

WATERDECK DOWN

Chapter 1 ANIMAL LINGUISTICS

To understand the following story you need to know how animals communicate. We all know that humans are at the top of the food chain. That is true when you take all skills in consideration. Clearly some animals

can run faster or jump higher. Some animals can swim better or even fly. Some senses are better developed like seeing at night or from the heights of a flying eagle. Some can smell a scent and follow it for miles. Some can hear a twig break and run away or climb a tree to avoid the dangerous thing that broke it.

We still conclude the supremacy of man primarily for his opposing thumb and intellect. The thumb thing allows us to build things and the intellect tells us what to build. The intellect does much more than that. As we think we plan. We can remember thousands of things like words. We know what they mean. We know how to write them, read them and even string them together and say them to others.

Communication is a huge skill. We have the ability to not only hear, but listen. That might seem like the same thing, but it really isn't. Hearing skills can be measured by testing and pointing to the correct (left or right) earphone. Listening is much more than that.

To really listen you must clear your mind of other input and focus on listening. The hardest part to listening in a conversation is that the listener is so busy thinking about what he is going to say when it is his turn, that he isn't really paying attention to what is being said.

The second big half of communication is talking or writing. Some people know more words than other people. Some people have the extreme skill of being able to draw on their thoughts and words quickly. They have the right response right away while others are still searching their word inventory. This usually brings about the "Oh I wish I would have said" thought after the moment has passed.

Humans, using their intellect, have studied and concluded that the balance of the animal kingdom is pretty bad at communicating. Some of their conclusions are correct. Horses, cows, oxen, and goats are pretty bad at communicating. These studies also suggest that dogs can understand about 100 words like sit, heal, come, bye-bye and bad dog.

They also concluded that there are about three different barks, a whimper and a growl. This is where their study begins to miss the mark.

Dogs can understand about 300 words and can communicate them to other dogs using a system of moves or gestures along with over three dozen different sounds.

Squirrels have about half of that capacity along with most birds. Rats, mice, raccoons, and other small animals can communicate with each other but not well with any other species. You need to get down to moles to be at the level that humans concluded exists for all the animals. Humans think that the animals can't talk. In actuality, humans can't listen.

The biggest exception, the big blip on the curve is the rabbit. I'm not sure of the reason but I think it is the size of the ears and the size of the brain as it compares to overall body size. For whatever reason, the rabbit can listen and learn words in all languages including human. They can share these languages with others up to their capacity. So they can communicate freely with other rabbits and with dogs as long as it lies within their 300 word capability. They can understand what humans are saying but try as they might, they can't get the humans to listen. So, rabbits eavesdrop and learn.

Now that you know who can communicate with whom it becomes easier to tell you the story of Waterdeck Down.

The cast of the story is as follows;

Tim and Linda, husband and wife

CJ, resident grandson

Lola, Dog

Harper, rabbit father

Ule, Rabbit mother

Haile, Barry and Gary, rabbit sons and daughter

Ben, rabbit, brother of Harper

Jamie, rabbit mate of Ben

Clem, Jenefer and Josie rabbit son and daughters of Ben and Jamie



Chapter 1

Linda brings Tim a cup of coffee and says, "You know we really have to fix up this back yard."

"Yeah, I know, it's getting kind of bad. I think we need to start with the deck."

The deck in question is a 16' x 40' raised wooden platform that is covered with an attractive beige canopy laid across a series of beams supported by wood columns at the corners and in the middle. Tim had installed lighting, sound and some power outlets. A nice marble table with six rattan chairs is centered on the deck with additional furniture spread around. By changing the furniture layout a family dinner gathering of a dozen or so can be well handled. Moving in some other tables and chairs allows for seating of up to 30 for bigger parties. The San Diego weather allows for this area to be real useable space almost all the year.

The problem is that some of the 2 x 4 planks are worn. Linda slowly walks the deck and says, "It looks like about every third board needs to be replaced."

Tim responds with, "At least. Whenever you start a project like this, you always end up with surprises. It never turns out to be as simple as you think".

Just then CJ comes walking out of the house and asks, "What are you planning?"

"Grama and I are talking about finally fixing up the back yard. We want to start with fixing the deck."

CJ, the grandson, is currently staying with Tim and Linda while he tries to get his life together. While living there he pays some rent and works for Tim's catering business. CJ has gotten a second job working a "pumpkin Patch". He helps kids on and off the rides and loads purchased pumpkins

into customer's cars. He also does all the heavy lifting around the house. Everybody knows, especially CJ that most of the physical work with any new project will end up on his to do list. He immediately liked the idea of the project and began his own inspection.

"The frame, the columns and the overhead joists look fine. They just need paint." After a deliberate walk through he added, "I bet we'll need to replace half the boards."

Tim looks at Linda and says, "See, it already jumped from a third to a half. We need to get Scott over here."

CJ and Linda immediately agreed. Son Scot had begun a huge back yard project about two months ago. His project is much larger involving two new decks each bigger than this one along with the conversion of a small existent building into a bar with plumbing. He knows decks.

"I'll give him a call and have him come by. CJ, get the crowbar and pull up a couple of boards we know we are going to replace so we can get a look at what's underneath."

As CJ was nodding agreement Linda asked, "What about the rabbits?"

Tim quickly jumped over the rabbit comment and said, "You know we've got your brother and Cindy coming in for a visit next month. Wouldn't it be cool if we had the whole back yard fixed up by then?"

"What do you mean fixed up?"

Tim said, "Well it looks trailer trash now. With the water restrictions I don't think I can ever make it look nice. How about we put in pavers and artificial turf?"

"That sounds expensive." Linda responded.

"It is but I've got an idea. Stay with me here, don't get flustered."

Linda knew that meant that Tim had another one of his ideas. Most of them work out pretty good but some are disastrous. "What are you thinking?"

Tim continued, "Well we have to fix the deck. I'll bet that's going to be more than \$1,500 by the time we are done. Now if we get rid of all the grass and replace it with pavers, turf and a block sitting wall in front of the landscape area we would have a cool back yard."

"That really sounds expensive."

Tim continued, "It's worse than that, or better. I want a hot tub right next to the deck. You and I both have enough aches and pains where a hot tub is not a frill, it's therapeutic. Now stay with me because here is where it gets expensive."

Linda replied, "Gets? Oh I've got to hear this."

Tim continued, "OK now we add in air conditioning and solar"

"Are you drinking again? That's huge money. Just how do you plan on paying for this dream of yours?"

Tim paused for a second. He wanted to lead up to this next part with a little drama. "It's free."

"Yeah right, free, look you do all that for free and I'll go along."

Tim was hoping for such a response. "OK, here's how we do it. You know I've been talking about a refinance to get in on these low rates before they go away, well we add in the improvements to the new mortgage."

"You said free. Your plan has us paying a bigger mortgage. That's not free."

"It is if your payment doesn't go up. Listen, we have been paying 4.25% on our mortgage, the new rate is 3.5%. We can increase the mortgage to cover all the improvements and still pay \$75 less than we are paying now."

Look, I plan on dying in this house. I don't care the amount of the mortgage, I just care about the payment."

Linda questioned, "This sounds like the "voodoo economics" of the old days. Isn't this what happened six years ago when the banks went nuts?"

Tim responded quickly, "No, the big difference is that we are putting the money back in the house. Every dollar we are spending, well maybe not the hot tub, but every other dollar we are spending increases the value of the house. Wouldn't the house be worth more if we had this done?"

"Well, yes, but we are going to be using more electricity with the ac and the hot tub."

"Yeah, but we are making it on the roof. Our electric bill will actually go down even with the extra usage."

Linda, still not convinced, said, "I don't know it sounds too good to be true."

Tim countered, "It's just math. Think of it this way, we've been paying too much on our mortgage, now we are finally getting it right. Oh, one more thing. Taxes. The big one is the tax credit on the solar. That will give us a one- time savings of \$7,000. We've got to do this."

Linda paused for a second and then said, "I want a bocce ball court and a fountain in the corner."

"Damn girl when you get it, you jump on big. The bocce ball court is probably cheaper than either pavers or turf. I don't want to buy a fountain but it would be fun to build a water feature. It would look cool in the back corner."

Linda added, "Remember my brother gets here in six weeks. Can you get this done in time?"

"Well, I don't think the AC or solar matters, but I bet we can get the deck and yard done. That would look great. OK, I'm going to call contractors for bids."

Linda reminded Tim, "Make sure you don't commit to anything before we know we have the mortgage approved."

"I know. I've already been talking to my mortgage guy and filled him in on my plan. He doesn't see it as a problem. But I will emphasize I need to get it closed this month, so we have the cash to pay everybody. By the way, we also get to skip next month's mortgage payment, so we have that extra cash to cover the out of pocket for the deck."

"It still sounds like "voodoo economics", but if you can pull it off I love it."

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Chapter 2

“Hey Harper, have you been listening to what they’re doing?” Ule asked already knowing the answer.

“Yes Ule. Don’t get excited. They’ve talked about this before. I doubt if they’ll get to it this time either.”

“I don’t know. Linda sounds committed. When she wants something done those two usually jump to it. I wish you would respond like that.”

Harper then said, “First off, Tim is still in charge. He just lets Linda think she’s the boss. Even if they do get on it this time it will take a while before they start and it will take weeks before they finish. We’ll have time to plan around it.”

Ule continued with a stern voice of worry. “You always put things off until the last moment, and then we must run around to get things done. Whatever your plan is I don’t want to hear about moving in with Jamie.”

Harper knew this conversation wasn’t going to go well. “You might have to just suck it up. We are going to be the ones in need. Ben and Jamie will offer temporary shelter if and when we need it. You’re the only problem”

Ule was quick to respond, “You know I can’t stand that bossy rabbit. I can’t believe she was telling me how to raise my pups. “

“Ule, you are just going to have to deal with it and be thankful on top of it. I need to focus on training the kids. If they really get this project going, I’m going to have to speed up my lessons on running and evasion. It’s good Gary is older. I already taught him the basics. He can help teach the kids while I give him his advance lessons.”

Ule says, “See what I mean, you should have done that already. You always put things off. You better start right away.”

"I will, I will." Then he thought, that rabbit can make you weak.

To get an understanding of the story you need a better description of the deck and the yard. Let's start with the property. The lot is bigger than normal by California standards. It's about 90 feet wide with a big front yard about 65 feet deep. Looking at the property from the street you see a one lane concrete driveway on the right side that turns to service a two-car garage located on the left side of the property with an overhead door facing in, not towards the street. The garage never has a car in it because the family catering business uses up most of the space for equipment. Next there is a 15 foot concrete separation before you get to the house. Here there is a door. Although the door is to the front, it is clearly the "side" door.

The house is also tucked on the left side of the property with a side yard about 40 feet wide that is separated from the front by a picket fence with a gate. By walking through the gate and along the sidewalk you come upon the main entrance. On the left side is the house and on the right is the deck. Two sides of the deck are heavily landscaped with mature tropical plants, some taller than 20 feet.

Other than the obvious needed repairs the deck is beautiful. The breeze is great, made even better by the smell of the jasmine hedge that is part of the landscape plan. Tim, to the chagrin of Linda often comes out to sit and smoke cigarettes while watching TV through the picture window.

Behind the deck and house is the back yard that is beat up. The grass has never been healthy or attractive but now worse with the watering restrictions.

Because some of this story takes place under the deck, we need to give a more thorough description. The platform appears to be rectangular. Tim and CJ will find out that it really isn't. A couple homeowners back somebody built the deck. When they were sinking the foundations for the six columns they "got it close". One end of the deck is six inches narrower

than the other. This is no big thing unless you are measuring and cutting the replacement boards.

