the plum tree. I'd often watch people playing fetch with their dogs in my park and always wonder what on earth's the object of that game? Why'd it seem as though they were both having so much fun playing it together? The dogs looked so happy! The tired old small rubber round thing they were playing fetch with wasn't even something they could eat. I just couldn't understand it. The dogs seemed as though they would have given their life, simply for the fun of playing. I remember the dogs trying so intensely, giving every last ounce of determination they had in them. They'd run as fast as their legs would carry them retrieving the small rubber round thing; running as though they were a fiery gazelle being chased by a hungry cheetah. It was as though they were trying so passionately, with such fierce determination, simply so the people would be proud of them.

The person would pick up the small rubber round thing, lean up toward the sky and throw it toward the clouds with all their might. Then, only moments later, it'd return hurling back to the ground like a falling acorn dropped by a bird returning to its' nest high atop a distinguished oak tree. Sometimes, I swear it actually bumped the clouds. The whole time it was in the air, the dog would be running to and fro attempting to position himself in what he believed to be the final landing place, many times even leaping to catch it in his mouth before it reached the ground. It was incredible! Once captured in his mouth, his feet would continue slipping and sliding on the grass for what seemed like days as he attempted to quickly reverse directions in order to return it to the person. Finally after regaining his full traction on the grass, he'd sprint so fast his legs and feet were one big blur; all the while the person slapping their hands on their knees and shouting strange sounds, as if to be encouraging the dog. I remember wishing someone would encourage me—forget encouraging me—I'd give anything if someone even cared I was alive. The dog would come grinding to a screeching halt, stopping directly at the person's feet to deposit the small rubber round thing and would begin to bark uncontrollably saying something I

couldn't understand. I believe it was something about playing fetch again, however I'm not completely sure. He'd continue hopping from side to side, almost as though he was begging and pleading to play yet another time, all the while a huge smile on the person's face. The dog absolutely loved it! Every time he'd try even harder than the last. He'd have done anything; he just wanted the person to be proud of him.

Now I understand; I finally get what all the fuss was about! I actually knew how it felt! The small person would do the same with me; he'd set me down in the middle of the square concrete area behind the building where he lived, walk the entire area gathering hordes of luscious purple plums in his arms and place them in a huge pile on the top step next to the door. It seemed to take an eternity; the anticipation would be absolutely killing me! Before even realizing, I'd find myself hopping and jumping around uncontrollably, just as the dog. Now I realize what the dog was barking so much about. The small person would grab one of the plums in his hand, lean up toward the sky and launch the plum toward the clouds with all his might. Sometimes the plum flew so high it wasn't even visible before it would come plummeting back down to the ground; all the while me squawking and frantically running in circles attempting to catch it in my beak before it smacked the ground. What an amusing spectacle it must have been—a goose playing fetch. That's what dogs do! To tell you the truth, I'd have done it for days and days and days. I'd try as hard as I could to retrieve the plum, going all-out, struggling with all my might to run the plum back to him; just so he'd be proud of me, too. However, I never could do it very well since my wing would always hurt. Yet, no matter how long it took or even if I fell down; each time I returned the plum his face would light up with a massive smile and he'd give me a giant hug. Sometimes he'd even let me eat the plum, celebrating my triumph! Man, those were good!

If the truth were to be told, the best thing was for a brief moment I truly felt normal—like nothing was wrong with me. You don't know what it feels like growing up a goose like me and being permitted to feel normal for a moment in time. I can't explain it. I'd have traded all the plums in the world; just to feel normal.

We played fetch on that square concrete area for so many days, it began to look like a cow's hide—only the spots were a gaudy purple color. It was a disas-

ter! Yet, none of that really mattered. I was happy and he was happy, too. When you have a friend by your side, somehow everything in life is better.



Chapter 4 - The Best Trip Of My Life



Now I could continue on and on about all the fabulous times, however you're probably bored to death by now. So, I'm stopping right here, only to tell you of one more exciting adventure. No ordinary adventure; by far the most exciting escapade of my life. There's probably no way to do justice telling the story; best trip of my life hardly begins to sum it up. I still remember as though it was yesterday—every color, every smell, everything.

This morning seemed different than all the others; somehow I knew something fantastic was going to happen. I didn't know what; I just knew it would be great! Around mid-day, the beautiful ball of fire was at its' highest point in the sky when I noticed the small person traveling across the park toward my pond. Even before he was close enough to hear me, I began squawking to him. Excited to see my friend again, I wanted to make sure he spotted me. What was I thinking—like he wouldn't spot me—when you look like me everyone spots you and makes sure you know it!

Making a beeline directly for me, with a large smile on his face, he scooped me up under his arm and headed back toward the building where he lived—as if we were on an important mission. As we journeyed closer to the building where he lived I couldn't help notice we seemed to be veering somewhat to the left, quite a bit off course, and weren't going to arrive at the side fence as we normally do. Instead, after crossing the long black border area with the yellow line down the center which surrounded my park; he immediately turned left and began walking down the small concrete strip running directly adjacent to the long black border area. The concrete strip seemed almost joined to the long black border area itself, closely flanking it no matter where we trekked. After traveling down this concrete area for quite some time, we eventually came upon another intersection between two long black border area's, very similar to the one which accommodated the building where my friend lived. By this time,

my park had become nothing more than a faint, tiny image off in the distance behind us, the pond almost indiscernible. Traveling this far from home made me extremely nervous; only the silent echo continuously repeating in my head that everything's going to be okay, he's my friend and he won't allow anything to happen to me, somewhat calmed my anxiety. Plus, he seemed to know exactly what he was doing which helped a great deal as well. It was all very exciting—like we were on a secret mission.

Turning right at the corner, we continued down another concrete strip adjacent to the new long black border area which was very much similar to the one we just departed only it had a row of extremely tall palm trees perfectly spaced the same distance apart sandwiched between it and the concrete strip for as far as the eye could see. Man was it a sight to behold as the light breeze made the palm leaves dance in concert. We continued walking down this new concrete strip for quite some time; my little brain approaching overload just trying to take it all in. Building after building after building we passed, very similar to the building where my friend lived only they were all differing shapes and colors; some big, some small, some with pointed tops, yet others with flat tops, some white, some blue and one even yellow like a bird. To top it off, many of the buildings were even highlighted with shiny, multicolored metal monsters, uncaged, sleeping on the concrete areas in front of them. I'd never seen so many different shapes and colors. It was literally amazing! By now, we'd already traveled so far my park was no longer even visible. Everything was all brand new to me—like nothing I'd ever seen.

Finally, we came upon yet another intersection between two long black border areas only this one was gargantuan, with one of the long black border area's being much, much larger than the one bordering my park. One yellow line down the center wasn't enough for this behemoth—it had six! I can't even begin to describe how many metal monsters were patrolling this long black border area—it was truly colossal! The rows of metal monsters stretched as far as the eye can see, streaming in both directions like a river crammed with schools of fish swimming in both directions.

We stood on this corner amidst all the ciaos, me tucked neatly under my friend's arm, facing this massive long black border area as if to be preparing for a daring attempt to cross this vast sea of metal monsters. No way, I thought! What in the world was he thinking? He's without a doubt lost his mind and

we're surely going to die! Clearly, the heat of the day had somehow stopped my friend's brain from functioning properly.

Right next to us on this corner stood a rather peculiar tree. This tree had a massive metal tree trunk and only a single metal branch near the top which had a bizarre piece of fruit dangling from the tip of the branch. This extremely bizarre piece of fruit had bright green, bright yellow and bright red light shooting from within its bowels, which would flash on and off periodically. I'd never seen anything like it on any of the other trees—it was truly unusual. I remember thinking it's probably not safe to eat. Down near the base of the metal tree trunk, at arms level, protruded a small metal round thing. The small metal round thing appeared to have something to do with the lights turning on and off in the fruit on that single top branch, as my friend continued to repeatedly press it.

