

Do You Need a Surprise Blessing From God Right Now?

A few years ago, we lost the fifth member of our family when Rusty the guinea pig moved to heaven.

Rusty lived with us for over four years and was a great source of amusement and fun until he took sick a few days before his death. Rusty had come to us at a very important time, and his departure left a sad feeling in our house.

His arrival was quite eventful on many levels. Let me explain.

When our youngest son, Tyler, was just 4 years old, he reached down to pet a supposedly friendly dog and was rewarded with a bite to the face. Today, if you look closely between his eye and the top of his chubby cheek, you can still see a fang scar, courtesy of that dumb cur. Understandably, a fear of animals, especially of dogs, gripped Tyler at that moment and remained for many years.

Things started slowly changing six years later, when we spent four days with some Michigan friends who were involved in the training of a therapy emotional support dog. When we got to their house, 10-year-old Tyler was a bit nervous and tentative, but the sweet golden retriever lumbered out and right then, decided Tyler would be his buddy. By the time we left, they looked like Timmy and Lassie, but Tyler's caution had not completely lifted.

Eleven months later, our lives were rocked by that stupid Katrina storm and we evacuated to other friends in Memphis. They were wonderful folks, but why did they have to have a dog? Still, during our eight-day stay, Tyler made a new canine friend, and the ice was continuing to break.

For 10 weeks after the storm, Linda and the boys ended up

living in San Antonio, and when they finally moved back—like most families with the loss of school, friends and a “normal” life—our lives were upside down. When they returned, Tyler’s spirits were especially low. In a time when we needed some joy, a miracle happened just across the street. Love was in the air.

Turns out Tyler’s buddy, Kyle, announced that they had apparently not kept their two guinea pigs as separate as they intended to, and they now had a crowded cage.

After perusing the new residents, Tyler took a quick fancy to the most unusual-looking one in the group. He didn’t have the typical rodent look. Instead, he had shocks of long, wild hair in every direction. A quick Google told us that he was a Peruvian, long-haired guinea pig. After seeing all the big hair, Linda, who is known for loving some big hair herself, laughingly said it was “a sign from God,” and Rusty moved in.

Rusty had a kind nature and, in moments, he won our hearts and helped finish off that animal- fear thing.

The clump of walking hair always elicited a smile or a “What is that?” from visitors. Lying on the floor, he looked like a bad hairpiece or a cross between Art Garfunkel and Cousin It.

As with most house pets, the promised care of said animal belongs to the kid but gradually ends up in the mom’s lap. Our house was no exception, and Linda spoiled him big-time. No dull, boring pig pellets for this guy, as he soon developed a taste for boxed organic lettuce, with sliced apple and carrot treats to jazz up his buffet. Then there was the hair care. It had to be cut on a regular basis, followed by a good combing. Life was good.

Soon, in an attempt to get more snacks as Linda walked by, Rusty would do a whistle that sounded like a “fingers to the mouth” wolf-whistle. His early-morning attention ritual, kicking his dish around his cage, was designed to get

breakfast going as soon as possible.

Rusty provided sure comedic relief, but one day, we noticed something was not right. He had been sick about seven months before and had recovered well, but now, he just wasn't springing back.

After finding a veterinarian who treated exotic pets, we got the news that he was in rough shape. Two or three things were going wrong at once. We just didn't need this right now.

Knowing Tyler's concern, we all tried our best to help Rusty get better. Twice each day, we held him and gave him two different medicines with an eyedropper. We all got involved. It wasn't unusual to see Geoffrey, Tyler's six-foot brother, sprawled on the floor feeding Rusty a treat or scratching up under his chin. But still, the guinea pig's response was not normal.

For those last few nights, Linda sat him on her lap, loved on him and hand-fed him. He snuggled a bit, but the whistle was gone. After four days in the hospital and a surgery to save his life, Rusty faded away.

The next afternoon, we went to the animal hospital to pick up the small white box with "Rusty Green" written on the top and headed home. We dug a small hole in the corner of the backyard, and at dusk, we walked to the spot. Tyler carried out the box and, together, we carefully laid it down. We stopped and thanked God for the joy Rusty had brought to our house, and then we covered up the hole.

Why am I telling you all this? Just because. And because there is a real story here.

To the more spiritual ones out there in TV-land, the Word is clear: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17a). The same God who concerns Himself with all the business of the

universe, right down to the adornment of the flowers, seems to have a soft spot for a kid's pet.

Yeah, even a long-haired guinea pig who helped transform a frightened boy into a confident young man, who now shows joy and affection for all kinds of animals, was a God-gift.

Over the next few days, all four of us caught ourselves looking at the spot in the backyard. And we all knew one thing: A very real fear was finally broken because of our special furry friend.

Just know this: God can use even the simplest of things to burst through that which seems so scary and complicated. Even in our darkest, most fearful time, we can receive a surprise blessing from an unexpected source that will bring life, joy and blessing. God is good, and He loves to work that way.

Just keep looking; you'll find the blessing. It may be just across the street. {eoa}

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