

Unus sed leo

"One, but (it is) a Lion"

For: Gregg T. Milligan, II
(Spudie)

Story and Illustrations by: Gregg T. Milligan, I
(Daddy)

Acknowledgements

This story integrates my life as a young boy with that of my best friend, SamBirdio (my kitty), both in the realistic sense of "the way things were" and in the majestic sense of "the way things could be." The first part of the story is true. I drew freely upon the realistic portrayal of my life with SamBirdio. The second part of the story is also true. I Believe (period). It is this belief or faith that has assisted me with advice, ideas, and critiques. *This was God.*

I am also grateful for the assistance of Sue Marsh and Sarah Lorkowski, who contributed generously to the editing and organization of the story throughout a tedious and demanding publication process. Sue and Sarah also provided me with the spiritual and emotional support needed to complete my first children's book. It was Sue and Sarah who encouraged me to take the idea and make it into a work of art. Sue and Sarah continued to provide me with insights with regard to word arrangement, grammar, and overall composition which helped greatly. Their love for themselves, me, and my son shines brightly in their contributions to this story.

The story itself began as an inspirational thought, a spark of hope that tinged my heart. As if someone had whispered "write it." This could not have been possible if it weren't for another special person in my life, Gregg Tyler Milligan, II (my son). I would just like to say he was the very inspiration for which the story was written.

Finally, special thanks to the One most responsible for keeping up His end of the bargain -a promise. If it weren't for this kind and generous spirit, I would not even be here on this earth. I would not have a son in which to praise and/or raise, nor a kitten that loved me so. I would not have loving people in my life, especially; Sue and Sarah. In the very least, I would have had none of this beauty of living. This is God. *Gratiarum Bene Facis, In Deo Spes Mea.*" Thank you, in God my hope.

-Gregg T. Milligan, I.- 1999

Dedication

Nothing is as simple as loving a child. Nothing is as weary as hoping they survive in a difficult world. With this, I let others sing of knights and kings, I have played a great role and still do in the majesty of a child's love. In an aged accent toward heavenly gates through untimely words of wisdom, I hope to paint shadows against my son's soul --drawing imaginary lines of truth.

Which prayer for him will reach on high and sing free the sacred virtues I must protect? Against the dark and light of time, will he fortify His name against an old age and learn in the errors of his youth. Oh, lover of thy children can you see his fair green eyes? How authentic his love and affections? You have given above powers a heavenly eloquence with the strong rein of the richest of all treasures. I will continue to offer to thy excellence a force greater than all the swords. In these words there is a rigor of spirit that goes forth expressed in the gain of my best glory and shall be sent.

My only child, a vision of mine and a vision to gain. Your soul is a deep crest beneath mysterious water both lucent and bright. Your face is a mural I have stared upon to give my heart's ease, a soft brow's grace, tender as the sea. I live this life such work, as our soul's to knit. The work begun will rest in Heaven's conception and a twelfth year and one.

Sit beside me underneath the sun in a misty meadow near a cool stream. While the light falls through tall elms in the last hour of our day. Allow me to touch great forelights of gold with a trailing gleam of silver -this is your subtle heart, profound like a dream. All wandering from the Father where once a thick, fibrous shadow is now a transient gleam. Sit and allow the embrace as the days last leaves stray about and the clear dusk consumes the face of the wind against the remaining sky. Let me glance into my eyes as they lift up and hear your voice giving note of a quiet welcome.

And I will pray you say, "I love the air in which the stars come out, I love the drifting joy of how you come when I call your name, I love the nurture of the hedge and tree, I love how you have seen me through the full soft rain..."

"...I love you, Daddy."

-Gregg T. Milligan I - 1999

Forward

Gregg told me the story of Sam not too long ago. In all the time I have known him, there have been many stories he has shared with me, but none quite like this.

This is the truly the most beautiful story I have ever read.

The fabric of Gregg's words is woven into a glorious tapestry; spinning a tale of two sad, lonely angels and the love they had for one another; the incredible strength they found together in which to face their earthly struggles; and the absolute joy they shared while in each other's company. Alone, they barely stood a chance, but when united, it was as if they were protected by God's fiercest battalion. Their bond could not be broken even by death itself.

