

Finding Angel

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By Burt Prelutsky

LOS ANGELES, Calif.—I wrote this article seven years ago. As I didn't have subscribers in those days and only had a website, the chances are you didn't read it at the time.

But as I often refer to my dog, I thought you might find our story interesting. Even after all this time, I confess I still find the kismet aspects that had to align themselves in order to bring my dog and me together rather astonishing.

No more dogs

Our tale begins in June of 2012. Yvonne and I had just had our second dog, Duke, put to sleep a few months earlier. He had been a Maltese, just like our earlier Sammy.

Because each time it had somehow been decided that I would be the one to take our dog to the vet for the fatal injection, I decided I had to put my foot down. No more dogs, I told my wife. There was just too much grief involved in losing them. But that's an easier vow to make than to keep if you love dogs.

The search began

So Yvonne and I had begun to talk about what kind of dog to get in the unlikely event that I ever changed my mind. As usual, she said it would have to be small and white just like the other two. I insisted that it would have to be female.

Understand, I have nothing against male dogs, although I still get the willies when I recall taking Sammy, our first dog, to the vet to be neutered. The operation is bad enough, but the real shock was having the vet summon us from the waiting room by attaching our last name to the dog's first name.

You see, Sam had been my father's name, and there was something definitely unnerving about having "Sam Prelutsky" summoned to be neutered. It was like something out of a Greek tragedy or a French farce.

Desired female traits

In any case, the reason that I indicated a preference for a female dog was because both Sammy and Duke seemed to have a streak of cat in their make-up. It wasn't that they'd hiss or scratch or hide under the sofa. They just struck me as slightly aloof.

Duke, in particular, had a way of ignoring you if you came home after several hours away, as if to let you know that if you could get along without him he was only too happy to return the favor. He would actually turn his back on me.

Admittedly, I had no way of knowing if this was a trait common to all Maltese dogs, but I had a hunch that a female would be more understanding of my real or imagined failings and more affectionate.

But, as I say, I had made up my mind that I would never again put myself in a position where I would have to put a dog out of its misery, no matter how painlessly I knew it could be done. Painless, that is, for the dog, but not nearly so painless for me.

Man plans, God laughs

Once again, man plans and God laughs. One day my wife and I were leaving the house, and a woman I didn't recognize was across the street attaching a flyer to a telephone pole. As we made our way to my car, she crossed quickly and headed us off. I looked around for something I could use as a weapon. This is, after all, Los Angeles.

"Have you lost a white dog?" she asked.

"We did," I replied, "but I suspect not in the way you mean."

She explained that she'd found a dog wandering around without a collar. She'd been putting up notices all over the neighborhood and checking with the pound, but no luck. She said it was a friendly dog, but she worked full time and would feel guilty keeping it locked up all day.

My wife asked her what the dog looked like. It was small and white.

I asked its gender. It was female.

Yvonne and I looked at each other. I suggested we follow the woman home and check out the animal. She lived about eight blocks away, proving she really had gone all out to find the dog's owner.

Needless to say, we took the dog home with us.

Relieved she found a good home

When my wife asked what we should name her, I never even hesitated: "Angel. What else?" It's probably worth mentioning that I was writing the script for "Angels on Tap" at the time.

One day, about six months later, while I was walking Angel, a neighbor from up the block came rushing outside and asked me if this had been a lost dog. I acknowledged she had been and wondered what had prompted the question, fearing it was her dog and she wanted her back.

"Well, just about every weekend, my husband and I go out on our boat. This one Saturday morning, when we came outside, I saw a little dog walking up the middle of the street. After giving her some water, I told my husband he

should go out on the boat himself because I wanted to keep the dog. He insisted I go with him. He said if the dog was still around when we got home Sunday night, I could keep her. Naturally, by the time we got back, she was nowhere to be found. I'm just so relieved to see she's found a good home."

I was also relieved. I was afraid I was going to have to lie and say we had found Angel, sure, but on the other side of the hill. No way this could possibly be her dog.

Viewed as a miracle

Now, normally, I'm not what you'd call a religious guy.

But when you realize the odds of Angel, a small, white, female dog, winding up with us—considering the fact that the woman who found her worked full time and couldn't keep her; the fact that this other woman had to go boating; the fact that we came out of our house at the exact moment that the first woman was standing where she could spot us; even the fact that little Angel had somehow been able to survive for some length of time on the street—it's difficult not to see our coming together as anything less than a small, but actual, miracle.

Old habits die hard

The only drawback is that Angel clearly spent so much time fending for herself that, on our walks, she insists on grazing on grass, leaves, twigs and just about any other plant life she comes across. Old habits clearly die hard.

No matter how often I tell her those bad days are over and she'll never have to scavenge again, I don't think she entirely believes me. I suspect she heard a rumor that I had once in a weak moment sworn off dogs.

Or possibly, like people who lived through the Great Depression, she can't shake the fear that more bad days are always lurking just around the corner.

Second greatest dog

Angel has now been with us close to a year, and I think it's safe to say that she is the second greatest dog in the world.

Second only to your own, of course.