

# *Touched by the Wings of Angels*

Written by Laurie J. Rollins ~ September 2014



*“I am amazed how my three poodles manage to touch the lives and hearts of so many people simply by being themselves.”*

# *TOUCHED BY THE WINGS OF ANGELS*

Written by Laurie J. Rollins ~ September 2014

Sunday, September 7th, 2014, was a lovely, late-in-summer day with a cool breeze and plenty of sunshine. My husband Jim and I and our three standard poodles, who I affectionately refer to as my “Mates,” due to the ease within which it rolls off my tongue, were heading up to Boston for the annual MSPCA Angell Walk for Animals. It was an event we have enjoyed attending for the last five years or so, weather permitting, of course. And on this particular day, the weather was simply grand.

Standard poodles are a naturally beautiful breed, but whenever we go anyplace with our standard poodles, Gertrude Tynan, Gretel Donegal and Ghillie MacCready, I see to it they are coiffed to the hilt, then I add a lot of my own creative touches to make them “sizzle.” For this particular outing, they were sporting three handmade feather bouquets in each ear with a splash of hair tinsel and glitter ribbon. Their back ends, not to be outdone by their front ends, were decorated with my own creation, “Booty Bling,” which is nothing more than creatively arranged colorful crystals placed in a decorative fashion at the base of their spines.

I equate walking with my poodles to what it must be like to walk amongst a crowd as a celebrity because we can't take more than a few steps that we are not stopped by a flood of people asking questions, requesting permission to take photos, inquiring as to our poodles' names, ages. . . the requests are endless and come at us like bullets out the barrel of an M60 machine gun.

I am extremely proud of my poodles. They are highly intelligent, and although they possess a natural beauty, it takes a lot of effort on my part to keep them that way. Any attention bestowed upon them is a direct reflection of my efforts to maintain them to the highest standards of the breed. There are times when the attention they command can be overwhelming, but as long as people show kindness and consideration, we don't mind taking the time to meet them, listen to their stories, answer their questions and educate them about the breed. However, my best advice is if you want to slip through life unnoticed, don't get a standard poodle.

We arrived in Boston and made remarkably good time getting there. It helped that it was mid-morning on a Sunday. The Walk for Animals does not commence until noon, but we always arrive early so my Mates can walk around the Common and take care of “business” before heading over to the festivities.

Upon our arrival at our destination, despite the fact we were in the dark, dank and stale-air-filled parking garage deep in the belly of the city, our Mates were thrilled to be – oh, heck, they didn't

know where they were. All they knew was they were happy and today was going to be filled with new sights, sounds and adventures.

As we walked out of the parking garage into the light of day and headed towards the Common, Jim and I joked about how far we would get before someone stopped us for the first time. Our Mates were keyed up upon arrival. Having spent a good 40 minutes in the back seat of our sedan, they were ready to make the city their own. They were full of life and anxious, eyes wide and tails wagging. Their long ears with their colorful feather bouquets were blowing in the gentle breeze as it wound its way throughout the bustling city streets.

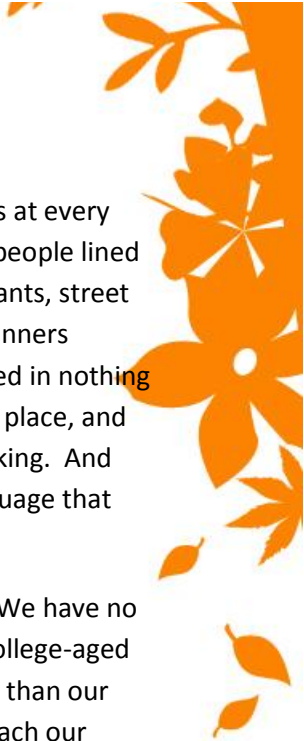
Boston is typical of any city, hectic with many distractions. I'm amazed at how well our Mates deal with the chaos of city life considering they live in the quiet calm of a log home deep in the woods of a small town.