The description of Gregg's love for Sam and in turn, Sam's love for Gregg, stirred me deep within my soul. Tears stung my eyes and my heart as I read the true story of Gregg's childhood. The words he uses to describe his earthly experiences are simple. Yet they belie a tragic life in which loving rays of a sweet fuzzy hope helped to break through the threatening clouds of abuse.

He later paints a breathtaking picture of a Heaven within a different realm. It is here that there is a bittersweet reunion of Gregg and Sam, and it is where they encounter the One of the Light.

Gregg's tale will enchant any reader and will offer them faith in the existence of a better day.

True beauty (that which is of God Himself) can only be found when one does something pure of heart.

Again, this is truly the most beautiful story I have ever read.

-Sarah Lorkowski-

Prologue

The title of the story; "*Unus Sed Leo*," is Latin, meaning; "One, but (it is) a lion." The meaning is adopted from Aesop, which tells of a conversation between two lionesses. [The lioness to the vixen who boasted about her having many cubs when the lioness only had one.]

From this meaning, I thought of having only Sam, one simple but extraordinary kitty. And, Sam was like a lion cub or in other words, a kitten cub that was like a king. Of course, this then reminds me of my *only son*, for whom this story is written.

My son, Gregg T. Milligan, II (nicknamed, "*Spudie*," since birth because he reminded me of a little potato spud), has been and still is my lion cub. Like Sam, Spudie has been my very best friend and confrere. He is the very reason I write this story and will write many others -an inspiration which can only be described as purely divine. I've been asked if I've ever seen the 'face of God' and I reply; "in a kitten, to a boy becoming a man."

When I look upon the moments in my life when I was alone and afraid, I see flashes of a warm fuzzy kitten sleeping gently in my arms wrapped in soft blankets. And, the small face of a boy with peaceful green eyes staring up into mine, gently in my arms, wrapped in soft warm blankets. I felt more love caring for another than all the love combined while being loved. It is truly better to give than receive. With this belief, I hope to give my son all the things in life that make it so precious -one of which is this story.

I lived the first thirteen years of my life during a very difficult and lonely time. However, Sam was there for me. And the voice of conscientiousness, wisdom, my soul, or God whispered, "it should then be no surprise that you will write this story and give to your only son on his thirteenth birthday." Now, my son is there for me and I for him.

I truly give thanks to all of those who had faith in me, including me; especially, my kitty, my son, and my God.

Let us begin this story, as I will promise to live my life -for God, for me, for my son, -- "*In Saecula Saeculorum*"...Forever and ever.

-Gregg T. Milligan I. - 1999

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I have many stories to tell, however, this one is very special...

Amazingly soft, sleek, silly, and full of love. Yup! That's my kitty. He goes by the name, "SamBirdio." What a name for a kitty? But not just a name, a whole story in itself. I'm so far ahead of myself already. I do this when I get excited. Take a deep breath, stretch like a sleepy kitten, and let us go way back. Like the maestro says; "from the beginning..."

I believe I was four or five years old, it doesn't matter much how old I was, but what does matter is that for almost two years I loved and "was" loved by the greatest angel of all. I sat on the front porch staring into the summer sky, so tired and lonely. What will this day bring, I thought? It was warm, and for the moment, quiet. Oh, how I loved the quiet. Almost in a rush and barely not even noticing her, a neighbor girl -I believe her name was Mary, musses my hair and tells me her momma cat just had kittens. Want One! Boy, did I! I had never owned a pet of my own. We had strays of course; most had gone to Heaven already, except for one. His name was "Mopsey" because of his curly shaggy hair. Mopsey was quiet too and I loved him dearly. While Mary still stood over me, casting a summer shadow, in a business-like manner she said that the baby kittens are going fast and if I wanted one I had better hurry.

No time to waste. I ran inside and asked my mother if I could have one of the newborn kittens Mary had to offer. No! She said without hesitation. I expected this and was surprised I was asking my mother in the first place. You see, I never asked her for anything -this was a very dangerous thing to do. However, there was something inside of me that felt like it wasn't me at all. Something pushing me to be brave and almost demand that I have one of these kittens. My mother became very upset with my persistence and I was punished. This didn't stop me, and to this day I still don't understand why, however, sometimes I think I just may. Then, all of a sudden, a break! My mother wanted to visit with Mary's mom and left for her house. I followed quickly behind her. On the way, my mother made it a point to tell me that I would not be taking any pets home. Still, I wasn't even listening. When we arrived at Mary's house, my mother immediately settled into



visiting and drinking that stuff that made her so unpleasant. So what, I thought. I had other business to tend to. I ran to meet Mary in her basement, where she was calling for me; "Down here, Greggie!" I loved it when people called me Greggie... It was a pleasant reminder that I was still just a little boy, no more and no less. Like an easy feeling of no expectations, only the sun on your face little man, nothing but you and mister sun. Mary yelled, again... "Come see the kittens!"