Now, you have to understand something, up to this point in my life I'd never been anywhere outside my park. On account of my wing, I was never able to join the other geese flying south for the winter. There was no way I'd make it. Man, I wanted to go so bad! To see and experience it all; I'd have given anything simply for the chance! I knew there was much more to life than just our little pond, in our little park.

I'd overhear outrageous stories of extraordinary adventures on their voyages south for the winter, so amazing, they didn't even sound real! They'd talk of soaring so high up in the sky people looked as if they were crumbs of bread scattered across the terrain, buildings looked as if they were little acorn shells and small ponds similar to ours as if they were tiny rain drops sprinkled on the ground. It sounded incredible! They'd tell of gorgeous ponds, so much larger than our own, there weren't even words to describe. It sounded literally breathtaking! They'd continue on and on about the magnificent splendor of being swooped up into the jet-stream, lifting them high over top spectacular mountains shrouded in pristine white caps, propelling them for days. It sounded so beautiful it usually made me cry. I'm so glad to be alive! Some day I hope I can see those mountains with my own eyes. Although, if I'm never fortunate enough, that's still okay, I've already grown somewhat accustomed to the fact. I realize you're not allowed the luxury of choosing how you're born, it's simply not possible. You get what you're born with and that's it. Man, if I had the choice, I'd have been the biggest, most majestic, absolutely spotless white goose

with the largest wings ever seen. Wings so massive merely flapping them would have blown off all the leaves on all the trees in our park. I'd soar like a graceful seagull, flying to the beautiful blue ocean anytime my heart desired. Everyone would want to be me! Yes, I know, I'm completely aware that's not possible; it's okay to dream though, right?

Winter was a lonely time, stuck by myself all alone, until they all returned to our park in the summer from their long winter voyage. Please don't feel sorry for me though, I'm used to it now. I never really had any friends; no one would ever talk to me. I learned most everything I know second-hand, basically overhearing the other geese speaking to one another. My parents never spoke to me either; only talking with me a grand total of five times in my life, up until the day they passed away, I believe. As a small goose, I'd catch myself actually wishing they would hit me or peck me or at least yell and squawk at me, simply to convince myself they still knew I even existed. Even though it hurt, at least I'd know they love me, right? Sorry for slipping a bit off track, I'll get right back to the adventure. I simply wanted you to understand why this was such a big deal for me.

For quite some time my friend stood there repeatedly pressing the small metal round thing protruding from the trunk of the metal tree. Then all of a sudden, as if time stopped, all the metal monsters came grinding to a screeching halt, standing at attention with their noses arranged in a perfectly neat line on both sides. It was remarkable! I think my friend may have possessed magical powers that could actually tame these wild metal monsters. I was in awe! I'll bet that's why he could hold one of those metal monsters captive in the small building behind the building where he lived.

Proceeding nonchalantly, with me tucked neatly under arm, he casually strolled to the other side of the long black border area, while all the metal monsters stayed put as if frozen in time. Then, as soon as we arrived on the other side, wouldn't you know it; the metal monsters immediately resumed their carnage. It was really true, he actually possessed magical powers!

Turning to the right, we continued down the concrete strip on this side of the massive black border area we just crossed, as if we were a fish swimming up stream in an angry river of metal monsters. The noise and chaos was so intense, I couldn't even think. Scores of metal monsters ripped past us as though they were an enormous stampede of wild horses, each making its own unique

sounds, and dazzling me with so many sparkly colors my head was dizzy. My head looked as though it was a leaf in a wind storm; rotating back and forth so much my neck ached.

We continued traveling for quite awhile on this concrete strip until finally coming upon another corner seemingly identical to the last; even with its own metal tree that was virtually indistinguishable, right down to the small metal round thing protruding from its' metal trunk. This time, instead of pressing the small metal round thing, we passed by it, turning left and continuing down the concrete strip adjacent a much smaller long black border area etched with only a single yellow line down its' center.

Again we passed building after building, some with fences surrounding the areas in front of the buildings, while others with only fences surrounding the areas in back, like my friend's. Then, the oddest thing yet; we happened upon a building with a dog in the front area which was tied to a tree by a long strip of leather. Metal monsters, many lacking their round rubber feet, were lying disabled on the ground scattered all over the area surrounding the building, their once glistening colors now fading away. Normally, metal monsters petrified me; however, standing there staring at all those lifeless disabled metal monsters made me feel sad for them in some way. I wondered if they felt like me. Did the other metal monsters make fun of them? I remember wishing there was some way to assure them everything would be okay. I'm not insane, though, they were scary metal monsters. Just as the metal monsters, the building's color too was fading away, with large patches of color now beginning to peel away as though it was a colorful snake shedding its' skin. It looked disgusting. The area occupied by the dog was worn so badly, not even a blade of grass was left standing, only dry powdery dirt. The dog was violently yanking and tugging, so fiercely in fact, I feared at any moment he was going to snap the long strip of leather as though it was a flimsy spider's web, or worse yet, possibly choke him self to death. How the dog could breathe in all that dust, I do not know. He was barking so profusely I couldn't even hear myself think. Man was he ferocious—absolutely terrifying! He didn't seem happy like the dogs playing fetch in my park, he seemed so angry. I remember thinking to myself, if only he had someone who would spend time playing fetch with him in the park, laughing and being his friend, he'd probably be happy. I just knew if there was someone who would play fetch with him it'd probably change him into a happy dog. I

was sure of it. Maybe there wasn't anyone though; no one to spend time with him, no one to play fetch with him, no one just to be his friend. Maybe he was always alone like me. Maybe the people in the building beat him. Maybe he wasn't lucky enough to have a friend like mine. I felt so sad for him. We walked on past him until the barking became a faint echo in the distance.

We continued walking for what seemed to be an eternity. My little wing had begun to hurt from being smashed under his arm—I didn't even care though—it was so exciting! I just wanted to take it all in! Ahead in the distance seemed to be a great deal of furious commotion. What could it be? I found myself both scared and excited at the same time; I didn't even know that was possible! When we arrived at the scene of the commotion, I could not believe my eyes. There stood the most immense metal monster I'd even seen. It was no ordinary metal monster; it literally dwarfed the regular metal monsters, looking as though it could eat regular metal monsters for breakfast. It was enormous! It had gigantic feet clad with massive belts of metal; one foot alone was larger than an entire regular metal monster. When it walked the ground would actually shake! The gargantuan beast reminded me of a mammoth over-sized scorpion with its' massive scorpion tail towering above its' body, blocking the ball of fire in the sky, as if it was an enormous tree reaching toward the heavens. Suspended from the tail's end, in place of the stinger, was an extremely large square metal cup with metal teeth on its' rim, which would crash down tearing up the ground as if it were water. As it moved, it'd exhale bellows of smoky white colored stuff from the top of its' head, as if to be some kind of angry fire breathing monster, roaring and growling the entire time like a giant grizzly bear guarding her cubs. It seemed like an entire new species of metal monsters, one I'd never seen before—a tribe of giants! I wondered whether my friend's magical powers would work on this metal monster giant. He didn't seem frightened at all, not even fazed!

The metal monster giant had positioned itself on one side of the long black border area, utilizing its' massive tail to dig a gaping hole in the ground, stacking the dirt in a large pile alongside as if saving it for later. The hole was gargantuan, an entire regular metal monster would fit easily with room to spare! It looked as though they were building a massive entrance into a secret underground world.

Posted directly in front of this entrance to the secret underground world stood a rather large bright red square sheet of metal, displaying a regular metal

monster encircled by a yellow circle with a yellow line through the center, almost as if to say no regular metal monsters were allowed. It's as though regular metal monsters were being barred from entering this secret underground world.

Directly beside this sheet of metal, to the right and to the left, sat loads of miniature red rubber tree trunks that were all trimmed neatly to a point on top, lined up in a row standing at attention. They were all my height and equally spaced apart, as if to block anyone attempting to enter this secret underground world. It's as if this secret underground world was meant only for giant metal monsters, regular metal monsters were excluded. I remember feeling sad for the regular metal monsters; they must feel excluded like me. I wish there was a world where no one was ever excluded, that would be a beautiful place!