The Common is probably no more than maybe three blocks away from where we park at Lafayette Place. On this particular day, we made our way to the park rather quickly. People were leaning out their car windows taking photos as they drove by, people were pointing at us from restaurant tables, and I can't tell you how many people we surprised when we appeared from around a corner. However, we were spared photo requests alongside the busy streets, which was a blessing. It was not until we set foot in the Common that we had our first request for photos from a young girl doing yoga. We were more than happy to oblige, and it was a scenario that would play out countless times throughout the rest of our day in the big city.

When we arrived at the site of the Walk for Animals, we strolled around and took in the view. After a time, we looked for a comfortable place in the shade where we could wait for the walk to begin as we watched the various dog breeds pass by. There are so many breeds in attendance at the Walk for Animals, and some are dressed in costume for the occasion. There are things to purchase, contests to enter and exhibitions to see.

The walk started promptly at 12:00. Jim and I and my Mates fell into the rear. Past experiences tell us that is the best and safest place to be. The walk is short, one time around the Common, which is about a mile. It's not a race. Everybody saunters at their own pace. The city continues to hustle and bustle around us, but our stride remains steady, a pleasant walk for a good cause on a beautiful day with our Mates.

At the conclusion of the walk, Jim and I found some shade where we enjoyed a water break. Once rested and refreshed, we made our way across the park grounds and onto Tremont Street. We were ready to venture out into the big city, as was our tradition, and make our way over to Faneuil Hall Marketplace.



It's a nice walk, probably not more than a mile or so, but it's a city walk. There are lights at every corner, pedestrians like ants at a picnic, ambulances, fire trucks, police cars. There are people lined up on the sidewalks waiting to catch a glimpse of some piece of history. There are vagrants, street performers, irate taxi cab drivers, and never-ending construction projects. There are banners everywhere, music that comes from who knows where, and an occasional person donned in nothing but underwear. I'm taking writer's liberties with the "underwear," but it is a happening place, and my Mates remained calm in the chaotic surroundings. I wondered what they were thinking. And yes, I do believe dogs "think." I could tell by their facial expressions and their body language that they were having fun. Their heartbeats were in sync with that of the city.


The closer we got to Faneuil Hall Marketplace, the louder the music got. What music? We have no idea, but it was extremely loud. Apparently, there was a concert nearby. There were college-aged kids everywhere and cops at every corner. We decided to take a slightly different route than our usual simply to avoid the unknown. This just meant it would take us a little longer to reach our destination. At this point, we probably had a good four or five miles under our belts, so why not another mile or two?

Faneuil Hall Marketplace was in sight. We had left the loud music behind us, and with the exception of some softer music played by street performers; the marketplace was alive with all its usual sights and sounds. People were shopping, walking, eating and watching the entertainment as the fragrance of various foods titillated our taste buds. There was the familiar scent of hot dogs, linguica, sausage, fried dough, hot pretzels and popcorn. It was around 2:00, and we had "walked up" quite the appetite. Fortunately, we had come to the right place.

For those who have never visited Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston, it is circular in shape. There is a building in the middle that is long and narrow. Inside is a food lover's paradise, and that includes to-die-for desserts and all kinds of fancy drinks. The buildings that make up the outer circle contain shops that sell all kinds of things, mostly catering to the tourist trade. The walkway that runs between the buildings is quite wide, the majority of it being crafted from cobblestones, which can make walking quite the challenge. My Mates remained surefooted and unfazed by the nostalgic surface. Jim and I, on the other hand, plodded along as if we'd had one drink too many and cursed "those damned cobblestones" with every wobbly step.

The slower our pace, the larger the crowd we'd attract, so despite the treacherous cobblestones, we stepped up our pace as we continued our search for a place to sit down so we could take advantage of this food lover's paradise.

There are concrete circles upon which to sit as well as concrete and wooden benches throughout the marketplace. The concrete blocks and circles are our preference as my Mates like to sit with us and the concrete surfaces provide a much larger space for them to do just that. The benches are less accommodating to my four-footed Mates. However, we spied a bench under a tree that offered shade, so we grabbed it. The marketplace was abuzz, we were hungry, and our choices were



limited. We were not sitting but a few moments, just long enough for me to remove my backpack, when people started to gather, questions began and the requests for photos started pouring in.