There she was. There was momma and all her new babies. No hair! I exclaimed. They're naked! And they were sucking on tiny little nipples with eyes closed and making the sweetest little grunts while doing so. They're so hungry, I said! Mary told me that they needed their momma's milk to get stronger, if not they could get sick and possibly die. This made me so sad, but not as sad as what I felt when I counted eight momma nipples and nine baby kittens. What's wrong with that one, I said? Tossed away from its momma was a baby kitten which was smaller than the others. Its skin was so pink and its little eyes were closed and very blue -almost black. It shivered and occasionally let out this weak, almost whisper of a grunt. Mary told me that only the strongest kittens would make it and that animals always ignored the weak. That way, only the strongest animals grow up to make more babies. What a screwed up way of doing things, I thought. "He's a boy kitten, I can tell," she said. I didn't know how she could tell and I didn't care. "What will happen to him?" I asked. Mary replied in a sad voice, "He'll have to be thrown away. He's going to die anyway, Gregg." Mary said she was sorry. What was there to be sorry about, I thought. He's not going to be thrown away! He's not going to die! I then asked Mary if I could take him home. I said this was the kitty I wanted. This was going to be my kitty, forever. After a brief argument, Mary finally agreed and brought me a handful of tissue paper. She said I would have to wrap the kitten up in this to keep him warm. She also gave me an eyedropper and said I would have to feed him by hand. With no mommy, this is what you need to do to feed a baby kitten. Okay! I was so happy. I had never been this happy in my life up to now.

I ran home, leaving my mother. With the utmost care I palmed the baby kitten in one hand and covered him with the other. The eyedropper was stuffed safely inside of my front pocket. When I arrived home, I quickly made a cozy home out of an old cardboard box and

lined it with shreds of soft cloth torn from one of my many tattered shirts. Gently, I laid the kitten inside the box and covered him up. Mary said he would die before I got him home. He didn't. I had a great big responsibility and there was no time to waste. From the corner store, I purchased a small box of milk with all the money I had. Returning home, I hid in a bedroom closet with the box and kitten safely inside. Filling the eyedropper with the milk, I slowly uncovered the only thing in the world that mattered to me. I was thinking to myself, I've been taking care of my mother and she's a grown up! I can certainly take care of an itsy, bitsy baby kitty. He was still alive! I could still hear the weak grunts, my hands were shaking, and I gently moved the tip of the eyedropper to his little mouth. His mouth was no more than a tiny pink slit and I remember thinking that I would never be able to feed him. "Please God. Please help my kitten eat." The kitten's head moved a bit and his mouth opened just enough to take in a single drop of milk. I could see him struggle with swallowing the milk and still his body shook and quivered. I began to cry. This helpless kitten was going to die and no matter what I did, it wouldn't make a difference. "Please don't die," I whispered. "Please, you're all I have." I still didn't have a name for him. Then I remembered a time when I was at a friend's house. His father was watching this movie that he said was a "Classic." The movie was called "Casablanca" and I absolutely loved it. There was a character in the movie that I really liked. He was a lonely piano player. No one seemed to notice him unless he was playing his piano and he had the saddest smile on his face whenever they showed him. They called him, "Sam." The main actor would say, "Play it Again Sam." This would be my kitten's name, because I loved the movie and my kitten had that same sad smile against his tiny face.

He took another sip of milk! "Thank you, God!" And another...He was suckling the eye dropper! He was eating! He was going to live! "Thank you, God! Thank you, so much!"

"Mom's home!" My youngest sister said. "April, don't tell mom I have the kitten! Don't tell her about Sam, please." It didn't matter that my sister would never tell, my mother already knew. I don't know how, maybe Mary told her. Who cares? My mother was too tired and with the drinking, too confused to say anything much except that I had better keep that damn cat away from her and when it dies, make sure I flush it down the toilet. "No

Problem!" I thought. He's not going to die, no way. I kept Sam out of everyone's sight. It was summertime and I could spend all day taking care of him and that's exactly what I did.