From a rabbit's perspective the floorboards of the deck is the roof. The spacing between the boards allows light to penetrate. Besides the general illumination you get the look of "stripes" on everything. The slits in the boards also allow for sound penetration but clearly the prime listening area is along the frame closest to the house. Because there is a sidewalk between the house and deck this frame board was constructed with a slightly bigger bottom margin. Immediately next to the house is a long bench with cushions. Tim often sits there so it becomes the most common place for human conversations. The "human language" classroom is a row of rabbits tucked next to the board with no eye contact with the speakers. The teacher, typically Harper, explains what is being said soundlessly by the humans. Whenever the humans gather to talk the class hurries into position. Harper begins each class with the message, "know your adversary".

Under the floorboards you have the structure that supports it. The outer frame is augmented by a double center board connecting the two long side frame pieces. In each half 18 piers were dug in and leveled. On them joists were nailed. Now the builder, or in this case rebuilder, can lay the floorboards down and fasten them into place with screws.

In the world below the boards, you have this vast area with a close to floor to ceiling border and a dividing piece in the center. Any rabbit can easily duck and run around the piers and beneath the joists. The outer and center frame require some digging. Over time five exits have been dug on the sides not facing the house. Two holes were dug under the center piece allowing access to both halves of the deck. These are lavish accommodations for any rabbit family, certainly big enough for two families.



Care had to be taken in the construction of the outer holes. They had to be big enough to fit the fattest resident rabbit, (Harper), traveling at top speed, but not big enough to allow Lola's drooling, barking snout. One good thing about the yard and deck being unkempt is the ease with which basic food could be accessed. On the back yard side grass could be eaten while still under the protection of the deck. With short runs out any of three sides yielded a bigger selection of foods. With a longer trip a wide range of delicacies could be eaten including fruit, berries and even vegetables from Linda's Garden. This enhanced menu came with risks. The biggest risk was Lola.

Harper gathered the kids together to give his first class on self-preservation. This one is entitled "Awareness."

Harper gathered everyone on the house side of the deck. The light was better and it might offer the practical experience of human conversation. He began.

"It appears that the humans are going to be changing the deck. They will be ripping up many if not all the top boards and replacing them. While they are doing this, we will have to move in with Uncle Ben and Jamie."

Gary piped in "Cool when can we go?"

Haile said, "What about Lola?"

Gary said, "Don't worry, It's not that far. I've been there a couple times. You just need to time it right, so Lola isn't out. Mom and Dad know how to do that."

Ule spoke up with a questioning voice, "I thought you only went over there once, with me. When did you go over there without me. I hope you were at least with your father."

Harper jumped in quickly to protect Gary from an angry mother and get back on track. "He made a trip with me once, I forgot to tell you." Gary just sat there quietly knowing dad had just saved his tail.

Harper began again. "Yes, we have a trip to make and yes it isn't that far. We will plan our trip to make sure Lola is not out. What we are talking about today is bigger than that. Rabbits have been blessed with many skills. It is our responsibility to always use those skills and not get lazy. Many rabbits have died senselessly because they didn't use the skills they have. The skill we are going to talk about today is "Awareness".

Harper paused for a moment to make the importance of what he is saying sink in. "There are many dangers in the world. We always think of Lola because she is the closest."

"And scary," said Haile.

Barry added, "She is so fast, I saw her chasing mom. Mom's fast too. I was glad Mom could duck back in under the deck before she got closer."

Harper liked the fact that the kids were participating in the class, but he had to keep it focused on the subject. "Yes, Lola is fast and scary." Harper looked at Haile and then Barry as he said each word that they had previously said.

Gary was noticing how Dad taught. He was good. He made it all interesting.

Harper began again, "There is more to fear than just Lola. You small pups need to keep an eye to the skies. We have many hawks and a couple families of owls nearby. The hawks you see during the day and the owls at night. Both are capable of swooping in and picking you up for dinner.

The next dangerous animal you need to watch out for are the coyotes. So far, we have been lucky they haven't crossed the street yet. I'll get to the street in a minute. The coyote is even worse than Lola for a couple reasons. First, they fight in packs and second they are fighting for food. OK, the pack thing, coyotes will sneak around you and while one advances on you the others lay in wait. When you try to escape the one that is coming your way you might run right into the trap of others ready to spring on you. Coyotes are always hungry. If Lola catches you, I don't think she would know how to eat you, she just wants to catch you. Coyotes know very well how to make a meal out of you. By the way you are just as dead either way. It's just that coyotes have a stronger driving force."

Harper looked up and saw that the kids were scared. With a comforting voice he said, "Remember we are smart and fast. If we don't get lazy and stay aware we can avoid most problems. When one does occur, we need to use all our skills to evade. Awareness is our strongest tool. It really isn't hard, but we need to do it all the time. Before you leave a position of safety you need to look and listen. It sounds so simple, but you wouldn't believe how many times I have seen rabbits run out into the open, usually in search of food, only to find out that a predator was there at the ready. The listening part is important. We understand what other animals are saying. Many don't know that we can do that. So before leaping out listen for what others are saying. I once heard one squirrel warning another about Lola being out on the prowl. I hadn't noticed Lola but by listening I knew danger was close."

Ule was watching Harper teach the kids thinking he is a good rabbit. He drives me crazy sometimes, but he really is a good father and mate.

Harper continued. "It is necessary for us to know how to get out of problems when they occur, but it is even more important to know how not to get into them. I mentioned the street before. Let me make myself clear. There is no reason for you to ever go into that street. The street kills. The only thing good about the street is that so far it keeps the coyotes away. Animals of all kinds die on that street every day. It's really simple, don't go there. The cars go so fast and in different directions. You may jump past the car that is bearing down on you, only to run into the path of another. If you are stupid enough and lucky enough to get to the other side, you then are in coyote territory with the only escape being back across the deadly road. Don't go in the street." Harper wondered if he needed to scare the pupils with specific stories of rabbits dying under the tires of vehicles. Looking into the eyes of his students he could see that they got it.

Just then Tim came out with Lola right behind him. The whole rabbit family froze and listened.

"Come on Lola, let's go bye bye in the car." Tim opened the door to let Lola jump in. He followed, started the car and drove away.

Harper said, "Ok that's enough class for today. Gary, take the kids out back and practice running. Work on turns as well as speed. Ok before you go out what do you do?"

"Look and listen." They responded.

"Right. Look and listen every time."

Lola was thinking. Short trip, long trip? Wind in the face. Maybe food. Wind in the face. Maybe butts to sniff, wind in the face. Music playing,

please don't sing, wind in the face. Short trip, just the store. Quick stop here we go again. Wind in the face.

"Sing us a song, you're the piano man..."

Oh no. Wind in the face.

Home already.

Ule hears the car pulling in the driveway. She yells, "They're home, come in right now. Come come."

Gary says sternly, "Ok guys, let's go. Right now, hurry, they're home." Everyone runs to safety before Lola gets out of the car.

As Tim and Lola are getting out of the car son Scot drives up and parks behind him. "Hey Scot, thanks for coming over."

Scot comes over to give Dad a hug and says "No problem. How's it look?"

As they walked over to the deck, "You tell me, you're Doctor Deck. How's your project coming?"

"It's a nut breaker. As you know, I've got the first deck done. Now I'm moving the shed. The foundation is pretty well rotted away. It's going to be a pain."

Tim asked, "How about your back wall?"

The back of Scot's property has a sloped hill about forty feet high. It is kind of tiered once with a couple eucalyptus trees growing on it. The bottom 15 feet or so is almost a straight drop. Scot is building a ten foot wall that does a couple things. First it secures the hillside. Next, it gives an attractive border to his back yard. Lots of labor went into that project.

"The wall is done and looks good." Scot said, "I'm glad that one is over with. I always seem to design stuff that ends up needing more time, money and labor than I figured."

Tim nodded, "Tell me about it. This started out as a simple repair. It grows daily."

CJ had previously pulled up 4 or 5 boards in two different areas of the deck. Scot walked around the whole deck quietly checking things out then he crouched down to get a better look at the piers and floor joists. Finally, he looked up and said, "Dad, I know what you are trying to do but I think you are screwed. I know you are trying to save floorboards..."

"Hey, they're seven bucks a piece, and there's a hundred and thirty of them."

"I know, I know but when you give them a good look even the good ones are kind of bad."

CJ jumped in with, "Yeah, I think we need to replace them all. If you are putting this much time and effort into something you might as well make it right."

Scot said, "Actually it's worse than that. You should replace all the boards but you need to replace many if not all of the floor joist." To further make his point he walked over to one of the piers and with a little bit of foot pressure was able to crack a joist. "Once you pull up all the boards I bet you'll see that you'll need to replace about half of the piers. That's a ball breaker."

"Thanks son"

Scot answered, "Hey I'm just sayin'. Some of these piers aren't gonna cut it, and they are a pain in the butt. They're heavy and they're awkward. You've got to dig the hole, muscle them in there and then make sure they are level with the next one in all directions." Scot said as he gestured his way through digging, heavy lifting, leveling and final inspection.

“When they are not, which will happen, you then need to yank them out of the hole make it deeper or shallower and then do the whole thing all over again. When you get done you have to hammer the new joist into place, and they need to be level to receive the floorboards. It’s a pain.”

Tim listened and was not happy with what he heard. “You got any other good news like I need a root canal or something?”

“Yeah Dad, the good news is it will look great when it’s done.”

Gary guided Haile and Bary as all three ran in the same hole and immediately headed for the nest.

This is not good.

Everybody knew to head to the nest.

Harper runs up and says, “Ule, kids, come here.”

Everybody came up close.

Harper with authority said, “We’re going to be ok. They’re just testing. It’s ok, it’s ok. They are talking about a project they will be starting some number of days from now, maybe weeks, then. we will need to move in with Uncle Ben. It will be soon, probably not now but soon. Right now, I need all of you to go to hole, ‘Dooly’ and wait. I’m going back to Frontland. I need to hear what they are planning. Just go to Dooley.”

All looked on and lovingly nodded before dashing to Dooly.

Dooley was a hole to the back yard that was created by the rabbit that lived here before. Dooley, a friendly rabbit, found Harper and Ule looking for a suitable home next door at the mobile home park. He invited his new friends to his home under the deck. Dooley has since passed on but the name of the hole leading to the back yard still bears his name.

Commented [CD2]: Right now, you are using two lines to represent a perspective change. You don’t keep to this pattern throughout the book. Pick a format and stick to it.

"Sorry Dad." Scot said, knowing that his advice just cost Dad money.

Tim said, "It's not your fault. I appreciate your help. Hey, I'm in this. It's a good investment. It's just that it's going to be a bigger investment than I figured. Specifically, what do I need to buy?"

CJ then asked, "Can I offer a suggestion...." After a pause he knew to proceed.

"I want to build the deck."

Scot said immediately, "Great."

Tim asked, "Are you sure you've got the time? Remember, you're working pumpkins now. "

CJ said, "I know, but I've got the time. "CJ looks Tim in the face and says, "You paint and I build."

Tim says, "Go on, I think I like this."

"OK. You've got a bunch of painting to do. I bet you've got a couple weeks work there. "

Tim said, "Yeah, that's about right."

CJ then continued, "I know what I've got to do. First, I need to strip the whole deck. I'll need a longer crowbar but with it I can tear off the boards quickly. As I do it, I need to carry all the wood to a pile in the front."

Tim interrupts, "The guys doing the back are going to cart away all our debris when they take out theirs. I just pay for an extra dump fee."

CJ, "Good, once I get the top off, we'll see how many joists and piers we have to replace. You keep buying the supplies and painting and I will stay ahead of you on the actual construction."