After about ten minutes of accommodating the crowd, I asked Jim if he would be comfortable if I left him so I could go get our lunch. All Jim had to do was sit with my Mates and field the questions and requests, but I just wanted to be certain he was okay with the responsibility. He assured me he was fine, and off I went.


When I walked away and left my Mates in Jim's care, I knew they would remain focused in the direction to which I departed. My absence would offer the perfect opportunity for people to take photos. My Gertrude, Gretel and Ghillie would sit like statues as they waited, eager to catch a glimpse of me upon my return.

When I returned with our lunch, you'd be of the impression I'd been gone a year by their reactions. Their tails wagged nonstop, as I juggled our lunch and a couple of drinks. A crowd had formed, so I had to make my way through them and simultaneously keep from dropping our Thai food on my Mates' heads. Although awkward, we were having fun, and it was all part of a day in the city with three standard poodles.

Lunch was a blur. I remember eating, but mostly I remember fielding questions, telling Gretel I did not think orange chicken was good for poodles and tapping Ghillie on his backside as he remained in pursuit of a half-eaten fried shrimp, despite my numerous requests to "leave it alone," while it taunted him from beneath the bench upon which we sat.

We never visit Faneuil Hall Marketplace that we don't indulge in some delicious dessert, but that indulgence comes after we walk off our lunch on Boston's Long Wharf. As Jim and I stood up and stretched, cramped from our less-than-comfortable bench seat, my Mates danced at our feet knowing full well we were on the move again. Jim assisted me with my backpack as we discussed who would walk which poodle. We grabbed the appropriate leashes, tossed our trash in the bin and headed towards Long Wharf.

Now, Long Wharf is maybe a five-minute walk from where we were seated at the marketplace. Factor into that three standard poodles with celebrity appeal that would rival Brad Pitt, and about a half hour to 40 minutes later, we arrived at our destination. The sun was warm, the sky cloudless and an exquisite shade of blue. The harbor was full of activity. We perused the multi-million-dollar yachts and wondered where they had been; where they were going; and who did they belong to? Across the harbor we could see Logan Airport, and we admired the skills of the pilots as they brought their planes in on final approach. Many people seemed as lost in thought as we were, enjoying the warmth of the sunshine, the gentle breeze, and the activities of the boats and planes, so we were able to maneuver around the wharf without interruption, which was a welcome change of pace.



Eventually, it was time to mosey back to the chaos of the marketplace where we intended to indulge in some dessert. It had been a good hour since lunch, and we knew it would take us at least a half hour to make our way back, so we strolled in the direction from whence we'd come. That five-minute walk, which we figured would take a good half hour, ended up taking about 45 minutes. We encountered a young couple accompanied by their three children and their in-laws. They originated from England, and then moved to Israel. Boston would be their home for the next year. They were pleasant and enjoyed chatting with us and spending time with my Mates. We, in return, enjoyed hearing their stories about England and Israel and how much they loved the Boston area. We shared with them suggestions of places they should visit during their year's stay in New England. They posed for photos with my Mates; we bid each other adieu and eventually made our way back to the marketplace.

We were in luck as Jim spotted a stone bench that was vacant. I was happy about that as I did not think my derriere could endure another session on a wooden-slat bench. Jim no sooner sat down when he was joined by Gertrude and Gretel while Ghillie stood with his back facing us wagging his tail as he greeted all the passersby.