It was so wonderful. I was there when Sam grew a wash of downy hair over his little body. I was there when his eyes opened for the first time and looked up at me (he smiled...so did I). I was there when Sam struggled to walk around his little homemade box and then eventually out of it all on his own. I was there when Sam didn't need the eye dropper anymore and was drinking all by his beautiful self from a saucer I had gotten him. I was simply and thankfully "there" for Sam and he was now "there" for me. He lived; plain and simple.

As Sam grew, we became the best of friends. He was so playful and loving. I would watch him dash through the house and with these long sharp claws, climb our living room walls, run up and down curtains, and hang onto Mopsey's under belly for a brief ride. I saw his mighty claws many times while playing, however, I could bury my face in his belly and make mumbling sounds but he never scratched me. Not ever. The soft pads of his paws would paddle my cheeks but never did his claws come out. I would kiss his little whiskers and mouth and Sam would just rub his face all over mine -purring all the while. I could put Sam on top of my head and his legs would just hang down around me, but he never moved. I could and most definitely would whenever the moment struck me, open my mouth as wide as possible, and stick Sam's furry little head inside. I would then hum little ditties which would come out sounding much like a musical mumble. After opening wide again and popping Sam's head out of my mouth, I would just laugh as hard as I could. "You should see how silly you look, Sam! Your face is all wet and you have this funny look about you like I just went crazy!" We would talk for hours about so many things. I knew his language and he knew mine -it was the same anyway. Sam knew when I was sad and happy and just needed to be loved. When I was sad, Sam would walk over to me (if I wasn't holding him at the time), and on his hind legs balance while placing his front legs against me. I would then pick him up and he would gently stroke my face and eyes with his soft paws. We would hug and I would feel so much better. Sometimes I would hold him like a little baby in my arms while he stared up at me. We would have these staring contests and neither of us would blink until one of us smiled. Sam



would make this "urt urt urt" sound when we stared at one another. I always believed, and still do to this day, that he was giggling.

Wait a minute! You're probably wondering why I'm calling him Sam and not "SamBirdio?" Well, the "Birdio" came later. When Sam was older and able to play with me outside, he would -"you guessed it," chase birds. Of course, he never caught one, even though we both knew he could have done so easily. But, remember, Sam was a special kitty and he didn't want to hurt the birds -only play with them.

Sam was courageous too! Whenever my mom was punishing me, Sam would run in between us, while facing my mom, he would hiss very loudly and stand his ground. Once, my mom whet to reach for me during one of these times and Sam scratched her --making her bleed. I never saw him scratch anyone before. Afterwards, my mom would always lock Sam up in a room before she would punish me. Sam would mew and moan while scratching at the door the whole time. It always helped me to know he was there and when it was all over, I could go to him. When I did go to him, Sam would curl up in my arms and stroke my cheeks, wiping the tears away. During these times, he would make an "ignit ignit ignit" sound. This was Sam crying too. There were other bad times. Like the time, Sam ran across the road one evening to greet me without looking both ways and a car hit him. I thought for sure he was dead. I rushed to him, picking his injured and limp body up and running into the house. It was my time to be courageous. I demanded my mother take us to the vet, now! She refused, but I wasn't giving up; Sam needed a doctor. My only friend in the whole world needed me. My father happened to come over shortly after. While tears ran down my face and as Sam lay dying in my arms, I screamed at my father who seemed to tower over me, "Sam's been hurt! Don't let him die!! Please don't let him die!!" My father did take us to the vet and the vet fixed Sam up. Sam even got to take home some medicine which I had to feed to him three times a day. No problem. The medicine was supposed to taste like peanut butter, but Sam hated it. I made him eat it anyway. "You've got to get better." I would tell him and he would take the medicine because he knew I loved him and that I knew what was good for him.

School. I hated school because Sam was home alone. I would write him letters in school and draw him pictures. I would rush home everyday and read the letters to Sam and show him the pretty pictures. Sam would like this very much. I would kiss Sam every day before going to school and say a prayer that God would take care of him while I was away. Sam was alone at home with my mother during the day and I don't think he liked this very much at all. I think Sam was scared to be alone with her, just like me. But, Sam was a brave kitty and together, we were very brave.