Scot said, "I like your gumption, it's a lot of work. The tough part is working with the piers. You've got to muscle them in, trial level, pull them out and muscle them in again. It's a pain."

"I know, but I can do it. When we're done, I want to be able to say that I built this deck."

Tim smiled and nodded, "That's great, I'm just afraid you won't have the time to get it done by the time Linda's brother comes to visit."

"How much time do I have?"

Tim said, "Just under a month."

"I can do that."

"OK, It's all yours. I'll paint everything. The tough day will be planting the piers. I'll hire a guy to help you with that because if you are struggling, I will want to help. That's the last thing I need to be doing."

Tim has already had one heart attack and two back surgeries. Linda won't let him do any heavy lifting.

CJ then asked, "I wasn't here when you guys met with the backyard guy. What did you decide to do?"

Just then Scot called out, "Hey look, Check out the rabbit."

All turned to see a full-size rabbit standing on the ground under where boards were freshly removed.

CJ said, "That's the rabbit that Gramma was talking about."

Tim said, "Yeah there is a whole family down there. They're in for a surprise."

Scot then asked, "Yeah what's going on with the back yard? Are you doing more than the deck?"

“Yeah, we’re going full boat. I’m doing pavers, turf and a block wall to set off the landscaping.”

CJ then said, “That’s cool, have you worked out a design?”

Tim said, “Yeah and in the middle is a bocce ball court.”

Scot said, “Really, a friend of mine put one in. I went over to play the other night. It’s fun.”

CJ asked, “I’ve heard of it, but I don’t really know what it is.”

Tim said, “It’s kind of like horseshoes but you have a small ball instead of a stake and larger balls instead of shoes. The first guy throws the small ball called the bolina and then tries to throw one of his bigger balls as close as he can. Both teams have four balls. You score it like horseshoes, but the game is only to seven.”

Scot said, “The cool part is women and kids can play. That just doesn’t work with horseshoes. We all liked it.”

“The good news is that the court complete with border costs less per foot than either pavers or turf. I’m also adding air conditioning, solar and a hot tub.”

Scot said with a surprising tone, “You got mom to go along with all of that. You’ve got to be kidding.”

“I showed her the math. I worked it all into the refinance. We get the money to do all that and still lower our monthly payment because of the new rate. She even threw in the need for a water feature back in the corner.”

CJ said, “Hey Gramma is willing to go along with stuff if it makes sense. Remember she’s a numbers person. When are you doing all this?”

“The back-yard guys start in just over a week. They say it will take them two weeks to finish. So, they’re on about the same timeline as we are

with the deck. All the outside stuff should be finished by the time Ray and Cindy arrive. The big question is can you finish the deck in time now that you have picked up the second job?"

"I think I can." He said. "It's easy enough work, and I always have a few friends that can jump in and help out."

Harper ran back to Dooley and saw the whole family gathered in fear. "It's alright, it's alright. It's just like I thought. We've got a couple days, probably a week before we need to move. They are fixing up the whole back yard. CJ's job is to tear up the boards. That will take at least three days probably longer because he works a lot.

Tonight, I need to go over to Ben's and tell him we are coming. Gary, I need you to start running the kids on laps. Start them on threes but I need them to get up to five without stopping."

Gary understood his job. Almost everything they did was under the back half of the deck. The house side was for listening and teaching. The other far side was the nest. The little ones slept close to mom and dad but Gary kind of developed his own area along the same outer wall but further down towards the back yard. The big space in the middle wasn't used for much. That became the training track.

It was necessary for young rabbits to develop speed, stamina, and dexterity. Running laps became the training regimen. There were enough straightaways to develop speed and enough turns to teach dexterity. Strength was accomplished by running them over and over. Gary understood Dad's order to make five laps. Gary figured the distance to Uncle Ben's was about the same as four laps. Dad wanted to make sure the kids could run more than that without stopping. He also wanted them to be able to do that at full speed. Lastly, he wanted them to be able to make quick turns in case they needed to evade.

Gary got right on the training. The kids thought it was fun at first. After about ten runs of three it became work. Gary would run with them every other run. He would always lead setting the pace. He would stop at each turn to watch his students make what should be a 180 degree turn. As expected, they start out wide and then come across and veer out wide again. Gary would correct them, keeping the turns in tight. After each turn, he would speed by them to judge them on the next one. Gary remembered Dad doing the same thing to him.

After each set of three laps, they would rest for about 30 seconds. After seven sets they took a break. Haille said, "Why do we have to run so much?"

Barry answered before Gary had a chance. "We need to outrun Lola in case she gets out while we are running to Uncle Ben's."

Gary said, "Actually, you need to be able to outrun Lola all the time. Remember Lola is about as fast as Mom and Dad."

Barry said, "And you."

"Yeah, and me. That's why I keep working you on your turns. If you learn to turn well, you can leave Lola running the wrong way while you escape. That's Dad's next lesson, EVASION. I'm still learning. This year Dad is going to teach me his "double turn". It is so cool."

Haille said, "I saw him do that once, I couldn't believe it. It looked like he turned around in midair. It was beautiful."

Gary went back into coach mode. "OK let's go. This time we are doing five laps at a time. Remember your turns. Hit them tight. Ready...Go."

The training went on until dusk. Harper called Gary over and said, "That was a good session with the kids."

"Yeah, they're beat. They're getting the turns down good with pretty good speed."

Harper said, "Get some rest, we're going to Ben's tonight."

Gary thought, Cool, Josie. Then he said, "Can you give me a lesson on the double turn?"

"Yeah, I can do that. Hopefully you will get it enough so you can practice on your own."

"Exactly."

About an hour later they were poised at the hole in Frontland. They noticed how much of the roof was torn off. Harper looked at Gary and asked without saying anything. Gary responded to the look with, "Look and listen."

The coast was clear. Lola was in the house. They darted out into the front yard. The first thing they noticed was a pile of wood, previously parts of the roof, were haphazardly thrown in the front yard. They moved beyond that to the open yard. One of the things both enjoyed about the front yard was the choices in food. Grass was everywhere in their world, but the front had some delicious trees, bushes and fallen fruit. They ate their fill. Now it was time for the class.

Harper began. "You are fast, and you make good turns. It is time to learn the double. The fundamentals that you already know are essential in moving it up a notch. You know how we steer with the front feet and power with the back. You know how we lean into the turn. All of that must be extenuated to accomplish the double. At first it will feel weird, but you will get used to it."

Gary was hanging on every word.

Harper continued, "Think about making a hard-left turn. Slow it down in your mind. Visualize what each part of your body is doing during the turn."

Gary was thinking and nodding compliance. Harper continued, "OK for the double you have to slow it down, just a little or you'll flip over. Think

about the turn one hop in. In the beginning you may need to think about it a couple hops in. After you get it down you will only need one hop. Anyway, you know you're going to make the turn, you don't just lean into the turn as you usually do, you throw your front, head, shoulders, and feet towards the left. It will feel weird and takes practice. As you are doing that your right foot jumps and immediately jumps again. This can be hard. For your whole life both back feet jumped together. Now you must mentally make your right foot throw in another jump."

Gary said, "That's gonna feel weird."

"Yes, it will, and you are going to take a few spills while getting it. Visualize it in your mind, real slow, then make it happen."

"Now?"

Harper gave a look like what are you waiting for?

Gary took five hearty jumps and then tumbled to the left. As he came back to his dad he said, "I think I did everything wrong."

"Pretty close. It takes practice. I need to make sure you've got it in your mind. Let's go through it again. Reduce speed a little, throw your body to the left and then after the first jump with two feet force your right foot to kick again."

Gary said, "I think I've got it in my mind. It's getting my body moving right that's the hard part."

"The visualization is the hard part. Once you go over it in your mind a couple dozen times it's easier for the body to react. Keep thinking about it. Let's go to Ben's."

The two ducked behind the garage and under the shed to arrive at Ben and Jamie's.

Ben was the first to speak. "Hey look who's here. Big things happening around here today. Fill me in with what you know."

Harper took them through the story of the deck, back yard, timing, and fears.

Jamie quickly said, "Well you guys are going to have to move in over here for a while. Is Ule going to be alright with that?"

Harper paused and then said, "She's going to have to. I'm hoping this will cause a healing of feelings."

Ben said, "That would be great. Let me tell you what happened yesterday." He was happy to change the subject. "I was out eating fallen oranges, which by the way are great right now, when CJ came out the side door. I immediately started running to the back yard when around the corner Lola came running, snarling, and looking hungry. I didn't even have time to stop. I hit a full speed double left and ran right past CJ back under the shed. My heart was pumpin'."

Everybody loved the story. Ben, like his brother, could tell a good story. Harper gave a look at Gary who understood the practical example of his recent lesson. Then Harper said, "It appears the CJ will be doing most of the tear out. It looks like he is going to start in Frontland. It will probably be close to a week before he gets to where we live. Ule won't let me wait that long, besides times are going to get weird with the contractors tearing out the back yard."

Ben asked, "When is that gonna start?"

"I think next week"

Ben said, "We need to warn the moles."

Harper agreed knowing it would be a hard conversation. Moles are dim to begin with but now I must try to explain how their entire world is going to crash. The whole back yard is going to be covered with a hard surface. The only place they will be able to come up will be on the ends of the yard that will be landscaped. To make matters worse the initial tear out will destroy most of their tunnels. The obvious answer is to move to the front

yard. The problem with that solution is another family squabble. Harper thought that he needed to tell this story to Gary. We all need to learn that we make mistakes. We need to apologize and forgive. Holding grudges helps no one. We must get over things and move on. Here we have rabbits and moles having to struggle through doing what should be obvious. Gary needs to learn this. After another pause, he thought Ule really needs to learn this.

Thinking about the moles Harper said, "I'm not looking forward to it, but I'll do it. They must be told." Harper then looked over and noticed that Josie was leaning up against Gary. The inevitable is happening. This is something else I'm going to have to talk about with Ule. What a week.

Harper said, "Look we need to get back. Ule and the kids have had a rough day. We need to be there to settle them down." He could tell that Gary was disappointed that the visit was over.

Jamie said, "Please make sure that I said that we have plenty of room and that all of you are welcome."

Gary and Harper both knew that Jamie was doing her best to make Ule feel as comfortable as possible. They said a quick goodbye to everyone else and began to head back. When they got to the front yard Gary took another couple tries at the double. His last attempt was the best one. Harper thought it was best to end on a high. He motioned for Gary to head home. They ran through the fence and into the hole. They continued at a run until they were back at the nest. Ule and the kids were happy to see them return.

"How did it go?" Ule asked.

"Good. Everyone there is well. They wanted to hear what we've learned."

Gary spoke up, "Jamie was really nice. She made a point of saying that we are welcome for as long as we want."

Ule just shrugged and didn't say anything. Harper began, "Yeah, the front yard has got all the wood that CJ has torn off. Their place looks good and certainly roomy enough for all of us. I ended up with the job of telling the moles what's going on."

Ule said, "That won't be fun."

"No. Ben told a funny story about being out by the fruit trees when CJ came out the door. He ran towards the back yard and as he did Lola came around the corner in full hunt mode. He had to pop a double and run back right by CJ and under the shed. The timing of his story was perfect because Gary was practicing his double on the way over there."

Gary said, "I don't know if you would say practicing. I was more falling and tumbling than practicing."

Haile and Barry laughed.

Ule spoke up first looking at the kids "Wait until you try to learn the double. It's hard. Gary, your dad and Ben both had to practice for a while before they got it. You'll tumble a few times until you get it. Then it will be second nature. You'll be fine."

Gary said, "I hope so. I think I've got it in my head I just need to make my body catch on."

Harper said, "You'll be fine son. You'll be fine. I think we need to plan the move for the day after tomorrow."