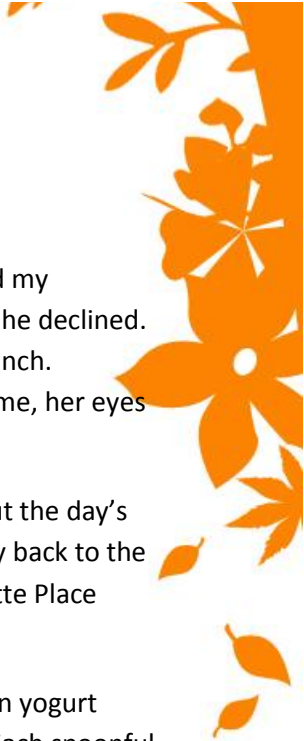
Our seat of choice was located right alongside a restaurant with patio seating, and the outdoor area was packed with patrons, all of whose eyes were upon us. As I struggled to remove my knapsack, I asked Jim what delectable dessert he had a hankering for. Never one to venture from the norm, Jim replied, "An oatmeal raisin cookie would be nice." I wrinkled my nose and gave him that "yuck" expression I'm known for whenever anyone mentions raisins. Jim asked me what I was going to have to which I could not respond because the selections were simply endless; however, I assured him it would not be an oatmeal raisin cookie.

Once I was certain Jim was settled, I gave him a quick kiss, grabbed my wallet, barked "Behave yourselves," in the direction of my Mates and headed back into the marketplace. Before being swallowed up by the crowd, I cast a glance over my shoulder. There sat my husband with Ghillie at his feet and Gertrude and Gretel alongside him on the bench. They were quite the sight. As people began to gather around them, they disappeared from view like a boat in heavy fog.

I made up my mind quicker than I thought I would. I ended up buying six cookies, two of which were oatmeal raisin, all of which cost me a small fortune. Then I purchased some frozen yogurt for myself. I figured Jim could have his cookie and we could freeze the rest to enjoy at a later date.

I walked out of the marketplace with my wallet under my arm, a bag of cookies in one hand and my frozen yogurt in the other. I could not even see my husband on the bench. He was obscured by the crowd that had gathered. My Mates were all sitting in the same spot they were in when I had left. They were peering through the crowd in search of me, and they had not moved an inch from where I had left them. My girls spotted me first, then Ghillie. To hear my husband exclaim, "Mommy must be coming," relieved my anxiety as I was concerned that he may have gotten trampled.





The crowd parted as I got the usual greeting from my Mates. I explained to my husband my reasoning in purchasing six cookies then offered him a taste of my frozen yogurt, which he declined. Ghillie decided to lie down on the cobblestones despite my offer to let him sit on the bench. Gertrude was laying down to my left on the bench while Gretel sat in between Jim and me, her eyes fixated on my dessert.

For a few short moments we enjoyed each other's company and were able to chat about the day's events without interruption. Upon finishing our desserts, our plan was to make our way back to the Common one last time so our Mates could take care of "business," then head to Lafayette Place parking garage to pick up our car and make our journey home.

We continued to talk amongst ourselves quietly as I savored every spoonful of my frozen yogurt knowing my indulgence could be interrupted at any moment by inquisitive passersby. Each spoonful took a detour as I had to dodge Gretel's nose that was just inches away from making my tasty treat her very own.

With my spoon in limbo somewhere between Gretel's nose and my mouth, my attention was drawn to a woman who was standing perhaps two feet in front of us. She had short, dark hair and was average in size and height. She was bent at the waist, leaning towards her left, and speaking softly to an angel. His tiny hand was completely engulfed in hers. He could not have been but three feet tall. He was bald. His skin appeared translucent and as thin as a piece of tracing paper. I knew immediately this tiny angel was afflicted with the devastating "aging disease" known as Progeria.

I had never encountered a child afflicted with Progeria. However, about two years ago I learned about Progeria when Sam Berns' story was showcased on a news show. Sam had defied the odds by living way beyond the normal life expectancy of children who suffer from Progeria. He was vibrant, intelligent and attending school with friends in Massachusetts. He loaned his voice to bring attention to the disease by sharing his experiences with the world. I remembered his bravery and how he inspired those who knew him.

Sadly, in early January, 2014, I became aware that Sam had passed away at the age of 17. Progeria had once again claimed the life of a child. I remember how his fellow classmates spoke of him with great fondness and admiration. Although Sam's time on earth had been short, he had left behind his mark due to the many lives he touched. He would not be forgotten by those who knew his story. I certainly did not forget him, which is why when I saw that little angel, I was heartbroken because I knew what the future held for him. At that moment I had the power to brighten that angel's day, to make it memorable and special, and with the help of my Mates, "we" were going to do just that.