My friend continued to walk down the small concrete strip adjacent to the long black border area, passing by the metal monster giant in the process. The giant didn't even glance at us; it was as though we were absolutely invisible! To tell you the truth, I think it was the metal monster giant's fear of my friend's magical powers that may have been the culprit, I'm not sure though.

We continued to walk and walk, until finally in the distance a faint outline of another intersection between two long black border areas began to emerge. As we drew closer, it became increasingly clear this intersection was a bit unusual, much different than the others. Sitting on one of the corners was an enormous building which we appeared to be headed directly toward. Once we arrived in front of the building, my friend stood there on that small concrete strip, facing the building, pausing for several moments as if to proclaim we've arrived, we made it, we've finally reached the final destination of our long secret journey. I must say, I was speechless! Standing there before my eyes was the most magnificent building I'd ever seen; all four sides of the building were clear sheets of glass from top to bottom with light shining out in all directions that seemingly out-shined even the light of day. Truly, it was unlike any building we'd come across until now.

Directly in front of the building stood another massive metal tree trunk, similar to the ones situated on the intersections of the long black border areas, only this one had two identical size branches on the top that were both in the shape of an arch. These two arches seemed as though they were on fire inside, brightly glowing with golden light, like two shimmering golden mountains. It was absolutely stunning. I'll bet none of the other geese have ever seen anything

quite like these two shimmering golden mountains! I've never heard them mention anything like this on their journey south! For once, I felt sort of special, as if I alone possessed something no one else possessed.

The building itself was surrounded entirely with black area, similar to the long black area bordering my park. As we stood there gawking at all the splendor, metal monsters of all shapes and colors rushed in and out of the black area, pulling up to stop at the building and swarming around it like bees to a hive. Normally, all those metal monsters rushing to and fro would have terrified me. However, I knew my friend possessed magical powers which could tame these monsters, so I knew I was safe with him.

Heaps of smoky white colored stuff carrying the most divine aroma belled from atop the building. I couldn't quite put my toe on what the aroma was exactly, let me tell you though, it was by far absolutely the best thing I'd ever smelled. Inside the building were multitudes of people all sitting around in small little groups seeming to have the time of their lives eating food, laughing, smiling and having a good time. It looked like the happiest place in the world! Directly in front of the building, near the metal tree trunk, sat five large round concrete things, each one with a thin round cover over-top to provide shade from the ball of fire in the sky. Two of the large round concrete things were being occupied by small groups of people sitting around them.

There were so many people and metal monsters dashing here and there, I couldn't even count. I remember thinking; I can't believe he doesn't mind being seen with me, especially in front of all these people. He wasn't embarrassed of me in the least. I know if it was me, I'd have been embarrassed of me.

He marched me straight over to the closest vacant large round concrete thing, in front of all those people, and set me down smack-dab in the center of it as though I was a glorious dignified eagle standing at attention on a large ancient tree trunk. I never felt so important; everyone was staring at me! Everything was happening so fast. He firmly pointed at me as if telling me to remain in that spot and proceeded to go inside the large building. I didn't move one inch! Although, I'm not sure I'd have been able to move, even if I wanted, being so nervous and anxious standing there on display all by myself.

In several moments, he emerged from the building carrying a small white paper bag in his hands. Decorating the outside of the bag was an image of the same metal tree, virtually identical to the one directly in front of the building,

right down to the same two golden branches on top that resembled two large golden mountains. Now that's definitely an attention-grabber, I recall thinking to myself; surely that tree must be an extremely important tree or hold some special significance. He set the paper bag down next to me on the large round concrete thing and proceeded to remove its' mysterious contents, as if to be some sort of surprise. He pulled out a small bright red paper carton, marked with an identical image to the one shown on the paper bag, containing what appeared to be a multitude of long skinny small twigs which were packed so tightly together they were literally overflowing the carton. The skinny twigs were a bright golden color, glistening and sparkling intensely as the bright light from the ball of fire in the sky vibrantly reflected off their surface. They were the oddest looking things I'd even seen. Could they actually be pieces of fruit harvested from the golden branches of that important metal tree shown on the paper bag, similar to plums on my friend's plum tree? I didn't know.

At that moment the wind changed in my direction, offering me a huge whiff of those little golden twigs. Wow! All I can say is wow! The aroma was as though I died and went to heaven! It literally took control of me. Without even realizing, I began hopping and jumping around from foot to foot, as though my feet had a mind of their own and refused to stop moving. Even my wings began to flap uncontrollably just like an enthusiastic seagull celebrating atop a bounteous bounty of recently discovered food. I didn't want anyone to see my wing and embarrass my friend. However, I was so excited I simply couldn't stop; the anticipation was excruciating!

He began feeding me those golden little twigs one-by-one, each one so crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside, so warm and salty; those scrumptious treats were literally amazing! After pretty much annihilating all those golden twigs in short order, he proceeded to reach inside the paper bag once again, only to reveal yet another exciting treat; a plastic cup containing this extremely cold smooth white stuff which tasted so sweet I thought I'd die! I absolutely loved it! It had loads of crushed nuts sprinkled all over the top, with a bright red berry neatly balancing on its' highest point to finish out the frill. I gobbled it down so quickly my head began to freeze. By the time I reached the bottom of the cup finishing that heavenly nectar, it was plastered all over my beak, all over my feathers and even on top of my head. It was literally every-

where! I was a mess! I looked like I was wearing a wig. Looking back now, it must have been the funniest sight.

That was the best meal of my life! I have such fond memories of that time—which could be attributed to being a small impressionable goose at the time—however I like to think it was due to the great deal of fun we had that day. I'll never forget it!

After finishing those delectable delights, he scooped me up under his arm once again and we embarked on the long trek back home—like two warriors returning from a secret mission. That was the best day of my life! What an exciting adventure! I knew life wouldn't get any better! I'd already pretty much accepted the fact I'd probably never see anything outside my little pond in my little park. Man, was I mistaken!



Chapter 5 - The World Is Mine



That night back at my little pond, sitting there beneath my large water plant all night, I didn't sleep a wink. Somehow everything felt different now, as though everything had changed. My park seemed different now. My pond seemed different now. Everything seemed smaller and more predictable. It felt as though I could handle anything now; as though my eyes had been opened to this massive new world and what I was going to do with it was all up to me! Who cares if none of the other geese like me, who cares how I look, I can still make something of my life despite what they all think! I learned a lot from that adventure. I owe a great deal to my friend and will never forget him for doing such an amazing thing for me. I don't think he knows how much that helped me.

The next day I couldn't wait to play fetch with the plums again. I didn't even wait for him to make the journey across the park to my pond to carry me back to his plum tree. Instead, I traipsed across the park by myself, all the way to the long black border area and stood bravely at its' edge. I felt strong and courageous—like a lion! After all, we made it out alive from our adventurous secret mission with all those metal monsters; what's a little black area with only one yellow line down the center? This ought to be easy now. Absent any metal monsters, I'm sure I'll be safe. Quickly glancing in both directions, ensuring no metal monsters were lurking about the vicinity, I bolted across the black area as though I was a mouse fleeing a hawk. I made it! Yeah, I made it! I felt as though I'd faced my fear and won, unleashing a huge squawk in pure celebration. My friend's going to be so proud of me!

I stood there at the side fence, squawking loudly over and over again repeatedly, hoping he'd hear and come out to play fetch the plum. This time, I'm going to play the best game of fetch he's ever seen! I could care less if it hurts my wing or not, he's going to be the most proud he's ever been of me!

After several moments, the door at the top of the steps opened, followed by the faint sound of foot steps. Then, all at once the side fence flew open as though it was a tree branch in gale force winds. My friend came bounding out, scooping me up in his arms with a big hug and proceeding to set me down in the center of the large concrete area. He raced around gathering a plethora of juicy purple plums in his arms and began making it rain in plums. I ran so fast—here, there and everywhere! I tried the hardest I've ever tried at anything! Not even one plum struck the ground; each and every one of them captured in my beak before even striking the concrete. I know I might be slightly exaggerating; man, did I try hard though. I wanted to make him proud of me to try and pay him back for what he did for me.