Ule asked, "Are you sure we have time? We're going at night, right?"

"Yes and yes. There's no way CJ is going to get to us in two days and yeah, we'll leave late after everyone is home and in bed."

Haile asked, "Including Lola?"

Ule answered, "Yeah, Lola will be sound asleep, and the door will be closed. Don't worry. Your dad and I will make sure you guys are safe. That's what parents do."

All the kids including Gary looked up and smiled. Harper then said, "Alright I want everyone to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow, I want a full training day. If Lola goes away in the car I want you running outside. While she is here train like you did today. Remember I want you to be able to make five laps at full speed with good turns."

Everyone nodded and headed off towards their sleeping place. Gary kept going over the moves for the double. He kept thinking that through with every thought that wasn't about Josie.

Chapter 3

“Morning hon” Tim said as he sipped his coffee.

“Morning” Linda said and then added, “You’re up early”

Ule and Gary heard the humans. They woke everyone else, and all ran over to the teaching wall.

“Yeah, I’ve got a busy day. Five different contractors are coming by today. Two solar, one air conditioning and two for the back yard.”

Linda asked, “Have you got Harry and Annie’s guy coming? They liked him for price and work.”

“Yeah, he’s here at ten. We already talked about the needed time frame and debris removal. The ac guy is here then too. Both solar guys and the other yard guy are here this afternoon. In between there I’m ordering the planks and picking up the paint. Tomorrow I’ve got the other ac guy. It’s amazing that when you’re willing to spend money these guys are quick to respond to give you a quote.”

“What’s CJ’s schedule?” Linda asked.

Just then CJ came walking out with a cup of coffee in hand. “I’m in at Subway from 11 to 7. No pumpkins today. Bumps, are you making a Home Depot run?”

“Yeah, I’m starting with that so I’ll be back here for my ten.”

CJ asked, “Can I come with you? I want to pick out the big crowbar, and I think we need a sledge too.”

“Yeah, as soon as I finish my coffee. I need to call the mortgage guy and up the numbers. I want to close next week. When I last talked to him, he didn’t think that would be a problem.”

Linda said, “This is all happening fast. Are you on top of this?”

"I've got it. I've set up files for everything. I'll be able to compare quotes, make a timeline and have a system for all the receipts. I'll have many Home Depot runs. It's going to take all these guys a couple days to put together their quotes. The only ones that are time sensitive are the back-yard guys. The solar and Ac will require permits from the city. They probably won't be done by the time your brother arrives. I don't really care if they aren't in the middle of a construction mess when our guests are here. I really want the back yard and deck done by the time they get here."

CJ said, "No pressure."

Linda said, "Hey you said that..."

"I know, I know and I will be done. I promise." Looking at Tim he added, "You keep buying what I need and keep up on the painting. I'll be done in time."

Linda said, "OK I've got to go to work."

"Good, somebody has to."

Linda looked at Tim and added, "You aren't going to sign anything before..."

"I know, I know. Give me a break. I won't get ahead of myself here. I've got enough grunt work to keep me busy."

Linda said, "OK I'll see you after work. I'm defrosting chicken for dinner. Do you want rice or potatoes?"

"Arroz con pollo sounds good."

"Yeah it does."

Tim gets up, kisses Linda goodbye, and walks to the center of the back yard to further visualize his plan. He's happy that this is finally coming

together, at least in his mind. "Come on CJ lets hit Home Depot. Get Lola."

The three of them get in the car to go. With a project of this magnitude, you need stuff in different isles. Tim went to wood and CJ went to tools. Tim wanted to have the 110 planks delivered. He also wanted to take home a couple joists so that they would have them for measuring and laying out. He didn't know how many he would need in the end. As he was leaving lumber heading towards paint, he stopped in hardware. He saw the size and type of screw CJ would need to fasten the planks. He picked up one box hoping that he would only need two by the time he was done. He caught up with CJ in tools. He asked, "What are you looking at?"

He already had a three-foot crow bar in his hand. "I'm going to need a power driver. This one should do the trick. I also want to get a sledge. There's one over here that has a hammer end on one side and a wedge on the other."

"Throw it on" Tim already had the joists and screws on one of those carts designed for moving lumber. "I'm heading for paint."

He picked out a gallon of "peanut butter" colored for the top joists. He also got a gallon of white primer. He was picking out what shade of brown he wanted for the deck and shutters. For that one he needed the big jug. As all of it was being mixed and shaken, he picked out brushes, rollers, pans and tape. Everything was more expensive than the last time he painted. There was too much weird stuff for self-check-out, so he went to a regular line.

When they got to the car, they saw that Lola would need to move to fit in the joists. CJ carefully placed them from dashboard to back gate down the center of the car. The paint and other stuff fit nicely in the back and Lola crammed herself in on the one back seat that wasn't lowered.

They headed home and started unloading. Lola is a creature of habit. She always gets out the driver's door. Now she was stuck in the back and on

the wrong side. She was attempting to jump the lumber when CJ opened her back door and coaxed her out. Lola is loving and wonderful but dumber than dirt. As she was exiting, she saw a rabbit. She immediately went into hunt mode. She chased the rabbit who escaped under the fence. Lola was not happy.

Harper turned to Ule and said, "I told you we've got time. They're just getting started. OK, Linda's gone to work and these two are going shopping. Gary, take the kids out back and start their training. Use the time to work on your jump as well."

They headed out. Gary explained where the turning points are. He started taking them through their reps. He had been thinking about his jump most of the night. As dad had said he was able to visualize it in his mind. He took his first shot at it, and it was the best one he had attempted. He tried to practice when the kids were busy running. He didn't want any wisecracks from the little ones. He got a couple down well, not great but pretty good. He tried one more and lost it. Flip, turn, tumble and then worst of all laughter. Haile and Barry were running in his direction when he wiped out. They immediately stopped running and began snickering.

"Hey, wait a minute. You don't know how hard this is. You'll see, if dad ever thinks you're good enough to learn", Gary said sternly. The little ones knew better than to push it. They started running again. Just then Harper came over and said, "You're getting it. It just takes practice. You need to fall to learn. Every time you fall think of it as a victory."

"Victory?"

Harper said wisely, "Yeah you're going to have to get in so many falls to learn the jump. Every time you wipe out, you're that much closer to winning."

Gary understood what he was saying but wished the falls were already behind him. He just looked at dad and smiled.

Harper said, "Keep working the kids and keep practicing. While they are gone, I'm going to check out the front. CJ is going to throw more wood on that pile out there. I want to have a plan for tomorrow night's trip even if the pile grows."

Both nodded and went about their business. A little later on Gary heard the car coming in. Without needing to say anything all ran to the safety of the deck. Gary knowing that dad was out front ran past the nest through Frontland and up to the outer border near the entrance. Haille and Barry ran right behind him. Mom saw what was going on and followed also. Just then Harper came flying through the hole. Ule looked up and said, "Are you OK?"

Harper answered with hastened breath, "Yeah for some reason Lola got out the other side of the car. She never gets out that side. That put her a little closer to me than I figured. I still outran her."

Ule looked over and said, "Awareness."

"I know, I know"

Just then Haile asked, "Dad, what does poke mean?"

Harper was happy that the subject had changed. "Who said it?"

"Lola."

Gary thought this is going to be great. He remembers this as one of dad's best stories. Ule was not so enthusiastic.

Harper began, "OK, to understand poke you need to know shit."

The kids began to giggle.

Ule spoke up, "Do we really have to do this?"

Harper with confidence said, "Yeah, they need to know". Then turning to the kids, he said, "You know what shit is right? You know, poop, crap. Well, all animals crap but it takes on different forms. Ours come in dry pebbles. Because we don't eat meat it doesn't smell too bad."

Ule rolls her eyes hoping for this to be over soon. Gary is laughing to himself while not letting mom know how much fun he is having.

Harper continues, "Meat eating animals like humans, dogs and coyotes make bigger plops that are moist and smell bad."

Haille said, "I've seen Lola's. It's disgusting." Barry nodded his head in agreement.

Harper begins again, "Well, some number of humans ago, somebody stepped in poop, probably from a dog and said shit. Stepping in dog poop is particularly disturbing for a couple reasons. First it feels squishy" All the kids groaned saying gross and the like.

"The second problem is when you step on it, it spreads around releasing this horrible odor that had been hidden in the pile. And that's gross too. Then it gets worse. Most humans wear shoes most of the time and once they've stepped in it..."

Ule again shows her displeasure with this topic by lifting her head and turning away. The kids were loving this.

"So, they need to get it off their shoe. They start dragging their foot on the ground. This gets most of it but not all. So, they find a hard-edged surface like a step or curb and scrape it on there as well. Because most of their shoes have wrinkles in the bottom they call tread, when the poop gets in there it won't scrape off. Now they've got to take the shoe off and find a stick or something sharp to dig the moist crap out of the wrinkles. Until they get it all off the smell will travel with them wherever they go."

Gary was working so hard at not laughing. It almost hurt.

"To a human stepping in poop is really bad. It happens suddenly and they know it is bad."

Barry asked, "What's this got to do with poke?"

Harper had maintained a straight face throughout. He says, "Just stay with me. So, some number of humans ago somebody stepped in it and said "shit!"

Haille then said, "We see that dad, but what does it have to do with poke?"

Harper again, "Well, over time the word took on another meaning. When a sudden bad thing happens, like stepping in..." Harper looks over at Ule then ends the sentence with "it" and continues, "so you'll hear humans say it when there is no poop around."

Barry said, "Yeah I've heard Tim and CJ say shit a lot."

Gary added, "Linda too."

Ule who had been well staying out of it could take no more. "You did not."

Gary quickly said, "Yeah, I did."

Ule said with attitude, "She's too much of a lady to say that."

Gary quickly defended, "I'm just saying. She was carrying food out to the table on the deck at the last party they had, and some food fell off the dish. And she said it."

Ule knew it probably happened as Gary said so she just left it alone.

Harper said, "That's my point. Something sudden and bad happened so she said shit."

Haile said, "but Lola didn't say shit, she said poke."

Gary then said, "Lola doesn't step in shit."

Barry said, "What, is she poop smart?"

Harper continued, "Well her eyes are close to the ground and her focus is close in. Human's eyes are way up high and they're frequently looking off in the distance to the point where they don't always see what they are stepping in. So what's sudden and bad for Lola?"

Haile questioned, "Poke?"

With the question Harper could tell that they still didn't get it. "Lola is wired to hunt. When she sees one of us, a squirrel, or bird in the bush she charges in full speed and often gets poked in the eye by a branch or a twig."

Haille and Barry were nodding like they just had an "aha" experience, Barry piped in. "So after some number of times being poked..."

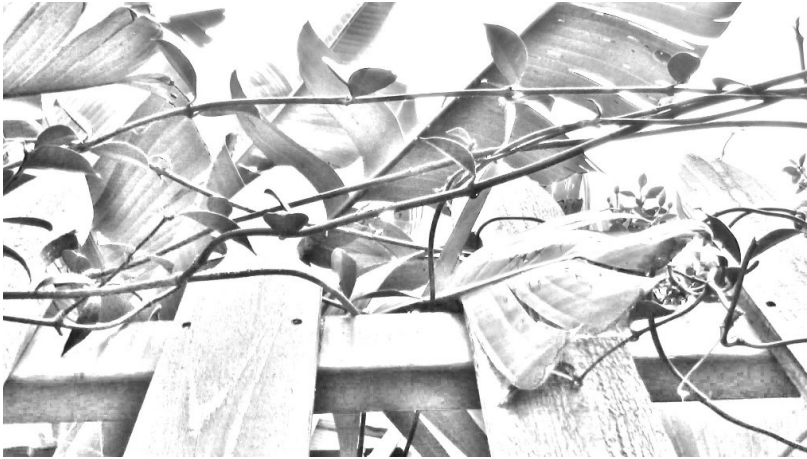
Haille continued the sentence with "which is a sudden and bad experience"

Harper concludes, "Yeah a different sudden and bad experience, like me beating her to the fence, she says poke."