I placed my partially-eaten frozen yogurt alongside my husband, and I passed off to him the two leashes I was holding in my hand. I gave Jim a quick wink and said, "I have an idea. Watch them, please."

I stood up and walked towards the little boy. He was so delicate and angelic in appearance, I half expected to see wings appear from beneath his jacket. The woman, who I can only assume was his mother, continued to lean towards the boy as I knelt down beside him. I could tell by the expression on his face he was excited to see my Mates. I remember saying, "Hi, there. How would you like to have your photo taken with my poodles?"

I glanced up at the woman and asked her if that would be okay. Her eyes met that of the little boy's, there was excited chatter between them, and that is when I realized that English was not their first language. Despite the language barrier, she had understood what I was offering, and I knew she had done a wonderful job translating just by the expression on the little boy's face.

As I stood up, the woman kept saying, "Thank you. Thank you." I was heading in the direction of my Mates to set up the photo shoot when I noticed a man who had been standing alongside the woman. He had a stroller, but it was angled in such a fashion that I could not see what was in it. The man started to turn the stroller in my direction as he said, "Yes, thank you so much."


With the front of the stroller in full view before me, there sat another little boy with Progeria. To say he was tiny is an understatement. His eyes were the biggest part of his body. The palms of his hands were no bigger than quarters, his fingers miniscule and reminiscent of the hands and fingers of a premature baby, the ones you see in an incubator with all the tubes and wires. He, too, was bald, his skin translucent and paper thin.

How does one estimate the age of a child with Progeria? It is an "aging disease." If I were to make an educated guess, I would say that the taller of the two boys was five years of age while the smaller boy was maybe two years of age. But as we age, our bodies tend to shrink, and when you consider a child afflicted with Progeria is on an aging fast track, perhaps the smaller of the two boys was the oldest. But if I based my guess on their communication skills and overall demeanor, the boy in the stroller was much more infant-like, whereas the taller boy I would equate with a toddler.

Now I had the daunting task of setting up a photo shoot amongst the chaos of Faneuil Hall Marketplace, where by now we had attracted quite the crowd, with three standard poodles that looked "gi-normous" in comparison to these dainty little angels I was intending to place amongst them. What was I thinking. . . and where was my frozen yogurt?

Gertrude and Gretel had remained sitting patiently alongside Jim on the stone bench while Ghillie sat quietly on the cobblestones. As I turned in their direction, all three stood up with tails wagging. In an effort to keep them as calm as possible, I had Jim hand me their leashes, then I had Gertrude and Gretel join Ghillie on the cobblestones. The expressions on their faces said "Where are we headed now?" My "sit and stay" commands told them "We're not going anywhere."






As I turned towards the mother, she had moved closer, the hand of the taller boy still tucked safely in hers. I knelt down close so he could hear me over all the chatter and asked him if he liked my poodles. He was so soft spoken; I could not hear his response. But the smile on his face that ran from one ear to the other made it abundantly clear that he liked them very much.

The father slowly pushed the stroller closer to my Mates. He secured it in front of Jim. My Gretel sat to the left of the stroller and Ghillie was seated next to her. I gently placed my hands on the taller boy's shoulders, pulled him near and then turned him around to face his mother. My Gertrude stood to the left of the boy. It was heartwarming to see such delight on his face. There he stood, right next to my Ghillie, stroking Ghillie's topknot and twirling his ears and the colorful feathers that adorned them between his tiny fingers. He had a delightful laugh and he never lost that smile. The baby remained in his stroller as the cameras began to click. I kept telling my Mates to "Watch Mama" and "Be gentle."