That night in my pond, sitting there beneath my large water plant, I slept the entire night. I didn't even dream. I was so exhausted, I wasn't even sure if I'd survive. I couldn't even move my wing. My claws on the end of my toes had been scraped down to the nub by the concrete. You know what though; I didn't even care. I'd do anything for my friend!

With each passing day becoming a little cooler and the ball of fire in the sky disappearing below the horizon a little sooner, I knew the end of summer was drawing near. I'm not sure of the exact day, I believe it was close to the end of summer if I remember correctly, I was sitting on the smooth placid waters of my pond gathering my thoughts in the early morning fog when I noticed an exceptionally unique gigantic metal monster navigating its' way up the long black border area that ran alongside the building where my friend lived. As the metal monster drew closer, it became abundantly clear this metal monster was like none I'd ever seen. It was bright yellow and shaped similar to an enormous elongated square box. It was the oddest looking thing!

Each morning this gigantic yellow metal monster would grind to a halt in front of the building where my friend lived as though it was under the spell of his magical powers and he would quickly climb aboard joining the many other small people who were already inside. The big yellow metal monster would halt there each morning at precisely the same time to collect my friend and then quickly speed off down the black border area. Still to this day, I'm not completely sure what the whole thing was all about.

As the days passed, I'd continue developing different theories, none of them ever really seemed to make any sense though. At first, I thought it might be

some sort of special training for small people to practice their magical powers over the mighty metal monsters. Then at one point I thought; what if it was actually the reverse? What if they were attending secret training to help the mighty metal monsters take over all the parks? At another point, I thought the mighty metal monsters may have actually captured my friend and he was being transported each day to a prisoner park where he was being forced to work hard labor all day. At one point, I even thought they may have been conducting some sort of secret experiment; brain-washing all the small people, making them be exactly how they wanted them to be. I never did figure it out.

Later in that day, when the ball of fire crept its way past the highest point in the sky, the big yellow metal monster would return to the front of the building where my friend lived and he'd quickly disembark. I could hardly wait until he returned each day! I had it down to a science; if I sat directly beneath the large metal pipe draining into our pond, staring up at the towering palm tree giving home to the wise old owl, as soon as the palm tree had completely eclipsed the ball of fire in the sky I knew the big yellow metal monster would be returning at any moment with my friend. Some days it seemed as though time would move in slow motion. Many days I couldn't even wait, going over there several moments early just to sit in front of the side fence waiting for him to return. Waking up some days, all I could think about was how long it'd be before seeing my friend. I'd eagerly wait there beneath the large metal pipe like a jackrabbit preparing for an important race and the instant the palm tree blocked the ball of fire in the sky—bang—take off sprinting for the side fence with all my might! It's as though the rest of the day didn't even matter anymore. I didn't want to miss even one day. I couldn't wait to play fetch the plum with my friend! Those were some of the happiest days of my life! I don't know how to describe what I felt when I'd see that big yellow metal monster off in the distance traveling down the long black border area with my friend. I knew in only a moment I'd be with my friend—laughing, playing and today would be another good day.

Waiting each day for my friend, I'd always stand over next to the side fence, never in the front where the big yellow metal monster would drop him off. I didn't want him to be embarrassed of me in front of the other small people. Plus, the big yellow metal monster made me quite nervous and I was perfectly okay with maintaining a good safe distance. When my friend would step out of the big yellow metal monster and notice me standing there by the side fence,

his face would light up with an enormous smile, as though he was as excited to see me as I him. I couldn't believe it—someone was actually excited to see me! His eyes would light up as though he was truly happy to see me. I'd never felt anything like that before! Whenever anyone else looked at me, their face would have an awful expression of being startled initially, then gradually progressing into pity. It would make me feel as though being born was the worst thing to happen to everyone around me. With him, I could be myself. I could be happy.

He'd fling open the side fence, letting me run onto the concrete area jumping and hoping around like some sort of crazy goose in anticipation of today's games of fetch the plum. I can't even begin to describe how much I looked forward to those times each day—to laugh, play and have fun with my friend. We'd laugh and play 'til nearly dark each day. I recall being sad when the days would become shorter as the summer season drew to a close, since it meant the cold winter season was on its' way. Now I was sad for a much different reason—it meant less time to spend with my friend.

Each day, around the same time, as the darkness of night was drawing near, the door at the top of the steps would open and a big person would emerge. Standing there in front of the open door, at the top of the steps, she'd begin shouting these weird sounds. I have no idea what they meant. My friend, on the other hand, seemed to know exactly what they meant. It appeared as though she was forcefully instructing him to come inside the building without delay. He'd run over, give me a big hug and immediately dart up the steps and through the open door, with her closing it behind them.

Without hesitation, I'd jump to the top of the fence, quickly scurrying back to my pond before the darkness arrived in full force. I wish it didn't have to end. I wish there was some way to move time forward, skipping the night, only to be right back the next day laughing and playing with my friend. Life didn't seem much like life anymore when it didn't include my friend—we were inseparable. With both of us, we could conquer anything! Nothing seemed unattainable with my friend by my side! I could no longer even picture my life absent my friend. I was truly happy. I remember thinking—I hope life can remain this way forever, even though I knew that was impossible. Life just doesn't allow that to happen.

Then one day, we'd only been playing fetch the plum for several moments, when all of a sudden the door at the top of the steps flung open and the big per-

son emerged. She stood at the top of the steps holding some sort of paper in her hand, profusely shaking it high above her head as though she was declaring to the world to stop and heed what she was about to say.

I remember that day being a rather hot day—hotter than usual for that time of the season. I distinctly remember there being a light breeze blowing from the direction of the ball of fire in the sky, carrying with it an aroma of pond algae baking in the searing heat. Some days, when I'm eating algae in my pond and the heat of the day reaches just the right temperature, I'm instantaneously transported back to that exact moment in time, as though time was left standing still—frozen for eternity. All of a sudden, I'm back a little goose, re-living that moment in time. It's funny how, out of all the many moments and memorable things in life, it's the oddest things which remain anchored in the fields of your memory until the day you die. Such small insignificant things in your memory are sometimes all that remain of such monumental emotional events.

She didn't look happy; there was no smile on her face. She looked furious. She had yet to utter a sound and even I could tell there was something wrong—very, very wrong. She just stood there continuing to shake that paper in the air above her head, looking to be gathering the sounds to say from deep within her brain.

At this point, I glanced over at my friend, hoping to gain some sort of guidance, only to see his countenance had gone from pure glee to utter despair in all but an instant. I didn't know what to think! He looked as though he knew something awful was about to happen and once the sounds finally did begin to spew from her mouth—like the roar of a lion echoing over its' mighty territory—the sounds were going to be delivering some dreadful news. He bolted over to the bottom of the steps, standing at attention, staring up at her—as if to be a prisoner waiting to receive his sentence. She remained standing there for the longest time, not even making one sound, peering at him with an expression of utter disappointment. The silence was almost worse than her making a sound. The disappointment in her eyes at that moment rendered even me motionless. So much was communicated without even a sound being uttered.

I thought for sure she was going to continue on and on with sound after sound, the same as I'd seen other big people in my park do to their small people when they had the same expression of disappointment on their face. However, to my astonishment, she only made one short sound—"You're a big boy now

and big boys must grow up and leave behind childish things". That's it! I have no idea what it meant; I'll never forget it though! It's probably one of the only people sounds I'll remember until the day I die! I sure wish I knew what it meant.

As my friend stood there at the foot of the steps, I noticed his eyes began to fill with water even as he struggled intensely to hold it back. As the water began to flood down his face, he ran up the steps and through the door with the big person closing it behind them, leaving me standing there all alone in the center of the concrete area. I just stood there stunned. What just happened?!?? I just stood there in the center of that concrete area, all by myself, bewildered and confused. What should I do? Should I wait for him to return so we can continue playing our game of fetch the plum? He'll probably be returning in several moments, I'll just wait I thought. After waiting for quite some time, I began to wonder if I should resume playing without him and have him join back in once he returned. As I resumed playing, it just wasn't the same—it wasn't any fun. It seemed as though it was only fun when he was having fun playing too. So, I continued to wait...and wait...and wait...and wait.