The kids loved it. Gary kept thinking how cool dad was in telling the story. He began to hope that he would be able to tell it to his kids someday. He then began to think of Josie.

Lola saw they were headed for the car. Here we go. Shot ride, long ride, she thought. Jump up on seat head to window. Uh oh CJ coming. Jump to back seat. Open window, come on open window, OK. Short ride long ride? Wind in the face, wind in the face. Food, maybe? Wind in the face. Parking. They leave. Find a shady spot, lay down.

Here they come. What's all this? Woo, long wood. Stuck in back. Not much room. Still have window. Wind in the face. Home, let me out. I can't get out my door. Here he comes. Open door, RABBIT, RABBIT. RUN, RUN. Fence, rabbit got away. Poke.



Chapter 4

The morning ritual began with Tim taking a seat on the bench with a cup of coffee in hand. Linda and CJ came out as Linda said, "What's on the agenda today?"

"I've got more quotes coming in on solar and air conditioning. When that's done, I'm going to prep tomorrow's meal."

"We're locked in with Harry's guy on the back yard?" Linda asked.

"Yeah, they start Monday. We must go over to the rock place to pick out the color of pavers and blocks for the wall. I kept pressing them on being done in time for our guests. They keep telling me not to worry."

CJ asked, "I'm working at noon, can you drop me off on the way in?"

"No problem. Do you have pumpkins tonight?" Tim asked.

"Yeah, I won't be home until after 10:00 tonight." CJ responded.

"Another long day" Linda began. "Are you sure...?"

CJ politely interrupted, "I'm good. I know I have three plus weeks to get it all done. Have faith. What are we cooking this week?"

"Lasagna." Tim stated.

"I love your lasagna. What, are you going in to make the sauce today?" CJ asked.

"Plus doing all the shopping. Tomorrow I'll just have to build and bake while you are making all the salads."

CJ asked, "With the Italian meal, am I adding a caprese? If so, I need to remember to grab some fresh basil from home."

Tim nodded.

Linda asked, "Do we need to go to the rock store today?"

"No, we've got time. They don't start until next week and the first three days are devoted to tear out. The store has it all in inventory. I thought we'd go this Saturday."

"Yeah, we can do that. This is going to be fun. OK, I'm off to work. How about pizza tonight?"

"Sounds good." Tim said as they all went about getting ready for their day.

Everybody took positions at the learning wall. Once the humans left Harper began. "OK that's good. Nothing is going to happen here today. We're going to put off the move until tomorrow night. Gary, I want you to run the kids the other way in the back yard. They need to work on right turns. You can practice your double. After a while I want you to start on turning the other way. You need to know both."

Gary looked up, "I barely have the left down."

Harper said with encouragement, "I know, keep working the left. Once your brain knows how to tell your body what to do, it is easy to tell it how to do the right turn. You'll see."

Ule spoke up, "Are you sure we have another day? What if tomorrow he finishes the whole deck?"

"He can't. It's going to take him three or four days to tear it all out. This is much better. I need the kids to know right and left turns with speed. Tonight I will teach evasion."

Ule and Gary both knew that class and understood that it would be good for the kids to have it. The plan was set.

Linda left for work. A couple hours later Tim, CJ and Lola left as well. As soon as the car left the driveway Gary took the kids out for training. He decided to run one more set of left turns before beginning on the right. He wanted them to get the feel for right turn after they have been running in the other direction. It accomplished his goal. The first set of laps were bad. The turns were wide with lots of missteps. Even the kids were laughing at how poorly they were doing. "It feels weird," said Haille.

Barry chimed in with, "my brain is thinking right while my body is trying to turn left."

Gary spoke with an air of wisdom, "Yeah, like everything else it takes practice. You need to get your mind capable of reacting to your wishes. Then your brain tells your body what muscles to move to go in the direction you want. Now you are running laps in one direction, stopping and then starting the other way. Once you have the fundamentals down on good tight left and right turns you need to be able to change directions at will." The kids knew that was going to be hard, but they also knew with practice they would get it down.

After multiple reps of right and left turns Gary changed the program by letting them run in one direction and then calling out "Change". With that command they would have to stop and begin running the other way. This was a disaster at first with lots of unwanted tumbling. Gary started out giving the change command when they were in the straightaways. That was hard enough. It got even harder when he started reversing them when they were in the middle of a turn. He called for a break.

As the kids were catching their breath Gary asked, "What have you learned?"

Barry responded while still panting a little. "This is hard"

Haille added, "When I hear you yell change it takes me a second to get the brain/body thing going to make it happen."

Gary addressed his class of two, "That's why we practice. Remember this training is not to make you good at running laps. In the real world you will be out playing or eating and something will happen. Maybe it's Lola." Gary saw the kids take on a look of fear with the mention of her name. He continued. "Dad will get into evasion later in class. What you are learning now is how to make your turns when you tell yourself to. The quicker you can make them the better your chances are getting Lola running the wrong way while you find safety."

The kids got it. Harper and Ule watched with pride. Ule said, "Gary is a good teacher. He gets that from you."

Harper looked up and smiled at the compliment. Reluctantly he began a conversation that he knew would be difficult. "Ule, we've got to talk about the move, specifically Jamie."

Here it comes. He could tell by the look on her face that this was going to be trouble. She began, "You know I don't like that bossy rabbit. For the safety of my family, we have to move in with them but I don't like it and I don't like her."

“Ok but think for a minute, why don’t you like her?”

Ule quickly said, “You know..... she told me to better look out for my pups because I lost Jack.”

“That is not what happened, I was there too. Look, it was a terrible day, more than a day it was just terrible. We all felt bad, but she wasn’t blaming you.”

Ule defensively said, “She certainly did. She told me to better watch out for Gary and the new pups when they arrive, or I’ll lose them too.” She was almost in tears.

Harper knew he was at a dangerous point in the conversation, so he moved into it carefully. “First, that isn’t what she said...”

Ule interrupted, “It is so.”

Harper calmly began again, “No it isn’t exactly what she said and it certainly wasn’t what she meant. Look, Jack was a special rabbit.”

Ule interrupted again, “Is a special rabbit.”

“OK... is a special rabbit but he had wanderlust. He wanted more than just our world. He saw that big open area across the street and needed to explore. There is nothing any of us could have done to change that. When we realized that he had gone to that dangerous place we were all heart broken. Now maybe Jamie said it wrong, but she wasn’t accusing you of being a bad mother. I think she was saying it more to herself than to you. Remember she was going to be a mom for the first time. She was scared and fearful that one of her pups might wonder into harm’s way as well. You took her comment over the top and haven’t come back. Jamie is a good rabbit. I need you to forgive her.”

Ule paused and then began, "I don't know if I can. That hurt me so much. I was already crushed at Jack being gone, then her telling me that I caused it was a knife in my heart."

Harper began again, "That's not exactly what she said and certainly not even close to what she meant. Forgiveness is good. You've got to let it go. What good does your anger do?"

"She knows that I don't like what she said and that I don't like her."

Harper again asked, "Yeah, but what good does your anger do? Let's say she said the wrong thing. She would and has admitted that. Let's even say that you are right, and she was accusing you. Again, I ask, what good does your anger do? She has apologized. She can't take back what she said. She has on many occasions tried to tell you that she wasn't trying to blame you. What good does your anger do? It's eating you up inside. Let it go, you'll feel better, and the family definitely will feel better."

Ule paused, then said, "I've been mad for so long I don't know if I can just let it go like that."

Harper chimed in with a smile, "Sure you can. You'll feel better. The move will be much easier and... I think you need to for another reason."

"Josie?" Ule asked. She had noticed the signs.

"Yeah, Josie and Gary. I've been watching the way they look at each other. I remember the first time I looked at you like that."

Ule with a coy smile said, "I remember that day. I also remember looking back."

"I definitely remember that. My heart was beating out of my chest. That's when our life together began. That was so scary back then. Every day we feared for our life. Remember the day when Gnash almost got us? That root saved our lives."

Ule started to think back to when they lived across the street. There were no buildings or deck to hide under. They had to burrow out a place to live. They didn't know it at the time but the site they chose to create a home was under a large bush. The leaves gave cover but that didn't help much because the coyotes could pick up their scent and they could dig if they were hungry. They were always hungry. It was the root system that saved them. Harper and Ule had burrowed down until they hit a large root. They tried to go around it and ran into another root. There was one spot between the two roots that was big enough for them to squeeze through. Luckily that spot was too small for the coyotes. They could dig up to it but not make it through. They tried to dig in from a different spot but could never make it to the inner sanctum. Even knowing they were safely protected from the predators it was still frightening, hearing the coyotes digging and swearing just inches from them. Finally, they would give up and chase something else for dinner. Ule physically shook with the memory and then said, "I'm so glad we made it over here. "She then changed the subject with, "So you think Gary and Josie have a thing going on?"

"If they don't, they soon will. It always starts with the look."

Ule coyly said, "You don't look at me like that anymore."

"I do so. In fact, I'm looking at you right now. You are my mate. You are the mother of my pups and a great mother I might add. I still remember you nursing the young ones. As they grew a little you would go out and gather grass and bring home cheeks full of food for them. You teach them to care for each other. You teach them love. You're mine forever."

Ule hadn't felt this good in a long time. She thought, I can force myself to forgive Jamie. We will probably be grammas to the same kids. I need to make this work. "OK, I'll make up with Jamie. I still believe that she meant to accuse me, but I see that it doesn't matter. I will forgive her, and no, I won't make a big deal out of it, I will just start talking to her and make friends."

Harper was delighted.

Tim and Lola got in the car. Lola took her place in the copilot seat until she saw CJ coming. She knew the pecking order and quickly moved to the back. CJ said, "Lasagna huh?"

Tim responded, "Yeah let's review how to make meat sauce."

CJ thought for a second, "OK, you start with 5 lbs. of ground beef and 5 lbs. of that sausage."

"Yeah, spicy chicken Parmesan sausage. Bulk not linked. I'm stopping by Sprouts to order it on the way in. Which do you cook first?"

"You start with the ground beef because it makes grease. You drain it in the colander and use the same pan to cook the sausage."

"What about the sauce?" Tim asked.

CJ answered, "OK, one can of crushed tomatoes, one sauce and three marinara. OH, you need one onion and two peppers fine cut and cooked in the same pan again. Then a palm of Italian seasoning with an extra palm of basil."

"Ok, then you dump in all together?"

CJ recognized the trick question said, "No, you keep one marinara out to build the lasagna. That way we make a cheese lasagna with a meat sauce. If we have any vegetarians, we'll be good to go."

Tim said, "Very good" as they pulled up to Subway. CJ got out and Lola moved up to the front. Tim thought, CJ learns well. He likes catering and thinks while he is working.

Lola heard bye bye and ran to the car. Tim opened the door and she took her front seat. When she saw CJ she moved to the back. " Open the

window, open the window,". The window opened as if she commanded it. Wind in the face wind in the face, long trip? Short trip? Wind in the face. They're talking. CJ leaves, front seat, front seat. Long trip, short trip? Long trip, good, maybe food, wind in the face.

Commented [CD3]: Dog Talk

Lola's typical driving position is front legs on arm rest with head and neck sticking out the window. She's good to about 55 mph. When Tim drives faster she ducks back in the car usually shaking her head complete with ear flops. The high-speed wind is a problem but an occasional bug is painful. Motorcycle drivers and Lola know the pain of taking a bug on the cheek at high speeds.