Now, Gertrude and Gretel at the ages of five and four respectively possess a bit more maturity than brother Ghillie at 18 months. However, my Ghillie proved himself to be as mature as he is beautiful. He sat stoic, his brown eyes focused on me, chest puffed outward, head held high, his floppy jowls flexing in and out with every breath like gills on a fish. Despite his large size, he is still young and grapples with his immaturity every day. But on this particular day, Ghillie MacCready conducted himself like a gentleman. He remained focused and poised. I believe all three of my Mates understood the delicate nature of the situation. They conducted themselves accordingly knowing full well that being calm and gentle was in the best interest of these two little angels.

An occasional glance behind me to assure I did not back into anyone provided me the opportunity to see that an even bigger crowd had gathered. I was aware that photos were being taken from every direction. However, I remained focused on my Mates and their angelic friends. I could hear voices and laughter. There was a roaring applause that erupted from the crowd when my beloved Gertrude took it upon herself to plant a kiss on the cheek of the taller boy whose attentions at this point had been focused mainly on Ghillie. He clapped his hands and laughed and gave Gertrude a pat on her head. My Gertrude looked at me as if to say, "Was that okay, Mama?" I assured her that her spontaneous gesture of affection was quite appropriate.

With cameras clicking away and the crowd growing larger by the minute, the mother took the baby from the stroller, lowered herself in front of my Mates with the baby on her lap while the father and the crowd continued to snap photos. When the woman stood up, I walked towards the older boy and placed one hand on his shoulder as I slowly knelt down in front of him and grabbed my Mates' leashes. I steadied him as I lead them ever-so-carefully behind him. I did not want him to get tangled in their leashes. The mother approached me after handing the baby back to the father and said, in the finest English she could muster, "Thank you very much. Thank you very much."



I told her she was most welcome, that my Mates had thoroughly enjoyed posing with her boys.

It occurred to me that when I had left the house earlier in the day, I had brought along three photos of all ten of our poodles seated before our St. Francis Grotto in our garden. It is not unusual for me to carry a few photos of all ten poodles when I'm out and about. There are times when I meet someone who I know will enjoy seeing a photo of all our poodles. I hand them out to children as a keepsake and many adults request one for themselves or a friend. A photo is an inexpensive way to leave behind a treasured memory, and sometimes it's just what someone needs to brighten their day.

I remained kneeling beside the taller of the two boys, and I said, "Want to know something special? We have ten poodles." He looked at his mother and she, in turn, translated what I had said. His eyes widened.

Then I said, "I have a photo of them. Would you like to see it?" Following his mother's translation, he nodded his head.

I handed him the photo, and as his mother knelt down beside him, we perused it together. I explained that the poodles in the photo belonged to me, my mom and my sister. Then I pointed out my Gertrude, Gretel and Ghillie, and I explained to him that the "other" redheaded poodle in the photo was Ghillie's brother.

I whispered in his ear, "Would you like to keep that photo?" My knees beginning to cramp, I stood up slowly, awaiting his response. Apparently, he understood that query, because he nodded his head emphatically, that familiar grin lighting up his face, and his mother didn't even have to translate.

By this time, the father had returned the baby to his stroller. The mother grasped the hand of the taller boy in hers and gently guided him through the crowd that was beginning to disperse. With the coveted photo of our beautiful poodles clutched tightly in the tiny hand of an angel, the constant echo of "Thank you, thank you so much," faded into the crowd as the family disappeared from sight.

Exhausted, I turned to my husband and let out a big sigh. Since all the commotion began, we had not spoken two words to each other. I invited my Mates to join us on the stone bench. I offered them fresh water and a multitude of cookies for being so good. And there sat my not-so-frozen yogurt alongside my husband, melting in the sun. I grabbed it and enjoyed a few spoonfuls of its soupy sweetness. The crowd that had formed had completely dispersed, so we took advantage of the lull in activity and talked.

I educated my husband on the subject of Progeria. I shared with him what I knew of the disease. He said he'd never seen anything like that before. He expressed great sadness. I confirmed with him that yes, it was extremely sad and that is why when I saw that boy standing there, so young and frail and forced to bear the burden of such a devastating disease, yet with a big smile on his face at the sight of our Mates, I just had to do something. Jim assured me that it was the right thing to do. Of that I had no doubt as I recalled the smile on the face of an angel as he disappeared from view.