The ball of fire in the sky began to inch its' way behind the mountains off in the distance with the darkness preparing to overtake what little light was left from the day. Normally, this was when I'd make my hasty retreat back to my pond. However today, I was worried for my friend and didn't want to leave until he returned. I wanted to make sure he was alright. So, I continued to wait, all the while the darkness drawing closer. If darkness arrived in full force before I reached the refuge of my park, would I even make it home? I wasn't sure. Waiting even one more instant, would I meet my demise at the hands of those mighty metal monsters? He'll return any moment; just one more moment I kept telling myself. I waited well into the middle of the night, standing there in the center of that concrete area, all alone, in the dark, until finally I wasn't able to stand it any longer and made a mad dash back to my pond. That was one of the most frightening nights of my life—wondering whether I'd be eaten in the dark by those mighty metal monsters. Working my way back across the long black border area seemed as though it was an epic journey that night. The confidence that'd been pouring out of me, knowing I now had a best friend by my side, seemed to elude me that night. It felt as though it was only me against the world once again. I was terrified again.

When I finally made it back to my pond, I immediately rushed to my large water plant where I felt safe. That night, my water plant cave felt dark and cold—as though loneliness was knocking on the door searching for a home again.



Chapter 6 - What Did I Do???



Early the next morning, I didn't feel like going out to the center of the pond. I didn't think I could handle all the other geese talking about me that day. I just sat there in my dark water plant cave, all alone, staring at the wall.

Finally, towards the middle of the day, I managed to muster enough courage to paddle over to the big metal pipe, making it there just in the nick-of-time, in fact, as the palm tree had eclipsed the ball of fire in the sky only moments earlier. As quickly as my legs would carry me, I scurried across my park and across the long black border area to the side fence of the building where my friend lived. I stood there waiting by that side fence—the angst literally killing me! I needed to know what happened! Was my friend alright? Everything's alright, I kept telling myself. The big yellow metal monster will be arriving any moment with my friend and everything will be right back to normal—I'm sure of it. Right then, the big yellow metal monster became a faint yellow dot in the distance, traveling down the long black border area with my friend. I didn't know what I'd been so worried about, in just a moment from now I'd be with my friend laughing, playing and everything would be perfect again.

The big yellow metal monster pulled up, stopping directly in front of the building where my friend lived. I couldn't wait to see him! He stepped out of the big yellow metal monster onto the grassy area in front of the building, looking over at me with this strange morose expression on his face, almost as if I wasn't even there. The same huge smile that was normally on his face being happy to see me had been replaced with almost no expression at all. His eyes that would normally light up excited to see me had been replaced with these gray expressionless eyes. Was he mad at me? Did I do something wrong? If I could just see him for a moment, we can figure all this out and everything will be back to normal. Then, he walked straight inside the front of the building. That's kind of odd, I thought, he never goes inside the front of the building. He always runs

straight over to me, so we can go through the side fence and begin playing fetch the plum right away. He probably needed to say something to the big person inside, then he'll come outside and open the side fence so we can play. Yeah, that's got to be it. I'll just wait right here until he comes outside and opens the fence. I waited there in front of that side fence for quite some time, squawking loudly every so often, hoping he'd hear me. He probably can't hear me all the way out here I thought to myself, so I hopped over the side fence into the center of the concrete area. Now, maybe he'd be able to hear me, so he'll come outside to play fetch the plum. I began squawking at the top of my lungs, over and over again, however there was no response as I stood there squawking incessantly until no more noise would even come out. My neck was hurting so bad I could hardly stand it! I couldn't understand what I did wrong; the whole thing didn't make any sense to me. Maybe he was simply too busy to play today or was having a really lousy day. I'll try to be a good friend and leave him alone right now—there's always tomorrow.

By now it was nearly dark, so I quickly scurried over the side fence, back to my pond. That night, I was really confused. I didn't sleep at all. Maybe he didn't see me standing over there by the side fence. No, that can't be it, he looked directly at me. Why did he act like I wasn't there? What did it mean? Was he embarrassed of me? No, that can't be, we had so much fun on our secret mission adventure and he wasn't embarrassed of me in the least. Of any time to be embarrassed, then would have definitely been the time. Then what was it? What did I do wrong? There's got to be some sort of explanation! If I could only get a chance to see him again for a moment, it'd probably all make sense.

The next morning was colder than usual with light patches of fog gently hovering over the surface of the pond, disappearing quickly as the morning gave way to the day. I didn't even wait 'til the palm tree eclipsed the ball of fire in the sky before making my trek across the park and across the long black border area to the side fence of the building where my friend lived. This time, I wanted to arrive early in order to make absolutely sure he'd see me standing there next to the side fence. Hopefully, he's not too busy today and can spend some time with me—I miss my friend. Right then, I spotted the big yellow metal monster off in the distance making its' way down the long black border area. As the big yellow metal monster pulled up in front of the building where my friend lived, I stood up on the very tips of my toes trying to make myself as tall as possible so he'd

notice me over by the side fence. This time I was going to make sure he saw me. When he stepped out of the big yellow metal monster, I began squawking loudly, even flapping my wings several times for good measure. He walked straight inside the front of the building, without even a glance over at me. I quickly hopped over the side fence into the center of the concrete area, jumping up and down, squawking at the top of my lungs, hoping he'd hear me. I just wanted him to come outside and play fetch, even it was only for a short time—I missed my friend. I really missed my friend! I continued to squawk...and squawk...and squawk...for nearly all that remained of the day. I squawked until nothing but air would come out of my beak.

As the ball of fire in the sky began to gradually inch its' way behind the mountains and darkness began to overtake what was left of the day, I slowly walked back to my pond, just staring at the ground, not even glancing up as I walked across the long black border area back to my park. I didn't even care about the metal monsters—so what if one ate me. I didn't care. He's probably just busy and doesn't have any time to spend with me right now, I told myself. I went straight to my large water plant and slept the whole night. That night I had no dreams.

The next day, feeling rather glum, I paddled around slowly in the center of the pond staring at my reflection on the surface of the water, while the faint sounds of geese taunting me echoed off in the distance. Near the shore, a big person and dog were playing fetch. They were having so much fun! The person was laughing and the dog was barking gleefully as though they were having the time of their lives. I felt like such an outsider; as though I was standing on the outside looking in at their wonderful life. I really miss my friend! I just want to laugh and play with my friend!

Right then, I noticed the big yellow metal monster pulling up to the front of the building where my friend lived. Oh no, I'm late! Lickety-split, I quickly paddled to the edge of my pond and began running toward the edge of my park at full tilt. By the time I'd arrived at the park's edge, my friend had already walked over to the side fence. I was so ecstatic to see him I just bolted across the long black border area without even looking! We're going to play fetch the plum today—I just know it! I couldn't wait! I'd missed my friend so much! He scooped me up under his arm, giving me a gigantic hug just like old times. I felt so happy again!

Just then, I heard the thump of the door slamming closed at the top of the steps, with several big people descending down the steps. The big people made their way through the side fence, passing directly in front of my friend and me, continuing around to the front of the small building where I believed they were holding one of those metal monsters captive. Then, one of the big people walked over to the thick piece of metal that was attached to both the door and side of the small building and proceeded to remove it. I wanted to squawk to warn them, I didn't though. They'll be alright, I thought to myself. They know what they're doing. They probably have magical powers over the metal monsters, the same as my friend. The big person leaned down grasping the bottom of the door and heaved that mighty door open toward the sky. I knew it! There was a metal monster being held captive inside.