Lola soon got excited as they pulled up to the Lodge. Tim and Linda were members of the Elks Lodge. It is also the place where Rotary has its weekly luncheon that Tim caters. For Lola it was a special place. She is let out of the car to wander the grounds pretty much at will. The visits here are usually for a long time and almost always involve food. As Tim preps or cooks he usually generates some goodies to feed Lola. She likes Lodge visits.

After a couple hours Tim had all his shopping done and sauce built. Time to head home.

Harper knew he had to meet with Bernie the mole to warn him about what is happening. He went over to the hole that ran to the central tunnel of their system. He called out for Bernie who finally appeared. Harper had to concentrate when talking to Bernie. First, he always appeared with dirt all over his head, down to his face and even in his

teeth. You could tell that he didn't notice but it sure was distracting. He felt like brushing him off but knew that would be impolite. Harper began telling him what was going to happen to the back yard. Bernie kept looking at him like he didn't hear a word he said. Harper explained again trying to make it simpler to understand. Still, it had no visible effect. Harper then asked if he knew what he was saying. Bernie replied, "My home will be gone?"

Harper answered slowly explaining that down deep will probably be ok but getting to it would be hard. Harper tried to explain that a hard surface would be placed on the whole back yard. Bernie asked a few questions and then without a goodbye or a thank you, ducked back in his hole and disappeared. Harper returned to Ule.

"It is so hard talking to moles".

Ule answered, "Yeah, they aren't very bright."

Harper with frustration said, "Bright? Hell they are so dim it's tragic. I told him over and over what was going to happen, and he kept looking at me with this blank stare. The stare is bad enough but when he's looking at you through crusted dirt all over his face, you begin to think he just doesn't get it. I felt like chicken little telling him the sky is falling."

Ule smiled and said, "I remember that one, ...actually you kind of are telling him that his sky is falling."

What is he going to do?"

"He is going to move everyone to the front while they change his world. When they are done he will come back and see just how much damage is done and whether he can fix it to their needs. If not, he will need to stay in the front. The other family living there aren't very friendly or welcoming. He might check out next door but said they used poison last year to kill the family living there. He's worried."

Ule thought for a moment and said, "Change of any kind is hard, harder still when it impacts your whole family. Hopefully all of us will get back to normal soon."

"We will. It will take a little time, but it will work out just fine. Will you call the kids over? I need to start the class."

Ule yelled out and all three came running. They were looking forward to the class.

Harper began. "The last class was on awareness. Tell me what you remember."

Haille began, "We always have to be looking for dangerous situations"

Harper asked, "Like what?"

Barry said "Lola."

Haille added, "Coyotes"

Gary said, "Humans too."

Harper said, "Don't forget birds of prey like hawks and owls. Let's talk about the humans."

Harper paused for a second to grab the attention of the kids before he began. "I know for the most part our three humans are pretty good. They aren't trying to get us but please remember they are still humans. Other humans hunt rabbits and eat them. Some, believe it or not, cut off the feet of rabbits and keep the rabbit's foot as a good luck charm."

"Really?"

"That's disgusting. Picture one of us dragging their toe around as a good luck charm." Gary said.

Harper began again, "I can't see Tim, Linda or CJ doing anything like that. I can picture them putting out poison if we become too much of a problem."

Haille asked, "What do we do that causes them a problem?"

Harper again, "Look right now we are kind of an outdoor pet. We're cute and we don't make a mess. If we ate ALL of Linda's vegetables, she might change her mind."

Gary piped in, "You always said to finish what you start. Don't take a bite out of a bunch of vegetables just eat what you started."

Harper said, "There is so much food in this yard of all flavors that as long as we aren't stupid, we shouldn't make too big of a dent in their harvest. We want to keep things the way they are, because if they get it in their head that they want us gone then we will be gone or dead."

Everyone paused and thought about the frailty of life. Someone else makes a casual decision and life as we know it could come to an end.

Harper sensed the down moment and knew he needed to pick it up. "All right, we know we need to be aware. We have to be paying attention to what is going on in the area around us. For the following examples I'm going to use Lola because you all like her so much."

Kids saying, "Yeah right, Love her. She's my favorite."

"OK if you are in the same area there are three things that can happen. First, you can see her...second, she can see you... or you can see each other. Number two is the bad one. If two doesn't turn into three in a hurry you are done. If you are just catching on to the fact that Lola is near, and she is already running fast you need to get into instant evasion. I'm going to come back to that one. Let's start with number one, you see her but she hasn't noticed you yet. What do you do?"

Barry said, "Run"

Haille said, "Freeze".

Harper answered, "Both are good answers. If you can freeze and Lola doesn't notice you, she will probably walk away looking for something else to do. Remember the word freeze. You want to shallow your breath, so it is less noticeable. If you were chewing on something, stop. OK, all of you, I want you to practice this with me. Keep your head in the exact same position, now move your eyes."

Everyone including Ule went through the exercise of looking around while not moving your head. Harper said, "You can see almost all of it without moving. You can certainly stay zeroed in on Lola without making a move that alerts her."

The kids were nodding at each other recognizing that they learned something useful. Dad is a good teacher. Harper began again, "Sometimes passive evasion doesn't work. If Lola sees you, it is time to move your feet. Gary has been training you hard on running fast and making turns. The problem is your size. Your older and bigger brother Gary can probably outwit and outrun Lola most times. I can do it all the time. Because you are smaller your jumps are smaller. As you grow this problem will go away. We are trying to train you so you will get old enough to grow. For now, you need a plan. I know Lola. In fact, I know the running pattern of all four-legged animals. If you aren't big enough to outrun them then you need to be smart enough to outthink them.

The chase involves two things, speed and direction. Lola is faster than you guys,

so you have to make her miss. Remember, quick review here. We start with awareness skills. We try to not be seen as part of our passive evasion. But when Lola's ears are back, feet springing into action you need to be ready to evade. You aren't ready for the Double yet. Gary will tell you how hard that is to master but you are ready to learn some evasion moves.

By the time Lola gets to you she will be running at close to top speed. If you can get her to think left while you're thinking right, then she will fly by requiring a couple strides to change directions to resume the hunt. So here is your new training regimen. Up until this point you have been running in one direction until Gary told you to change the other way. Now I want you to practice running straight as fast as you can then take a quick left followed by a quick right. This move won't save your life. One hop left and right still leaves you under the jaws of Lola. You really need to make two jumps left followed by two jumps right to cover enough ground to make Lola change her course. You're going to enjoy this training more than running laps. You can mix it up as you go. My personal favorite is two left, one right and then two lefts again. You'll find it easier to see what you are doing by watching the other. So, Barry, stand behind Haille as she does twos and threes. See how much she

changes direction with each. Help each other develop the best pattern to leave Lola with nothing but a mouth full of poke."

The kids all laughed, but they got it. They immediately headed out to the back yard and began practicing. Just before they sprung out of the deck Gary yelled out Awareness. The kids stopped to check out the yard, and even listened. Harper was thrilled.

Ule said, "You are the best dad. And Gary is growing up to be just like you. You should be proud."

"I am. Yeah, Gary will make a fine dad."



Chapter 5 Wednesday

Linda is always the first one to wake up. She time brewed the coffee last night so all she has to do is pour a fresh one in the morning and add a piece of fruit or muffin or cereal or something else. She then heads back to bed to read, pray and email/text. This meditation is taken while Tim and CJ are sleeping away.

Linda knows everybody's schedule and wakes up folks when needed. Wednesdays are always busy because it's Rotary day. Tim, CJ and Lola need to be on the road at 8:15 with whatever extra something they need from home loaded up. On the way in they stop by Sprouts to buy the fresh fruits and vegetables for lunch.

When they get to the Lodge it's just after 9:00 and Adam is already there. Each member of the three-man team knows his job. Adam is on room setup, CJ makes all the salads and Tim makes the main course. Everybody knows that all tasks have to be complete to serve up to 75 people at noon. They usually serve about 60, but you don't know how many you get until they approach the line. This makes planning interesting. During the last fifteen minutes before serving is when things get exciting. There are dozens of things that all need to be done. Everybody knows what to do. They check each other.

There are six tables of 12 people. Each table is set with linen tablecloth, silverware, napkin, glass, pitchers of Iced water & iced tea, salt and pepper. At the buffet line the guest picks up a plate and self serves from the following: Fresh fruit plate, Caesar salad, Spinach salad with mushrooms and chopped hard boiled eggs, Fancy green salad with feta cheese, apples and almonds, tray of deviled eggs and avocado slices, tray of caprese salad, bowls of sliced pickled beets, and black olives. The other salad offering is unique. Chopped tomato, cucumber, red pepper and red

onion are combined with a raspberry vinaigrette. Customers frequently garnish whatever salad mixture they have created with this colorful additive.

Today's main course is cheese lasagna with a hearty meat sauce. Non-meat sauce is available. At the end of the line is hot garlic bread and extra Parmesan cheese. There is a self-serve coffee/dessert station. This week it is ice cream and spumoni.



Tim and CJ work the room making sure all buffet items are replenished and pitchers of tea and water are full. Adam moves over to the dishwasher first cleaning up everything from the food preparation and then moving on to dishes as they get cleared. Somewhere during a break Lola goes for an extended walk and gets fed. Everything is spotless by 2:15 and the crew heads home. Tim drops CJ off at the Pumpkin Patch for his evening shift and then continues home.

Prior to taking a nap he processes what needs to be done on the deck. Tomorrow he will begin painting the upper joists that support the canopy. Each of the two sides has six joists each twelve feet long. Because everything needs two coats Tim guesses that this part of the project will require four sessions about three hours each. On a good day he might get

two sessions in. The same paint will be used to cover the upper and lower outer sills of nine windows. All of the windows also have shutters that will be painted brown when he moves on to that color.

The upper and lower border of the deck and all six columns also need two coats. The good news is that almost all painting except the shutters requires no taping. Tim guesses that this is going to require another six sessions. All of this needs to be done without hindering CJ's tear out/construction or the work of contractor doing the back yard. It sounds complicated but with a little planning it should all flow. Tomorrow he begins.

As soon as everyone left for work training began. Ule came out to watch Harper and Gary put the kids through their paces. It was rough at first with the jumps being timid. Gary coached up close as Haille and Barry tried mastering consecutive left turns and then right. Once they developed speed and a full stride he then called out "two lefts, two rights." He continued combinations of one, two and three until they could see what ground they covered by the different series of jumps. He then sent them out on their own to develop different evasion paths. Harper and Ule were happy with how the kids were learning but even more so in how Gary was teaching. After a rigorous couple of hours Harper called everyone over.

He began, "Tonight we make our move over to Ben and Aunt Jamie's. We will certainly be using our 'Awareness' training but hopefully not need our 'Evasion' skills. We will make sure everyone, including Lola is buttoned up in the house before we begin. If there is no one to evade then we focus on speed. Your mother will be with you as you leave the deck. I will be stationed in the front at the end of the debris in the yard and Gary will be at the end behind the garage. When we are set up Mom will tell you to go. You will then run as fast as you can to me. There you will turn and run fast again to Gary. Simple. You don't need to evade anything unless

we are surprised by an unwanted visitor. That won't happen but we went through this training just in case. Do you understand?"

Haille asked, "Once we get to Gary, what happens?"

"Ben and Jamie will take you from there. It's just a couple hops to our new temporary nest."

Barry asked, "How long are we going to stay there?"

Ule answered, "We aren't sure but it will probably be a couple weeks. Don't worry, everything will be set up for a comfortable stay. Aunt Jamie and I are planning some fun activities for you and your cousins."