We rested quietly for five minutes or so. Gertrude was lying on the bench to my left while Gretel sat between Jim and me and Ghillie remained at my feet on the cobblestones. My Mates were resting comfortably when we were approached by a woman and two men. The woman was dressed casually in shorts and a shirt. She was striking in appearance; short, cropped hair, tall and slender with the perfect tan. One of the men that accompanied her was very tall with salt-and-pepper hair and a mustache to match. The second man was much shorter in stature and stood between them. All three approached slowly as if trying desperately not to disturb what must have appeared to be our "down time" between performances.

Jim and I remained seated as did Gretel. Gertrude remained on the bench but stood up, and Ghillie was front and center to get his share of whatever attention was coming his way.

The woman spoke first. She said, "We just have to meet these wonderful poodles and say hello." She reached out her hand, and Ghillie immediately placed his red head front and center while Gertrude leaned forward to ensure that she was not overlooked.

The woman continued to speak: "We are in awe of what we just witnessed. You and your poodles are absolutely amazing."

I felt a bit daft, but I was unsure as to what she was referring. I could tell by the way she conducted herself she was sincere in her compliments. I rationalized in my mind that she and the two gentlemen must have been nearby watching my Mates, and they were most likely impressed by the way my Mates had conducted themselves amongst all the chaos. Their calm demeanor and the fact that they are extremely well-behaved impresses everyone, so I leaned towards the rationale that they were very impressed by my Mates' good manners.

As Gertrude and Ghillie continued to charm the woman, the taller of the two gentlemen chimed in: "You are to be commended for your actions, as are your poodles. That was wonderful, just wonderful and unbelievable."

The woman wanted me to introduce my Mates to her and her friends, which I did. Ghillie was insistent that he was going to get more of the woman's attention than Gertrude, which prompted me to explain to her that my girls were very well-behaved but that Ghillie still needed a lot of work. He was young, very silly. . . and a boy. To which she responded. "That's perfectly all right. They are simply wonderful, and I will never forget what I witnessed here today."

I remained perplexed. What had they witnessed that moved them so?

Although a day filled with new faces, it was a typical outing for us. Our presence generates a lot of attention. We do try to accommodate the crowds that gather by answering their questions and allowing them to take photos. In some cases, I pose my Mates so that people can be photographed with them, just as I had done numerous times on this particular day. That is not always the case, but we try our best to be congenial. It's not always easy, but if the circumstances are right, we'll make the offer. I'm certain some people are very impressed by our willingness to accommodate others, and I felt confident that was the motivation behind the gratitude these three people were bestowing upon us.

It was not until the taller gentleman said, "You know, for whatever time those two children have left, you've given them something to remember for the rest of their lives," that I realized they had witnessed my Mates' interaction with the little boys afflicted with Progeria.

He continued: "They will never forget what you just did for them. You are special people and your poodles are incredible."

Jim and I sat speechless. The pause was awkward but short-lived. The way our Mates manage to bring happiness into people's lives, we find most humbling. Being elevated to superstar status, albeit flattering, was most unnerving and a tad uncomfortable.

In an attempt to minimize the adulation which continued to make us squirm, I explained that we have ten poodles in the family and they all do therapy work with the elderly and they've raised money for breast cancer research. Not knowing what else to say or do, I proceeded to hand them the photo of all ten poodles. They loved it.

I explained to them what our poodles did for those children was simply what they do, they make people happy. When I saw that little boy, I knew he had Progeria, and I knew the seriousness of his condition. I saw an opportunity for my Mates to bring a bit of happiness into his life; we jumped at that opportunity and made it so.

I never gave thought to who might be watching or what they might be thinking. I saw an angel grinning from ear to ear at the sight of my Mates, an angel who jumped at the opportunity to be photographed with them when the offer was made. I was happy that the mother and father were amenable to my offer. They could have turned down my offer with good reason, but they didn't.

Apparently, the impact of our actions was grand and had extended far beyond the hearts of two little angels.