The big people, one by one, proceeded to get inside the metal monster, just like my friend would get inside that big yellow metal monster each morning. Then, all of a sudden, the metal monster came alive! Beams of light began shooting from its' eyes, casting bulky streaks of glowing illumination across the ground in front of it, saturating the area ahead for quite some distance. The metal monster sat there staring at my friend and me, making these deep snarling growls as though it was a wild buffalo preparing to charge. To say I was frightened was an absolute understatement! Right then my friend, with me under arm, began to get inside the rumbling beast. Why in the world were we getting into one of those metal monsters who patrolled the long black border area around my park? I was absolutely terrified! All my relatives had emphatically warned of these sinister metal monsters, I trusted my friend though and knew he wouldn't allow anything to happen to me, so I got in despite the crippling fear that was haunting my entire body. Maybe we were embarking on yet another secret mission adventure, similar to my friend and me, only this one would include his entire family—how exciting! This adventure could end up being even more amazing than our adventure. Maybe we're all going on a secret mission adventure to the beautiful blue ocean, the same as all those majestic seagulls gliding gently and effortlessly through the air. That would be incredible!

Then, the metal monster took-off as though it was a wild elephant at full trot. We traveled for what seemed like days, turning to the left, then the right, then the right again, then left again, then left, then right, again and again and again. It seemed as though it would never end. We'd stop for several moments

like a cheetah catching it's breath between sprints—then boom—take-off running once again. We kept running and resting, running and resting, over and over again. Finally, after running for what seemed to be an eternity, we arrived at a park; only this park was much different than my park.

As the metal monster slowly came to a halt next to this park, the rumbling suddenly stopped as if the metal monster had gone to sleep momentarily to recover from our lengthy journey. Immediately, my friend pushed open the side of the metal monster, taking me out from under his arm and setting me down on the lush green grass. Wow, this new park was absolutely breathtaking; much, much nicer than my park! It was truly unbelievable, I must say!

This new park, like mine, also featured a pond; only its' pond was located directly in the center of the park and was much larger than my pond. The entire pond was chock-full of the most amazingly clean crystal clear water. I'd never seen such crystal clear water! Man was that water clean! The entire surface of the water had a massive reflection of the beautiful mountains off in the distance and the tall stately trees perched atop each hilly mound of lush green grass. Each tree was different, all of various shapes and colors, many even sporting fruit to eat on their branches and ground below. They reminded me of our plum tree behind the building where my friend lived. Man, it was truly a sight to behold! Standing there gazing at it all gave me chills.

The park itself was also much larger than my park, with hilly mound after hilly mound of luscious green grass sprawling out like an ocean for as far as the eye could see in all directions. I remember the grass being this remarkably green color which was so vivid it would literally captivate you. I can still see it as though it was yesterday, even after so many seasons have passed. Each blade of grass was like a painting—it was perfect! Still to this day, I can't get over how each blade of grass was so green. It was like nothing I'd ever seen! That luscious green grass was so pristine, I wasn't even sure if I should walk on it!

This was the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me! Why would someone be so nice to me? Did they take a good look at me? I don't deserve it. Placing me in this park is only going to ruin the painting, I thought to myself.

I remember being so happy, I began racing through the grass as quickly as my legs could carry me. I think that day was the fastest I'd ever run in my life! I even began to fly at one point, without even realizing it! There's no way this could be happening to me! Before I knew it, I was out on the pond. Oh my

goodness the water was so incredibly clean and refreshing! It was so crystal clear I could almost see to the bottom of the pond! And the food...the food...there was so much I couldn't even see it all! Off to the left, in the distance, was a fresh stream which was feeding the pond with beautiful crystal clear water. Oh wow, no wonder the water's so clean! Out in the center of the pond was a gigantic fountain which was spraying the crystal clear water high up into the air in all directions, making it seem as though it was raining in the middle of the pond. When you'd paddle over to the center of the pond, you actually felt as though it was raining every day of the season. Cool drops of crystal clear water showering down all over you on a hot summer day—how refreshing is that! Seagulls were everywhere; flying high in the sky, flying over the tree tops, circling around the gigantic fountain in the center of the pond. People and dogs were having the time of their lives, laughing and playing in all different parts of the park. There were even smaller miniature water fountains spread out all over the park which were spraying water up into the air and onto the grass, with dogs playing in some of them and even small people laughing and playing in others. It looked to me as though it might be the happiest place in the world! It was absolutely paradise!

Then, for a brief moment, in the midst of all my excitement, I remember pausing and thinking to myself; life's going to be all better now. I made it through all the hard times; now everything's finally going to be okay. No longer would I be starving with nothing to eat, I'd have plenty of food. Plus, I'd have my friend who'd be able to visit me all the time at my new pond. Life's going to be perfect now! I don't know how I was ever going to thank him!

Right then, I'm not sure what prompted me to glance back toward my friend, however when I looked back they had all stepped outside of the metal monster and were standing there on the grass alongside. I'd already run quite a distance to the pond, so it was rather difficult for me to see them clearly, however it looked as though they were all smiling with the biggest smiles I'd ever seen them display. Each member of his family looked so happy. It's as though they were happy for me; watching me so happy running and swimming in the lush green grass and crystal clear pond. It's almost as though they were happy, simply because I was happy. I remember thinking, there's no way someone could actually care about me—look at me. I quickly hopped out of the pond and began running back toward them, eager to thank my friend for doing such a wonder-

ful thing for me. As I drew closer, I noticed my friend's eyes had begun to well-up with water that was starting to drip its' way down his face. Why was he crying? I'm so happy, why was he so sad? My brain was too small to figure it out, it made no sense. He just did the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me, why's he so sad? He should be happy. I kept trying to figure it all out as I continued rushing toward them at full speed; it'd probably all make sense once I reached my friend. When I was almost half way back, they all began stepping back into the metal monster, except my friend, who remained standing there crying. Now, this is the part that remains etched in my brain and still hurts to this day; my friend lifted his hand up into the air and very slowly began waving good-bye to me. Why was he waving good-bye? He looked the saddest I'd ever seen him, as he stood there crying. It was as though his best friend had died and he knew he'd never see him again. And then—bang—it hit me so hard I actually stopped running and froze for an instant; I was the best friend he was never going to see again! Immediately, I began to fly as fast as I could with every ounce of energy left in me. That's when he also turned and stepped back into the metal monster and the metal monster began to slowly drive away. I don't know how but I flew like an eagle that day, almost catching up to the metal monster as it began to gain speed. I could still see my friend's face in the glass and his hand slowly waving good-bye as I belted out the loudest squawks I've ever made, hoping there was some chance he'd hear me. Maybe if he heard my squawks, he could instruct them to stop since they didn't realize they'd accidentally left without me. He wasn't able to hear me, though. I flew the hardest I've ever flown in my life that day! I didn't care if my wing broke off or I suffered a massive heart-attack and my heart exploded; I was going to catch that metal monster to stay with my friend! No matter how hard I tried though, I just couldn't keep up as that metal monster slowly inched away from me. Each passing moment the metal monster edged its' way further and further from my sight, until finally in the end it was only a faint black spec in the distance as I collapsed on the top of a grassy knoll at the edge of the park. I didn't know what to think. What did I do wrong? How would I find my friend? I don't even know where I am. How would I ever find my friend? How would I ever go on without my friend?

I stood there on the top of that grassy knoll with my heart racing and my body paralyzed. I couldn't move! It felt as though the weight of a large mountain had suddenly been dumped on top of my chest. What just happened! It

had to be a mistake! Did they know they'd forgotten me? They had to know, they were all crying. Will I ever see my friend again? There's no way he left me here, he cares about me. It has to be a mistake! He'll probably be returning in a few moments when they all finally realize I'm not with them. Yeah, that's it! That's got to be it! I didn't want to move even one inch, in case my friend returned at that very moment. I stood there paralyzed...minutes passed...hours passed...then the ball of fire in the sky began to creep its way behind the mountains off in the distance. I literally couldn't move; my feet didn't work, my wings didn't work, nothing worked! I'm going to remain right here until my friend returns for me, I thought to myself. I know he'll come back for me, he's my friend and he cares about me. I just know he'll come back for me, he's my best friend!