Harper was happy that Ule was trying to make the kids feel comfortable. He was hopeful that she meant to work with Jamie on making it fun for the kids. Gary could only think about seeing Josie every day.

As the evening arrived final preparations were made. Harper gave final instructions to the family. CJ was working, Linda and Tim were eating dinner and Lola was begging. It was time. Everybody gathered by the hole in the border of Frontland. With a nod to his family Harper ran off with Gary right behind him. Harper stopped at the end of the wood debris as Gary continued on to the fence behind the garage. With everyone in position the mission began. Haille was the first to go.

Harper signaled to Ule who told Haile, "OK, as fast as you can run to your father."

Haille took off. She was scared and excited. She ran as fast as she has ever run. As she approached Harper he said, "Turn in front of me and run to your brother."

She made a great right turn and continued on to Gary who was right next to the entrance. As she ran behind the garage Ben said, "OK, slow down, your safe, slow down."

It took Haille a couple hops to comply. She stopped as Jamie said, "OK darling, stand over here and wait for your family."

One down, and one to go. Harper signaled Ule who started Barry on his run. Barry had always been the youngest and treated as such. He wanted to impress Dad. He decided to show off his evasion turns on the way to Harper. Dad was not impressed and said with authority, "stop it and run to your brother."

Barry complied and knew he was in for a talking to. He ran past Gary and stopped next to Haille. Ben and Jamie were welcoming him in. Haille could tell that her brother had screwed up. She didn't know what he did but he sure looked guilty. She knew she would find out later.

Mom was next. She could run fast. She whizzed past Harper, continued on past Gary and pulled up next to the kids. She was already looking sternly at Barry. Harper and Gary followed Ule behind the garage. Ben lead the way under the shed with Jamie at the end of the line. The cousins all said hello to each other as everyone gathered. Jamie and Ben had gathered some fruit and grasses for their guests. Ule noticed and thought that was kind. Everyone was kind of excited except Barry who knew he had a 'talking to' coming. Harper decided to wait until later for his 'responsibility' lesson he would have with his youngest.

Everyone began to settle in. It was no surprise that Gary had moved in the direction of Josie. Conversations were spirited with excitement in the air. All the kids liked hearing stories from their uncles and aunts. They were used to hearing their parents talk but now there were different adults telling stories. Things eventually settled down and everyone went to sleep.

Barry knew he had screwed up and was in for an unpleasant dad session. He wondered why he hadn't been yelled at yet. It's probably one of those 'praise in public, criticize in private' things. He thought to himself, 'why did I try to show off. I know better.'

The next morning Linda had an early appointment so she was out of the house without the typical morning conversation. Tim and CJ gathered with coffee. Tim began, "OK here we go for real. I know what I have to do, how about you?"

"Yeah, not much to figure out. I'm just yanking boards and dragging them to the front. I hope to have it all stripped by Sunday."

Tim asked, "What's your schedule?"

"Today I work three to close at Subway. Tomorrow I've got a double. Saturday I've got only pumpkins and Sunday I've got a double again."

Tim said, "That doesn't seem like you've got very much time for this."

CJ responded, "It's not too bad. I've got a good five or six hours today, and about the same on Saturday. I think if I get rolling I can get it torn out by Sunday."

Tim said, "I'm starting on the upper joists and then continuing on to the sills. I'm trying to do one color at a time."

"Smart, I'll crank up the music so we can hear it out here."

Tim said, "Cool. I've got to get set up. I can't pull the canopy off so I'm going to slide paper under it and on top of the joists."

"Sounds like a plan"

They both put in a full day and continued on through the week end. Monday the contractor started digging up the back yard. Everything kept moving along pretty much as expected. By Wednesday CJ was ready to start putting in the piers. Tim hired a guy to help CJ muscle the piers into place. Leveling them, one to another was as hard as they thought it would be. By the time the next weekend arrived Tim had completed all painting on the deck and shutters with the exception of the floor boards

and the new floor joists. The joists needed to be weatherproofed and the boards needed two coats of brown before being screwed into place.

During that first week the contractor had torn out and leveled the back yard. All prep work was done to allow for the placement of the pavers, turf and surface for the bocce ball court. Each day of the next week saw big changes in the back yard. These guys knew their stuff. Seeing the big stone pieces interlock was fun to watch, as was the creation of the brick border to the bocce court. The tiered landscape wall turned out great with the top piece designed for sitting. Instead of just straight walls Tim designed in two curves or scallops. He also had the contractor run conduit and wire so he would have electricity available in the back where the water feature would go. That was going to be a spring project but having electricity available would make that job much easier. It is better to run the conduit when everything is torn up. It was all good.

Tim and CJ's work was less exciting. Tim was just doing a lot of the same thing, painting boards. He had set up two saw horses. He would load up three boards, roll out the brown, flip in place and roll again. Storing the 100 + painted boards became an issue. On a quarter section of deck Tim began stacking the painted floorboards. By putting down spacer pieces he could place one layer on top of the next and still not smudge the paint job. CJ would draw from the pile to place the boards as Tim continued to paint and stack.

The debris pile in the front continued to grow with all the boards that CJ had torn out combined with all the packaging for stone that the contractor threw in. It was a messy project in process. Each day you could see major changes. The plan was becoming a reality.

The rabbits were all getting along well. Everyone had to stay pretty much under the shed for most of the day. The workers had to keep going to the front yard to get more product that was stored on the driveway. This

meant that the gate between the front and back remained open. That meant that Lola had continual access to the front. For the most part outside activities were restricted to evenings or when Lola went in the car. The dreaded meeting between Harper and son Barry was less painful than anticipated. Harper knew that Barry knew he screwed up. He also knew that Barry was trying to impress his dad. With a simple review of the mistakes that were made and a warning to comply strictly to Dad's instruction life moved on.

Rabbits don't typically store food except for the very young. This situation was weird enough to cause everyone to bring home cheeks full of grasses and the like as they returned from their evenings out. It's good to be prepared just in case. Ule was getting along with Jamie. After a couple days it appeared as if a problem had never existed. There was lots of time for storytelling. Barry and Haille had always liked hearing mon and dad stories. Now there was a bigger audience and more rabbits telling more stories. The fun part was when somebody would tell a story and somebody else, usually a spouse, would add or change the story. It's funny how rabbits remember things differently.

Gary and Josie stayed in the combined family setting most of the time. They would get away now and then to be alone. Training continued but now included the cousins. Everyone was picking up skills. Gary had both doubles down great. He actually preferred the right but could execute both flawlessly. There was lots of room under the shed and the company was great but everyone was ready to move back home. During the second week Gary and Josie approached their parents and asked/told them that when the move comes, they would be occupying Frontland under the deck. The way it is with rabbits, there is no 'asking for the foot'. It is nice and shows respect when the young couple announces their intentions. All four parents knew this was coming. The move to Frontland made sense giving them some space but still retaining close access or availability.

With little more than a nod Gary knew he was being beckoned. He dutifully moved out to the front yard with Harper and Ben right behind him. Harper began, "This is a big step, are you sure you're ready?"

Gary quickly responded, "Yes I am sir."

Ben spoke up, "You know that we rabbits mate for life. Are you sure she is the one?"

"Yes, she is all I ever hoped for. I think of her all the time that I'm not with her. She and I both want a big family. Being right here next to both of you will be great."

Harper continued, "There is a lot of responsibility in being a husband and even more so in being a dad. You have to protect them, train them and love them all the time."

Gary said, "Dad, I have watched what you do. You are a great dad. Since the move I have seen how Uncle Ben does it as well. You both love your kids with all you've got. I want to do it the same way. If ever I have a question I know I can come to either of you for advice, and I know it will be good."

With that the three of them gathered into what could be called a group hug without the arms. Everyone felt great.

After the boys left the little ones laid down to sleep. Jamie, Josie and Ule gathered for a talk.

Jamie began, "My little rabbit is growing up and beginning a family of her own." She was clearly emotional.

"Come on mom I am older than you were when you married Dad."

Ule answered, "Darling what you don't understand is that mothers always look at their children as their babies no matter how old they are. Mothers are built to love and worry."

Jamie appreciated Ule being here for this. "You are going to be with him forever. Are you sure that's what you want to do?"

After a short pause Josie said, "I love him. He is so smart and funny. I never grow tired of listening to him. I've seen what a good big brother he is. I know he'll be a great dad. We want lots of babies."

Ule said, "That's great and joyful. Remember being a mom is hard work. On top of all that you need to be a good mate as well."

Josie said, "I can do it, I want to do it. I can't wait to do it."

Jamie quietly said, "Well you've got the right attitude and you certainly selected the right rabbit. I am so happy for both of you."

Ule said with glee, "And you've got Grammas living on either side of you. How can you lose?"

The three giggled while touching cheeks with each other.

Then something unfortunate happened.

Harper ran into Bernie the mole and found out that his son was killed. He was a causality of the move. The family of seven was trying to relocate when Lola found them. The only evasion technique that moles have is to dive into a tunnel. Son Mike was caught before he could find one. When Bernie told the story Harper could tell that he was shaken up by it all. It forced Harper to think back to when Jack left. It's a horrible feeling that never fully goes away. The only good news was that Bernie had inspected the back yard and figured they could move back when the workers left. Most of the down deep tunnels remained intact. They would have to dig some new access tunnels from the sides but felt that they would be able to re-occupy. Life is always strange and sometimes hard.

CHAPTER 6

Snarl looked at Gnash and said, “Can you imagine never being hungry?”

“I remember when we caught that young deer. We feasted on that for days. But right after that we were hungry again. All day, every day we look for food. Sometimes I’m shocked at the kinds of things we eat.”

Snarl said, “Hey when you are hungry almost anything that walks, crawls or flies looks good to me.”

Gnash said, “Yeah, I’ll eat stuff that’s already dead. Did you see all the rabbits walking around across the street?”

“Those are dangerous thoughts Gnash. Let’s stay on our side of the street and keep hunting.”

“Rabbits are good eating.”

It’s amazing that with a project we always count backwards. It doesn’t matter if you budgeted a week, month or year the last three days will be hectic. The other item that is a constant is that you do all the fun stuff and leave the crap or hard stuff to the end. The deck project followed these lines.

The contractors had finished the back yard and it looked great. The only drawback was the surface of the bocce court. The internet accepted design for the court called for using crushed oyster shell and powder for the fill. It looked pretty and the balls rolled nicely but when you walked off the court you left a trail. Tim figured that over time he would continue to add sand until he got to a mixture he liked.

Commented [CD4]: Roof Shot Photo Needed

The solar and ac guys had gotten their permits and installed their equipment. Nothing could be fired up until the city came and inspected the installation. That wouldn't take place for another week or so.

All of the debris was carted off and the front yard raked cleanly. Everything looked great except.... CJ needed to install the last six boards and cut off the excess on the house side of the deck. There was a spacing problem with the boards, mostly caused by the outer perimeter being built a little off. Tim and CJ finally agreed on a fix that wouldn't be noticed by anyone but them. With the last boards in place Tim rolled on the final coat of brown the night before Cindy, Ray and others would arrive for the party. Just under the wire as usual.

Harper made a trip over one evening early in the week to see how far they had gotten. He told Ule and the kids that he would be staying the night so he could hopefully listen in on a human conversation in the morning. Gary asked if dad wanted him along. At first, he thought no but then figured that he might as well take advantage of some father/son time because when he sets up home with Josie, those opportunities will dwindle. They first listened to make sure the coast was clear and then sprinted out with a momentary pause at the corner of the garage and then full speed under the deck.

It really was quite impressive. They inspected under the deck to make sure there were no changes to the family's living space. It all looked pretty good. There were some scraps of wood lying about and a wrench that they'd be looking for months from now but all in all no changes to worry about.

