



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

An Interview with Author M.R. Wells

M.R. Wells, co-author of ***Great Dog Stories: Inspiration and Humor from Our Canine Companions*** (Harvest House, 2012) and several other books of inspirational pet stories, talks with The HSUS about the connection between animals, God and our life experiences.

Great Dog Stories: Inspiration and Humor from Our Canine Companions is your newest book. This (seventh) book of inspirational pet stories has a slightly different twist than your previous books. Can you explain?

In our other books, we built each entry around a format that involved a dog story, a human illustration and a biblical tie-in that all focused around a very specific theme. That theme was usually flagged in the story's sub-title. For example, we have a story in our latest book entitled "The Dog Who Wouldn't Fight." The subtitle is "Choose Love." Each of the elements of this story builds on that theme.

But in this book, we haven't always included a separate human illustration. Some of the entries are longer dog stories that just naturally have a human element woven into them. But each story still has a biblical tie-in and other elements from our previous titles, such as thought questions at the end to help readers think about how the story's central theme might apply to them personally.

What inspired you to tell these stories? When did you start writing about animals and faith?

Actually my "a-ha moment" involved a very special little Sheltie mix named Morgan. He was a rescue I adopted as a two-year-old. I had some training issues with him around bathroom habits, and I was told it would help to crate him when I couldn't keep an eye on him.

Christmas Day I was going visiting for several hours, so I left him in a crate while I was away. All was well when I returned. I let him and my other dog, Biscuit, out to do their

business. After they came in I ran upstairs to change clothes. In that short amount of time, Morgan messed in the house one more time. I knew I loved my dog dearly. I knew I would never part with him. But I needed to vent.

I put him back out in my fenced and gated yard and told him to go live somewhere else. Of course, three minutes later, I was out there calling him. When he came, I scooped him into my arms, sat on an outdoor step, and wept into his fur. I told him how much I loved him. I told him no matter what he did, no matter how many times he messed, he would always be my dog.

And when I thought about this I realized—what a picture of my relationship with God! Through faith in Jesus’ death for my sins, God has adopted me into His family. But I still keep messing in the wrong place. And He would have every right to put me out and tell me to go live someplace else. But He loves me too much for that, so figuratively speaking, He does what I did with Morgan that Christmas night. He gathers me into His lap, weeps over me, and forgives me.

After the first book, did you immediately get a sense that the second book was going to happen? There were more stories to tell?

Our agent thought right from the beginning that this concept could be a series of books. We weren’t sure—it depended on how the first book did. Also, since the first book was about dogs, I had toyed with the idea of doing a devotional for cat lovers too.

My best friend Dottie Adams is a Teaching Director with a ministry called Community Bible Study, which has Bible study classes all over the country and abroad. We are in the same local class in Los Angeles. She adores cats and frequently uses her own cats as illustrations in her teaching lectures. She was my “go-to” person on the first book when I had questions about biblical material. At one point she half-jokingly said, “If you do a cat book I want in.”

A few months after our first book came out, Dottie shared an amazing illustration about her cat Midnight as part of a lecture on the Book of Acts. It involved Midnight being dive-bombed by a pair of blue jays. Midnight loved to go outside, but those birds scared her so badly, she did not want to leave the house. Imagine Dottie’s shock when one day, she saw Midnight sitting bold as brass by a window with the blue jays diving toward her from outside. That cat was totally unafraid—because she realized there was a pane of glass between her and those birds.

Dottie tied that in to the Apostle Paul being unafraid when he and those with him were facing shipwreck, because the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he must be Christ’s witness in Rome, and they would all survive. The Holy Spirit was his “pane of glass”—and could be ours when the fears and frustrations of this world “dive-bombed” us.

Have you always seen God in animals?

I didn't really come to know God in a personal way until I was 19 years old. I had been searching for a long time, and it was a long journey, but it all came to a head in my junior year of college. I came to faith in Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, and my Savior. As I grew and matured in my faith, I got exposed to how things in nature illustrate spiritual truths.

I began to realize that God has placed illustrations of His truths throughout His creation, if we have eyes and ears to see and hear and connect those dots. These books are an extension of that—a realization that things our pets do, and ways they interact with us, are living parables God gives us to deepen our faith and our relationship with Him.

Are there particular stories that stand out for you?

I have a story in the gift book edition of ***Purr-ables from Heaven: Devotions for Cat Lovers*** that has been one of my life lessons and faith journeys. It is called "A Cat in Doll's Clothing." The subtitle is "Be Who God Made You." Fluffy, the cat in the story, was a beautiful gray and white kitty I had as a child in New York. My mom loved photos of cats dressed up in clothing, and one day I decided to put a doll's dress on Fluffy. It was not a good fit. It hog-tied that cat.