The woman responded that what we had done was extraordinary, they were honored to have witnessed it, and that our poodles were very special. She asked if the poodles had a web site. And then she inquired if they could make a donation to breast cancer or some other cause on our poodles' behalf.

I assured her we were not fundraising at the moment; however, our poodles did have a Facebook page. I handed the woman one of my calling cards on the back of which I wrote "BCAPs, Breast Cancer Awareness Poodles." I told her to "Find them on Facebook."

She took the card with one hand and quickly pressed some bills into the palm of my hand with the other. I looked at her and said, "Thank you, but really, we are not fundraising today." She was insistent, "Take that and make a donation in your poodles' names to finding a cure for breast cancer or just buy them something special. They deserve it."

The woman reached out her hand one last time to Ghillie and Gertrude as she said, "Well, we just had to stop and tell you how special you and your poodles are and to thank you for what you did. We feel so honored to have witnessed it."

As the trio walked away I placed the crumpled bills in my knapsack for safekeeping. I did not even look to see how much had been handed to me. It was time to finish my no-longer-frozen yogurt. I needed a straw.

Jim and I stood up from the bench. Simultaneously, Gertrude and Gretel jumped onto the cobblestones while Ghillie gave another one of his famous stretches. Jim and I had been talking about what had transpired. I was still shocked by all of it. I remember echoing the woman's compliments when I exclaimed, "Our Mates are amazing. I can't believe the way they inspire people. I mean, they really are incredible."

Jim just shook his head. He is rarely a man of few words but even he was dumbfounded by what had occurred.

I made mention to Jim of the fact that the trio must have been standing amongst the crowd while my Mates were being photographed with the little boys. Jim told me they had not been in the crowd. They were sitting "right there," as he pointed to a table on the patio of the restaurant not more than five feet away. He said they had been watching us while eating lunch, and when I left to fetch our dessert and Jim was left in charge of our Mates, as the curiosity seekers surrounded them, the taller gentleman kept giving Jim the "thumbs up" as if to say, "You're doing a great job."

Before I hoisted my knapsack onto my back, I decided it would be best if I placed the cash that had been handed to me in a safer location. I reached for the crumpled bills that I'd stashed in the front pocket. I knew there were a couple of bills, so I was thinking the woman had handed me a couple of dollars. Imagine my surprise when the crumpled bills revealed \$40. \$40 for doing something that we did often; something that was simply the right thing to do.

During the drive home while my Mates slept peacefully in the back seat, I kept mulling the day's events over and over in my head. \$40? What am I going to do with that \$40? I kept hearing the woman's voice as she pressed the bills into the palm of my hand, "Take that and make a donation in your poodles' names to finding a cure for breast cancer or just buy them something special. They deserve it."

Well, my poodles want for nothing, and the one thing I'd love to purchase for them, but all the money in the world can not buy it, is the guarantee of a long, healthy life. My Mates earned that donation because they are special; in turn, that donation should be gifted in their name towards a very special cause.

That is when I had my "Ah-ha" moment. The events of this day were amazing and worth committing to paper, captured forever in the written word; the details far too precious to let fade with the passage of time. So I made the decision to write a short story about the day's events and send it along with the \$40 donation to the Progeria Research Foundation which was founded by the parents of Sam Berns. Although small in comparison to what is needed, I don't think a more uniquely-earned donation could ever be made, and even the smallest amount may prove helpful in finding a cure.

I am amazed how my three poodles manage to touch the lives and hearts of so many people simply by being themselves.

I don't know that I will always be as blessed as I am now to share my life with three beautiful and extremely special standard poodles, but there is one thing of which I am certain: I will never forget that sunny day in Boston when my Mates were touched by the wings of angels.

\* \* \* \* \*

This story is dedicated to Gertrude Tynan, Gretel Donegal and Ghillie MacCready, true masters in the art of capturing hearts. I've no doubt that throughout life's adventures, they will always leave a trail of happiness in their wake.

Laurie J. Rollins

Acushnet, MA ~ September 2014