Almost two years had gone by when Sam and I first met. My friend, my hero, my SamBirdio. Then Sam began acting very strange. He would sleep all of the time, and while sleeping his body would shake and sweat. Sam also stopped eating as much. This got so bad that I had to go back to feeding him with an eyedropper. It was the same eyedropper I had when I first nursed him. As the days and weeks passed, Sam began having these terrible convulsions and would try so hard to stand up when he was having these. He was so very brave and fought so hard for his life and for me. Sam had a terrible disease. We didn't have the money for medical care so he was left with little hope. I didn't even know what kind of disease it was. I would pick him up and tell him it was going to be okay. I would cry so hard and was so afraid that I was going to lose my best buddy. His convulsions were like many I had when I would go into these terrible panic attacks and think I was going to die. During these times, I would call out, "Sam!" "Sam!" He would come running and jump up into my arms. All the while one of his paws was on my mouth and I could feel his little motor running while he purred. I fell asleep so many nights listening to his tiny motor and feeling his warm body against mine.

Sam's attacks got worse. I would wrap him in my favorite blanket before leaving for school and when I got home he would still be there, tired and soaked with sweat. I prayed so much that God would make him better.

Then it came to pass that Sam would have to leave me. I left for school one day, wrapped Sam up in "our" favorite blanket, said a prayer, and kissed his face. When I got home that day, my mother was drinking again and it was then she told me, Sam had died. She said

some men from Lansing came and took him away to study him. "Why!?" She said because they wanted to see what made him so sick. I was so lonely, again. I didn't believe her about the men, but I did know that my friend was finally gone. He suffered and it was good that he wasn't suffering anymore. He was still gone and I missed him.

Heaven's Gates are open to all humans, but what about brave little kittens? Now that Sam was gone I would lay awake and think of him often, wishing he would come back. I missed him and loved him so much it hurt. I would occasionally dream he would jump up on my belly while I lay in bed like so many other times before. Only to open my eyes and he would vanish but not before just barely seeing his small face slip slowly away in front of mine.

On a particular night, when I dearly needed SamBirdio to protect and love me, I laid in bed wrapped in all the blankets I had. I remember praying for Sam to come and rescue me. I could smell his sweet breath and feel his warm coat of soft fur against my face. I prayed for a very long time and must have fallen asleep from exhaustion. I was sure I was asleep because I must have been dreaming. Well, of course I'm dreaming, I'm standing up aren't I? I was among the most beautiful clouds I have ever seen. They were so close and moved with an easy back and forth motion that was almost hypnotizing. The air smelled like violets, peppermint candy canes, and lilac. Like I said, I was standing, but more like floating would best describe it. My feet felt like they were planted firmly on the ground, but there was no ground! Only a deep blue like the calmest ocean where you would be able to see a reflection, if there was something to reflect. There was nothing, only me. Me and the clouds and this funny yet wonderful place. I felt at peace. No one would hurt me or leave me alone. No one would forget to feed me or wash my clothes. No one would ever yell at me or scare me. No one. This is when I thought of Sam again. Sam never did any of those awful things to me. Except, Sam did leave me, but he wouldn't have if he could have helped it. He tried so hard not to, remember? Yes. I did remember. The thought of Sam brought back a rush of memories I could barely keep them all straight. They were like flashes of firebugs and electric white light against a black sky. My head spun and my stomach flip-flopped, but most of all, my heart ached and broke all over again. This was when I fell and began to weep. I thought what good is this beautiful place? It's just like that dark, lonely place I

came from. That place I have to call home even though it has never felt like home. I'm still lonely and scared. I still feel sick and worried. I don't have any friends. I still don't have Sam...