In the story I only half-jokingly observed that if Fluffy were capable of human speech, she probably would have told me, "Silly human, what were you thinking? I'm not some two-dimensional greeting card or postcard kitty. I'm a real cat. And real cats don't wear puffed sleeves!" Fortunately for both of us, I freed poor Fluffy from that dress after just a few minutes and never did that to her again.

Thinking back on that experience, I realized it was an amazing picture of a deeper truth. I've often envied other people's talents or personalities and tried to be like them. But it hog-tied me, just like that dress did Fluffy. It was a bad fit—and I was not embracing and developing the person God made me to be. We humans tend to compare ourselves with others and feel that if only we were more like someone else, we would be better loved, more successful, or have more of what we want in life.

It is a process, over many years, to really understand that God made each of us a unique creation for His perfect purposes and it is far better to be a one-of-a-kind "designer" creation of His than a second-best copy of someone else. The image of Fluffy stuffed into that dress was a wonderful visual of that truth, a truth I will continue to learn more deeply as long as I am on the planet.

A special story from ***Great Dog Stories*** is "The Dog Who Wouldn't Fight." It is about my friend Sue's female pit bull, Champagne. Years ago, when Champ was a puppy, she showed up on Sue's porch one night. Sue saw that she was a pit bull and that she was

emaciated. But as she carefully drew nearer, the puppy smiled and wagged its tail, then climbed on her lap, smothered her with kisses and wrapped its paws lovingly around her neck.

She thought the dog might be lost and planned to inquire in the morning, but later that evening a teenager showed up looking for a missing puppy. The description fit perfectly and Sue returned the dog. She thought that was the end of the story, and was stunned to find the same puppy back on her porch the following evening. The pup looked “hang-dog,” as if it had done something wrong and expected to be beaten. Sue sensed something wasn’t right and called animal control. After asking her address, they told her there had been reports of people in a nearby house raising pit bulls to fight. Arrests were made and Sue was allowed to keep the dog, who has been one of the sweetest canines Sue has ever known.

In the book, I paired that dog story with the story of friends of mine who lost their seven-year-old son to gang violence. Evan, his baby brother, Alec, and their mother, Rhonda, were at a park where the seven-year-old played sports. Rhonda was about to drive off with the boys when gunfire erupted around their car. The older child was fatally shot, and his ten-month-old brother suffered loss of vision from metal fragments that penetrated his eye. Their parents knew Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord and knew that God was calling them to forgiveness and reconciliation.

They chose love, forgave those involved in their son’s death, and formed the nonprofit Evan Leigh Foster Foundation. Its mission is to reach out to gang members with the message of God’s love and redemption in hopes that by bringing gang members to faith in the God who can heal and transform them, other children’s lives will be spared.

What do you hope readers take away from the books?

I believe God puts illustrations all around us to show us His love and reveal more about Himself. My prayer is that readers will start looking for the parables God puts in their own lives. It might not come through a dog or cat. God might use a parrot or a turtle or a horse. He will use whatever is around us to speak to our hearts and reveal His truths...but we must be alert to Him and what He is saying.

I also hope that the “slice of life” parables in our own stories and their spiritual applications will minister to the hearts of our readers. With three co-authors for each book and material gathered from many more dog and cat lovers, we cover a lot of life situations. Our prayer is that God will use our books to speak to our readers’ hearts in ways unique to each of them, and that they will find comfort and hope and healing and grow closer to the Lord as well.

What is next for you?

I am working on a new book, and this time I am writing it alone. It's about how dogs have rescued their humans—and also other animals. This is actually a metaphor for how God rescues us. I am exploring various aspects of rescue—some of them a bit unexpected. I am looking at emotional as well as physical rescue.

I am looking at situations that might be “rescue” in a sense we don't always think of as rescue. I've got some great stories—but I am looking for more. So if any of you reading this have a wonderful “dog to the rescue” story, I'd love to hear from you. You can email me through our books' website, where you can also see a full selection of our titles and peek inside each book to sample a story.

Our web address is www.fourpawsfromheaven.com and my email is mrwells@fourpawsfromheaven.com. I look forward to hearing from any of you who'd like to share.

About the author: M.R. (Marion) Wells has written extensively for children's television and video programming, including several Disney shows, the animated PBS series Adventures from The Book of Virtues, and the action video series Bibleman. She lives in Los Angeles with three dogs (Biscuit, Becca, and Munchie), and two cats (Muffin and Bo).

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