That night, standing there in the darkness, was the most alone I'd ever felt. One day passed...then two days passed...then three. I was so hungry! I didn't want to leave searching for food though, in case that was the exact moment he returned for me. I know he's coming back for me. He'll remember all the amazing times we had together and it will remind him to come back for me. Three days stretched into four...four into five. I know he'll be back for me, I kept telling myself. All those fun times playing fetch plum, all the fun times laughing and playing, the best adventure of our lives; I know he's coming back for me. I just know it! Five days stretched into six...six into seven. The days were beginning to blur together. If I don't leave to find food soon, I'm going to die. I really need to leave to find food. I'm not even hungry anymore, though. I don't even care about going on without my best friend. Maybe it'd be better to just sit here on this grassy knoll and starve to death; at least the pain will stop hurting in my heart. If I die right now though, I'll never see my friend again. I've got to get something to eat! What if he comes back while I'm gone, I'd never forgive myself? I got it—I know what I'll do! I'll pluck out some of my feathers and place them in a small pile on the top of the grassy knoll, that way when he returns for me he'll know I'm somewhere close. Right away, I yanked out nearly all the feathers on my small wing, placing them all in a neat little pile on top of the grassy knoll. As I stood back and stared at the pile of feathers; they just looked like a couple of leaves in a little pile. There's no way he's going to spot these, I thought to myself. I need to add more feathers if there's even going to be the slightest chance he notices the pile sitting there on top of the grassy knoll. I pulled out nearly half the feathers on my big wing, adding them to the pile also.

The pile was larger; it still just looked like a couple of paper wrappers crumpled up in a pile, though. I needed more feathers. If there was going to be a chance of him noticing, I needed more feathers. Beak-full after beak-full I added to the pile; just a few more feathers...just a few more feathers...just a few more. It was at that moment I realized, standing there staring at that little pile of feathers, my quill holes throbbing, feathers still clinched in my beak, my blood dotted skin clad wings making me look as though I'd been in a vicious brawl with an angry porcupine; he's really not coming back. He's never coming back. I think my heart already knew; it was my brain that hadn't caught up yet. He's not really coming back is he; my brain continued asking my heart, over and over again. It's as though my brain didn't understand the answer, or simply didn't want to believe the answer. Why was he not coming back? What did I do wrong? My brain was just too small to process the truth. Yet, I knew the truth—I'm going to miss my friend...I'm really, really going to miss my friend.

The next three weeks were some of the darkest days of my life. I really have no idea how I made it through. It felt as though someone very dear to me died and I was never going to see them again, yet they were still alive, continuing to live their lives. It felt like nothing I've ever felt, heartache so painful I thought I was going to physically die. It seemed as though every beautiful color in life had instantly been turned to black; the beautiful flowers now looked black to me, the beautiful trees now looked black to me, the beautiful grass now looked black to me, the sky looked black, even the magnificent ball of fire in the sky that I loved so dearly now seemed black to me—absolutely everything seemed black. Life seemed black. Eating wouldn't stop the pain, sleeping wouldn't stop the pain—absolutely nothing would stop the pain. How was I ever going to be able to make it through the rest of my life enduring all this agony and grief? Every moment begged a reason for existing. Time didn't matter anymore, sounds didn't matter anymore. My life had become so contingent on my friend being a part of it that it ceased to exist without my friend being in it. My friend made my life worth living. The smile that used to belong to me, lighting up my day and adding color to my world, would now belong to someone else, brightening their world. My friend who'd so immeasurably changed my life was no longer a part of my life. All the fun times we spent laughing and playing together were now going to be only memories in my head. Here I was smack-dab in the middle of paradise, yet I felt as though I was dead with my

eyes still awake, as though I was on the verge of dying without actually being able to die. You wish there was some way you could talk to your friend however that's no longer possible—you are never going to see them again.

When I was a small goose, my 10th brother died while flying south for the winter. My 10th brother was unquestionably my parent's favorite, they absolutely adored him. He was amazing! He'd done so many incredible things. On his voyages south for the winter, he'd fly to all different magnificent places, a different fascinating place every season. He'd fly over the highest mountain ranges, over the largest oceans and beautiful panoramic vistas stretching endlessly into the horizon. He'd tell all the geese incredible stories of adventure, recounting thrilling conquests and remarkable journeys of exploration. One year he actually flew over the highest mountain peak in the world with its' beautiful majestic snow covered top. He was my hero! He was incredibly strong with the most amazing wings; wings like an albatross with the grace of an eagle. There was nothing he couldn't do! Everyone liked him. I looked up to him like no one else in my life, wishing I could be him. We never talked though; I think I was an embarrassment to him. I'd have given anything if I could have only spent some time with him and talked with him.

When he died my parents were devastated. My mother was absolutely paralyzed for three full seasons! I think she was in utter shock. The pain was so deep; I believe her heart didn't even have the capacity to comprehend it. She couldn't even make a sound for those three seasons, as if she actually died along with my brother. I'd have done anything to eliminate her pain. I don't think I ever really comprehended the full magnitude of the sorrow and grief. We all died a little when he died. I know it's not the same, yet now I think I understand a little of what she must have been feeling at that time. What's confusing to me though was how I was experiencing some of the same pain, sorrow and heartache as in the death of someone who's close to you; yet the person is still alive. My small brain simply couldn't understand. I was never going to see my best friend again, only he wasn't dead, it's as though he was only dead to me. The only one who ever cared about me is now going to live only in my memory.

When someone special becomes a part of your life, it's as though a part of you dies when they're no longer a part of your life. I was living in a much better park now, though somehow I didn't feel happy anymore. My life was nothing before I met my friend, then it became something and now it's nothing once

again. I remember hating him for even knowing him. Why'd our paths have to cross in life? Why'd he have to be my friend? If I'd never met him, I'd have lived my normal lonely life and died not even aware of what I'd missed. Sure I'd have been lonely; at least I wouldn't have all this pain, though. How can someone make your life so good simply by knowing them and make your life so bad by no longer knowing them? It's your same life before knowing them and your same life after no longer knowing them, both are absent your friend. I'm still that same goose with the same life. It's the exact same life; everything should be exactly the same. My life's the same now as it was before meeting my friend, better in fact; so how come my life feels so much worse now absent my friend than it did before which was also absent my friend? How can life before my friend was in it and life after my friend was no longer in it feel so completely different, they're both absent my friend? How can life which doesn't include somebody you care about be so irreversibly altered by life which you share with someone you care about for a moment in time? How come life doesn't simply return to the way it was before your friend was in it; why must it now include all this pain? How come life is so much better simply when someone you care about is in it? My little brain simply lacked the capacity to understand, it just kept spinning in circles, all the while my heart in agonizing pain. So many thoughts passed through my brain. I remember thinking, it would have been better to have never loved someone than to have loved someone and never see them again. Only then, I'd remember all the fun times we had laughing and playing fetch the plum. If I'd never met him, I'd never know what it feels like to have a friend who cares about me. I can't hate him—he was my best friend! He was the only one who ever treated me like a normal goose; it was almost as though he was blind, somehow unable to see how truly hideous I looked. When he looked at me it was as though he was seeing a totally different goose that was completely normal. That was the only time in my life I ever felt as though someone actually cared whether I was dead or alive. He'd hug my neck, the worst thing about me, making me feel as though everything was all going to be better. That was the only time in my life I ever got to feel what it felt like to be hugged. I remember thinking he'd probably finally grown up and realized how truly repulsive I looked just as all the other geese already knew and decided to no longer come see me anymore. I remember trying to scrape off the hideous gobbler on my neck against one of the large trees next to the pond, almost bleeding

to death in the process. If only I looked normal, maybe he wouldn't have left me. If only I had a normal wing and could have fetched the plum faster, maybe he wouldn't have left me. I remember scouring down deep into the depths of my soul, searching for any answer that made the slightest sense in hopes it might ease some of the pain, nothing worked though.

Now that I'm much older and wiser, I realize that's simply what happens in life; people grow up and move on with their lives, building new lives that don't include you. I've grown to realize life isn't perfect, allowing you to be loved your entire life from start to finish, instead—if you're lucky enough to love and be loved—it lasts enough for your entire lifetime. I'm really going to miss my friend.