...He jumped! Like a cheetah and soared like a jet. I felt the warm and soft thump against my chest and the purr I'll never forget as long as I live. Sam!! Sam!! I fell holding him laughing and crying at the same time. It was my kitty, my brave little kitty! It was my Sam! I must have kissed him a million, trillion times all over his tiny mouth and face. I stroked his whiskers and squeezed his belly. His paws were brushing all over my eyes and neck. I was home. I continued to rock Sam back and forth and tell him I loved him so very much. That I was so sorry he was sick and that I never should have left for school that day. I told Sam about all the times he saved my life and all the ways in which he was my hero. And, Sam talked back to me in our special way of talking with crazy little sounds, grunts, and purrs. "I missed your motor, Sam!" I said. We held on to one another for quite a while. When I relaxed a bit and my tears slowed, Sam gave me the signal he wanted to get down. I didn't understand how I knew what he was saying after that, but this was a special place and it all made perfect sense to me. Sam wanted me to follow him. He took me through a golden forest, past flying dragons that breathed snow and laughed out loud, a garden that was empty except for a vast fountain next to a great book that was sealed shut with magnificent locks. A simple tree that bore a fabled fruit. We then walked past hundreds and thousands of what looked like mighty angels who smiled at me and monstrous looking men on horses donned in gold and silver. On their foreheads were enchanted and odd symbols. Their hands gripped powerful swords that glistened and looked deadly. They stood in a regal muster. In a form made of many but with an embodiment of only one. Not to protect so much but to prepare. To prepare for what? These horsemen scared me because I could see an unimaginable power, not yet released. As if one heard my thoughts, the one that seemed to lead and follow at the same time looked up. The one most recognized. This absolute one charged toward me and Sam with a great fury. He looked to be their leader. As a matter of fact, He appeared to have lead many battles and you just knew that He ruled wherever He went. The horse He rode was a brilliant white with dark



green eyes that appeared to literally fly. He, upon His mighty horse, stopped short only inches from me. I could not look upon him because I was so afraid. I also felt I wasn't allowed to look directly at Him, only down as if humbled. Sam leapt into my arms and purred unafraid and seemingly quite happy and content with all of this. Not me. I thought of running but I did not know this land and did not know where to go. I watched from the corner of my eye, my head still bent toward my feet. The horseman then lent down close to my ear. With His free hand He gently touched the underside of Sam's chin and then moved His gentle yet powerful hand across my forehead as if brushing the hair from my eyes. In my ear he whispered only one and very odd word. "Reliance." The horseman was then gone with the speed of light and appeared to move the others with only the slightest movement and tilt of His head. Sam spoke to me in that odd way he had begun to do when we first met in this place. It was like he was speaking words but there were no words to leave his mouth and his words carried with them a tone of majestic awe and phenomenal devotion. But I heard these words from him none the less and they were, "...'twas the Lamb." It would be years before I understood what Sam had meant. I gently put Sam down again and we carried on. We now passed a boundless place which seemed to go on forever and I believe it did. It was limitless and even though it was complete empty of all physical things, I never felt so loved, not even from Sam. Sam appeared to hear what I was thinking, and with his upturned face to me, nodded ever so slightly. Then Sam did something quite peculiar, he lowered himself onto his haunches and symbolically bowed his head. I saw an approaching light, and even though the light appeared to be approaching, it was at the same time, all around me and Sam. It filled this immense place! How could it? The light was upon me now, under me, over me, and most of all, within me. The light spoke. It spoke like Sam had been communicating with me. I could hear its words and they seemed to have come from everywhere. The light said "I am you. You are Me." "I love you." "I've missed you." The light referred to me as "a son and an angel." I had never been called these names. It felt so marvelous. The light had no beginning and no end. Its names were told to me to be minion but I can only remember one, "Father." I held on to this name. It had a very special meaning to me. Not, just because my own father was never around and had never shown me love, but because my heart and soul knew this light as if before I was ever born. Sam had its own name for the light; he called it "Deus."