Many, many seasons came and went, with each passing season becoming easier than the last. Funny thing 'bout life; it doesn't sit around waiting for you or stop to feel sorry for you, it just keeps on going whether you like it or not. Each passing season, time would carve away at my hurting heart. The hurt would become more and more bearable. One-by-one time would erase a tiny morsel of pain, many times at the expense of a happy memory. I think we're all somehow designed that way—with time healing all wounds. I think it's the creators' way of helping us make it through life. If our hearts never let go of the pain, we could never survive. No matter how bad the hurt it always heals—time always erases the pain. One-by-one memories of those times fall away, with each passing day becoming easier to bear. It's funny how life works that way. The real secret to remember is allowing time to erase those painful memories, without allowing it to steal too many of the happy one's too. When time does somehow successfully make off with one of our cherished happy memories, we feel guilty, as though we've allowed the value of those wonderful times to diminish in our minds in some way—that's okay though—without it our lives would become so painful we wouldn't be able to continue.

Although, when you really stop and think, those painful memories are just as important to life as the happy memories. Without those painful memories, we'd really have no way to realize the true majesty of the happy memories. So, it's really both the happy and the painful memories together that make life worth living. If we traveled through life having only happy memories or traveled through life having only painful memories, would we actually be truly alive? Without both the highs and the lows, would any of life's experiences tru-

ly be memorable? Without both the highs and lows would life simply be the same, with every day virtually indistinguishable from the last? Would life lack excitement, emotion and passion? Would we end up being the same as a rock sitting in the park; it's neither happy nor sad, it's just a rock?

As we're traveling through this life we're building memories. The good memories and the painful memories together are what truly make us alive and feel life. When I reflect back on my life in both my parks, you know, I can't remember hardly a single normal day. The days I remember most are the really good days, also the really bad days too. Sometimes the painful memories are even more emotional and make me feel even more alive.

In the end, all we have left are our memories. If there was a way to erase all the painful memories in one full swoop, would you? I wouldn't, erasing all my painful memories would erase a majority of my life. Erasing all my painful memories would erase my friend, leaving me with living my entire life miserable, lonely and then dying. The trick is really to embrace them both, learning to live with those painful memories right alongside the happy memories.



Chapter 7 - I Forgive Him



I'm much older now and understand a great deal more about life. I've learned a lot on my journey, growing much wiser in my old age. It took me many, many seasons to finally realize; he didn't leave me at that park that day because he didn't love and care about me, quite the opposite, he left me there that day because he truly did love and care about me. As people grow up, exiting their childhood lives, it's impossible for a childhood pet to come along. If he could have taken me with him, he would have taken me with him; that's simply not how it works, though. Now I realize, leaving me there that day hurt him as much as it hurt me. He brought me to that park that day to give me a better life. He did that because he cares about me, not because he doesn't care about me; I can see that now. Do I miss him? Do I miss all the good times we shared? Of course, however it sure does help a great deal knowing he actually cared. If I had the chance to squawk at him again, the one thing I'd want to tell him—I truly forgive him for growing up and leaving me. What he gave me is the most valuable thing in the world—love. None of the other geese will ever know what it feels like to love and be loved. I'm going to die now with the happy memories of those good times playing in my head. I can actually say I had a friend. Given the chance, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd do it all over again, every last bit—pain and all.

I often wonder what he's doing now; if he's still alive; if he has a family of his own; if he has another best friend. If he saw me again, I wonder if he'd recognize me. I wonder if he'd run up and hug my neck like the day we first met. I wonder if the rigors of people life have worn away his compassion. I wonder if part of growing up in a people world requires leaving behind kindness and care along with the other childhood things. I wonder if he ever thinks about me and the enormous impact he made on my life. If he has a family, I wish I could see his kids and meet his wife. I hope he passes on to his kids, the same com-

passion he possesses. I hope he teaches them to have the same sympathy and kindness he showed me. I hope he still believes in love. He showed me what love really means, I hope he instills the same in them. If I ever had the chance to meet his family, I'd tell them what a tremendous difference it made in my life that are paths crossed. I'd tell them how much I appreciated him bringing me to that park that day, giving me a better life. I've been able to live my entire life in this beautiful park, an absolute paradise. I couldn't have asked for a better life. Wherever he is right now, I hope he's happy. I hope he knows I love him. My entire life, the only thing I ever wanted was someone to love me—now I know the real happiness is not in being loved, but the joy in loving someone else.



WAIT—WAIT—I'VE GOT to stop telling you my story. I'm really sorry, but I haven't been completely honest with you. I may be a wee bit guilty of understating the reason I'm sharing my story with you.

My current situation is much more serious than I originally led you to believe. Presently, I'm tangled in some fishing line that's managed to completely wrap itself around one of the massive supporting posts of an enormous pier. The supporting post's only a short distance from the white sandy shore, yet unfortunately, still far enough to go completely unnoticed buried amongst all the noise and hubbub of the people yelling, laughing, and having a good time, and the sounds of the raucous seagull's celebrating their latest catch echoing through the breezy ocean air. I've been trapped here for hours now, anchored to this post, frantically attempting to gnaw myself free while telling you my story. The line's just too strong. I've flapped my wings every way imaginable, the lines simply won't break. As evidence of my vicious struggles, I've now got deep scores carved up and down the edges of my wings from the sharp line cutting through my feathers. My wings are beginning to resemble the design on a tie-dye tee-shirt, only the design's entirely red on account of the fact it's blood. I'm a mess! If only my wing was a little larger maybe then could I free myself—oh well—you don't get to choose what you get in life. I don't want to depress you or make you feel sorry for me, it's only the water will be rising soon for high tide, and I know enough about tides to know in a short while from now the tide will

probably force the water above my head since I'm anchored here to this post. I'll be gone forever. No one will even know.

Having exhausted nearly every last bit of energy remaining in my body attempting to unleash myself from these shackles, I'd finally resolved myself to the fact this was going to be my end. The water continued to rise, each passing moment climbing its' way up my body; first reaching the bottom of my wings, then slowly creeping over my wings, slowly covering my back, then finally beginning to inch its' way slowly up my neck. I wish my friend was here I thought to myself as I floated there virtually comatose, thinking about my life. I really wish my friend was here.

Then, just as the water began to make its' way across my beak, I began to hear the frantic splashing and commotion of a small person quickly running through the water and swimming toward me echoing from the direction of the sandy shore. By now my eyes had become rather blurry, fading in and out of clarity, making it nearly impossible for me to see what was happening. When he got to me, he began to ferociously and violently rip and tear the fishing line as though he was some sort of wild beast in an acute state of emergency, snapping and breaking the twisted loops of line as if they were only frail delicate spider webs. Grabbing my lifeless body in one arm, he quickly began swimming toward the sandy shore using his other arm. As he laid my limp body down on the sand, he was only a faint blurry outline as my eyes fought to barely stay open for their last time. For a split second, I caught a glimpse of his face—his eyes—they looked so familiar. They reminded me of my friend's eyes, filled with that same kindness and compassion. In that last fleeting moment as my head fell over softly on its' side in the billowy white sand, I noticed close in the distance behind the small person was the faint image of a big person rushing toward us who looked just as my friend might have looked after many seasons had indubitably left their mark on his face. As he reached the two of us, kneeling down beside me with an expression of both shock and astonishment on his face that slowly began morphing into sympathy and compassion, he blurted loudly—"Henry...I knew you'd make it!" His eyes resonated with the same unforgettable compassion and kindness—it was my friend! I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt—it was indeed my friend!

What those several loud sounds meant I haven't a clue, yet no longer did it matter for as my eyes slowly closed for their last time etching a dazzling image

of my friend and his son on the surface of my mind's eye that would remain there for all eternity, happiness began to well up and overflow my heart, for now my friend would know forevermore—I did it—I made it to the beautiful blue ocean and caught a fish...



THE END



"God chose to include calamity in His grand design, to afford us opportunity for greatness." —A. Vültznick