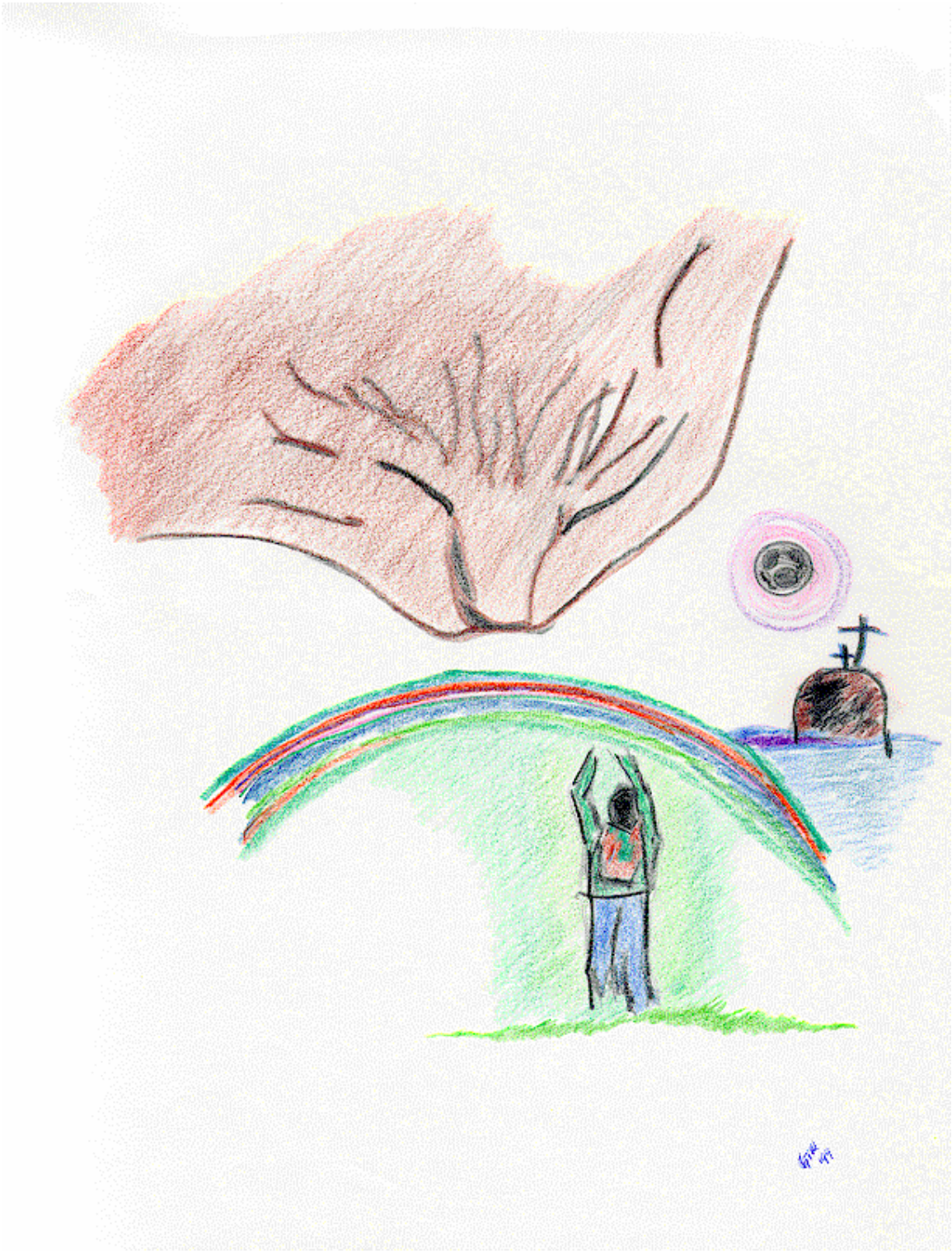
The light took shape (as if for my sake -to better understand). It became this very old man with a dazzling white beard and a kind loving face. He wore a magnificent robe which looked to be made of woven soft linen and wool. I saw no feet as the robe seemed to crest and flow about him. The light never left Him. I knew this must be God. Even though I knew from the very beginning that this must be Heaven, how else would I have seen Sam? I wasn't afraid. I did not feel anything except peace and love. It was then I fell to my knees and bowed my own head. I knew in my mind that I was not deserving of this place nor this amazing gift. A voice then moved within me and my soul as if to disagree with me and allow me to feel very much at home. It was as if this place was created for me and I this place. My alpha and beyond. My soul was forgiving and this place was too.

And God spoke... Few words and extremely simple, but they held a power like all the bombs in the world. The first word was but one which came like an answer, "grace." It was then Sam whispered in a kind and gentle way, "Remember the Lamb?" God continued to speak, "Your time here has come to an end. For it is not your time, My son." I knew that I could not stay. I knew that from the beginning, but I could not bring myself to leave. I loved this place, this Heaven. I loved my Sam kitty, and Oh how I loved God. And hearing this, God spoke and said, "I love you my son when I first whispered your name. I love you and your strong heart among the wicked. I love you as I will love you for all eternity." How could I not weep when hearing these words? How could I not feel the undying forgiveness and love? And how could I not feel the shame of feeling I would never come close to repay God. To show Him how much I love Him. To prove myself to be worthy of His love and this place called Heaven. Sam walked over to me and I took him into my arms. As he lay there, looking up at me with his brilliant green eyes full of tears. I began to slowly brush his whiskers with the tips of my fingers. God again spoke. "My son, I hear your questions and know your heart. You have a lifetime to show Me your love and devotion, but you have not failed Me even now." I truly know that God would not lie, but how could I have shown Him so much love having spent so little time on earth up to now? With this, God said, "You must go, but before you do, you make ask one question of Me." Before I asked my question and still pondering what it would be, I brought Sam close to my neck and hugged him. As I wept I



told him that I would always love him and that I would always miss him. I told Sam that he was my joy, my sun and moon. He was my peace and my fullness of hope. I then thanked him for loving me and taking such good care of me. For holding me dear to him when I was afraid and making me laugh when I was sad. I began to feel sad and angry that I had to leave. That Sam had to die. It all began to feel so lonely again. I spoke to God, out of line and out of place, but I was hurt. I said, "you don't know what's it's like down there! People hurt me, my own parents. I'm afraid all the time." God spoke and even though I was angry, He was still calm and as gentle as a feather. "I have walked as man and died as man so that you may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. So that all sins may be forgiven. This I would have done for you alone if you were the only child on earth." He then continued to speak and in His soft and powerful voice said, "I know your heart and your fears. I have felt your loneliness and I wept. I have held you in my arms and breathed more life into you when there seemed to be none left. I know the struggles of My earth and all mankind." I listened to His words and turned them over and over in my mind and I understood. It was now time to go. I kissed Sam one last time and put him down. He was bathed in the light of God and sat very still near the ends of His robe. I love you, Sam was all that I could say. Still kneeling before God, I apologized for my anger and said I would try and be brave. I also said that even though I feared Him, I loved Him with all my heart and would for the rest of my life. I thanked God for this gift of a brief glimpse of Heaven and to see my Sam one last time. I then turned to leave, but not without touching the very top of Sam's head and again telling him how much I loved him. Sam, in turn, gently swatted my hand with his paw and said the same. I'll miss you Sam...

As I walked toward where I had first come, God's voice came to me. As before, it was both kind and mighty. "Angel, you had one question of Me. Ask it now." I was so terribly sad I was leaving Sam, that I hadn't remembered the question. I then thought of how God had said he knew of mankind's struggles and the pain of my heart. How He had said a long time ago he lived and died as a man. Was he alone like me? Was he loved? Was he afraid? God can be anything He chooses, can't He? He's our creator. Was He only a man? If so, why only a man? It seems as if God would have been so many other things. Why just a child and a man -they are so alone and afraid. I wanted to ask God if He were with me all of the time.



Did He hold me when I cried? Why couldn't I feel his arms around me? So many of these questions buzzed through my head like so many times before on earth, alone, afraid, full of sorrow. I had so many questions for God because of what I had gone through already as a child. Did God ever travel the earth at times as a bird, a fish, a tree? Truly, I thought where is God most of the time? This was a terribly important question. A question I asked many times as a child and would learn I would ask many times as a man. These questions I asked many times while I cried myself to sleep. When my father left. When my mother hurt me. When I was hungry and cold. When Sam died. Why did I have to go back to earth a boy? Why couldn't I go back as something else? However, I could only ask but one question of God before leaving. I gathered my thoughts and they kept returning to my friend, my kitty, my Sam. I wanted to be with Sam. I wanted to be with God. Why couldn't I stay? Who would really miss me? The one friend that loved me more than anyone in the whole world was Sam and Sam was here, in Heaven. God said He loved me and I believe Him still. I will then ask my question.

I then stopped walking, turned toward the light, and asked a question which amazed me. It came to me as subtle as Sam's whiskers... "My Lord. Of all the many faces of your spirit, what living creature on earth have you been which brought you the most joy and you felt most loved?"

At that moment, in an unexplainable way, I could feel God smile. It engulfed me in its warmth and wrapped around me like the soft sugary fluff of cotton candy. Suddenly, in a rush of hope and faith, I heard these few words that explained so much and I will never forget as long as I live...

...and God said... "Well, my son, there was this one time I was a cat..."

The End and *The Beginning*.