With the pile of wood and debris gone from the front yard, Harper thought he would plan the family trip home with a path along the side of the garage followed by a quick sprint across the driveway, through the fence and then under the deck. He figured he and Gary would run out with Harper stopping at the corner of the garage and Gary continuing to the fence. This way he would be in the middle encouraging top speed for

the pups as they ran to their brother. Shoot them all through including Ule and Josie. Easy peasy.

Harper really missed not being able to listen to the humans. He always liked listening and learning but now it is even more important to know what they are doing and when so he can plan a safe return home. As expected, the three humans came out with coffee cups in the morning. Harper and Gary were already in position to learn.

Tim began, "Good morning. Looks like we are all up and firing today. CJ and I have Rotary, what have you got today?"

Linda answered, "Today is my downtown day. I've got checks to write, a report to prepare and some other stuff. I made a nail appointment after work. I should be home about five o'clock."

"I'm dropping CJ off at pumpkins and then I'm home. How about, I make dinner tonight?"

"Cook or buy?" with a bit of a smile.

Tim said with a laugh, "What difference does it make? I'll check out my options and give you a call. Either way, you don't have to worry about dinner. Try to relax. You work too hard. I love you."

Mom just gave a pause that had a smile inside. CJ felt he was caught in someone else's "magical Moment" but it felt good.

Even the rabbits felt good.

Harper and Gary sat and listened until Linda went off to work and Tim, CJ and Lola went off to cook for Rotary.

Today was meatloaf day. It was an easy meal to prepare and the guys loved it. Afterwards Tim dropped CJ off at Pumpkins and came home for a nap. Lola joined him. As is the case most Wednesdays Rotary leftovers become the family dinner. Tim didn't have to buy or cook, only reheat.

"How'd Rotary go?"

Tim answered, "Good, we served 65 and everybody loved it."

Linda said with a smile, "You could serve those guys meatloaf every week and they'd love it."

"Yeah, go figure the easiest meal to cook is clearly their favorite. How was your day? Traffic bad on the way home?"

Linda said, "Traffic was horrible. There was an accident on the other side of the freeway but the 'lookie loos' slowed it down to a crawl. Work was ok. I got done what I needed to. I've got a couple hours of input to do."

They continued with dinner and small talk. Tim knew he was going to pick up CJ after his shift at pumpkins. He doesn't always pick him up but today CJ worked a double and he's been putting in the hours on the deck. A ride home seemed in order.

Harper gathered everyone together to go over the plan. There was a lengthy goodbye taking into consideration that that Harper's family was going about 70 feet. But everyone promised that they would have lots of gatherings in the future. Even Ule and Jamie had a special moment. This two-week visit cured a problem that had lasted quite a while.

Everyone knew where to stand in the order of march. Harper and Gary were at the edge of the fence in 'awareness mode'. Just then the outside light came on and the door to the house opened. Rabbits froze in place, listening. Tim came out to the car as Lola took one quick spin through the

front yard as she always did. Tim called Lola who dutifully jumped in the car. The car started up and drove off.

Gary looked at Dad and said, "Good thing we waited, huh?"

"Good thing we were aware". Harper liked when he could reinforce his lessons with real events. He told his family that everything was good, in fact even better with Lola gone. The pups needed some consoling. They prepared to go again.

Snarl said, "There weren't two bites in that bird."

Gnash said, "Well I noticed you didn't share."

"Share what? There's more feathers than food. I've had it. Tonight we eat rabbit."

Gnash said with a warning voice, "There you go again. It's dangerous to get those rabbits."

"Danger smanger. I'm hungry. Look, at night we can see the cars coming from far off. We'll carefully cross the street and hide in the big bushes on the left side. We'll wait there for a bit as we check out the yard. You stay there and I'll go up past the garage. The rabbits usually come out together. Once they are out I'll charge them. They'll run towards you. With a little luck we can both get one. Remember rabbits can't hurt you but the street can. Once we have our catch we will meet back at the bush before the street. Then we carefully cross the street and have a feast."

Gnash looked at Snarl and saw he was dead serious. "Are you sure you want to do this?" Just then they looked over and saw the car pull away. "See, even that dumb dog is gone. Let's have dinner."

They quickly ran across the street and took up their position under the bushes. After a momentary look around the yard Snarl moved up to his hunting position by the garage.

Harper and Gary looked over their shoulders and gave a smile of confidence to their family. Even after looking and listening they were totally unaware of what was waiting for them. They ran along the side of the garage. Harper stopped in his position as Gary started over towards the fence.

Snarl jumped out with a howl. He ran full speed at the frightened rabbit. Gary knew he was in big trouble. He took two quick hops to the left. That was enough to get the coyote to change direction. Gary then executed the best right double he had ever made. The hunter had already altered his course and was completely outmaneuvered with the 180.

Harper wanted to help his son, but how? Then the other problem surfaced. Gnash sprung from his place and ran directly at Harper. Both rabbits were under full attack. They had no offense. Their only hope was to outwit and outmaneuver the predators. Harper took on the same defense that he taught his son. Both were performing admirably but how long could it last? Their doubles were confounding Gnash and Snarl but with each move they were moving further from shelter. The coyotes were learning that catching rabbits isn't as easy as they thought. After missing twice they altered their approach with less speed and more attention on where they thought their prey would jump. It looked like victory was in sight.

CJ was waiting when Tim pulled up. There was some small talk about the shift. They started going over the final board placement. After the short ride home, they pulled in the yard and saw the battle in full swing. Tim didn't complete his turn into the driveway, but stopped short to better illuminate the front yard. If they could have, they would have stayed in the car until it was all over. Lola had a different idea.

The first thing Lola saw was Harper and went into hunt mode. "Rabbit, Rabbit." Then, close to immediately she saw the coyotes. DEFEND, DEFEND, DEFEND.

Lola jumped out her window and ran towards Gnash, barking. Tim and CJ were freaked. Lola was in it so they had to do something. As Tim got out he grabbed his coffee cup left over from that morning and hurled it at the coyote. CJ had his backpack and did likewise. They both started screaming hoping to scare them away. Lola was on Gnash biting him in the neck. Snarl was coming for Lola also. Everyone was surprised when Harper ran in front of Snarl causing him to lose focus and veer to the left. One more double and he was headed for the fence. By the time Snarl returned to chase Lola Gnash was headed for the street. Tim and CJ kept screaming. Tim even threw make believe coffee cups.

Snarl didn't know what was going on, but he didn't like it. It was time to head out. By the time he got to the street his partner was already across. He ran to join him without looking.

The car that hit him slowed and then stopped to see what happened. Snarl was hurt but happy to make it to safety on the right side of the road. As quickly as it began it was over. Tim and CJ ran to Lola to see how she

was. She had a couple bite marks but nothing too serious. They ran her into the house where Linda was standing trying to figure out what all the noise was. Hearing the coyote story, she immediately checked over Tim and CJ making sure they weren't bitten. Once satisfied she moved on to giving aid to Lola. Everybody was talking at the same time telling their version of the story. Lola's heart was beating rapidly. She got a quick treat and lots of petting as Linda inspected her wounds. One cut was pretty deep but the others were superficial. Linda cleaned them all and put on some ointment. It took a while for everyone to settle down. Things got calm enough for everyone to laugh at Tim throwing imaginary coffee cups at the coyotes. Lola was praised by all. Nobody even thought about the rabbits.

Gary and Harper were under the deck panting to catch their breath. Finally Harper said to his son, "Bet you're glad you learned the doubles well."

"You think? That was terrifying. I was scared enough trying to outwit that beast when I looked over to see you battling another one. What happened?"

Harper began, "Well it looks like the coyotes were hungry enough to brave crossing the street. You did great Gary. That was first rate evasion. I don't think we would have made it if not for Lola."

"I know. She jumped out of the car while it was still moving and rushed that..."

Harper said, "His name is Gnash." Gary looked on bewildered that Dad knew his name. "I heard the other one call his name. Yeah, Lola sure went into protect mode."

Gary asked, "Why did she do that?"

"She wasn't protecting us. She was protecting Tim, Linda, CJ, the house, her yard." Harper explained.

Gary said with almost a grin, "Well, I'm happy we got protected along the way. By the way, did I see you run a diversion for her?"

Harper paused for a while and then said, "Well kind of. I really don't like coyotes. I still have memories from the old days. I mean I really don't like coyotes. I didn't want them to go home successful and fed. If so, then they'll come back. And quite frankly Lola saved our butt. I figured if I distracted Gnash for just a moment that the hunt would change. By the time he could get back on course his partner had already fled. Did you see Tim making believe he was throwing things at them? Hey it all worked. By the way, we don't need to mention the diversion to Mom."

Gary said, "Yeah, I can see where she wouldn't agree with your decision. Maybe she didn't see it. What do we do now?"

"We've got to make it back to Ben's. They must all be worried. Are you ready?"

With a nod and a look and a listen they ran back to their family.

Gnash growled at his partner, "You got any other great ideas?"

"Leave me alone, that car hit me." Snarl responded looking for sympathy.

Gnash couldn't muster any, "That was the last dumb thing you did, starting with the idea to eat rabbit. Can you walk?" Gnash softened a little at the end.

"Yeah but it hurts. Did that dog bite you?"

Snarl was quick to respond, "Damn right she bit me. She was tough for a house dog. She surprised me when she jumped out of the window of the car. I'm still hungry."

“Good.”

All rabbits began rejoicing as Harper and Gary arrived. The story was told from all perspectives including Ule’s who saw it from the sidelines. Although she didn’t mention it, Harper could tell that she saw his move to help Lola. He knew he had a rough one coming once they were alone.

Everyone was thrilled with the outcome but collectively agreed that the move was postponed. There has been enough excitement for one night. Tomorrow is another day.

The next day all the same preparations were made. They gathered in position to make the sprint back to the deck. It all went off flawlessly, just as planned. Gary and Harper especially liked the way it turned out this time. While in process they thought back and remembered how frightening it was to evade the enemy.

Gary gave Josie a tour of her new home. Just Frontland was way bigger than the shed that housed five. Then they ducked under the center joist and visited Gary’s old home. It was all so huge. As part of the tour Gary pointed out all exits, his family nest and the Learning Wall. At the wall he said, “Wait until you sit here and listen to the humans. It is so much fun and you learn some really good stuff.”

Josie nodded as she pictured her new life with her mate in these glorious surroundings. She felt excited at what her life would be.

On Saturday the party went well with all the appropriate oohs and ahs on the improvements. The bocce ball court got a workout. The grandkids loved it because they could compete evenly with the adults instead of having a size disadvantage that comes with many games and sports. Everybody had fun.

The major topic of conversation was the coyote attack. Tim, CJ and Linda all had their version to share. The three big points were first that the coyotes came across the street, second was the bravery of Lola and finally everyone got off on the image of Tim throwing imaginary coffee cups. No matter who was telling the last one they included a gesture including Tim's angered face.

The rabbit clan including Josie spent most of their time at the learning wall. Sometimes various rabbits would move to be underneath different gatherings of humans at different places on the deck. Lots of input. This was Josie's first deck party. She had gotten used to the "light stripes" caused by sunlight coming through the cracks in the floorboards. What was new was the change in light patterns as humans moved above. All this action was initially exciting but as the evening moved along it all became normal. So normal in fact that Haile and Barry fell asleep during the party.

Lola liked parties. She had to start out welcoming the first arrivals verifying that they were welcome. As more arrived, she became less vigilant. The big thing about parties was the vast number of people you could beg for food. Many knew to shoo her away, but she always scored with a few.

Lola had the ability to find a place to lay down that would be in the way. This time she sprawled out on the pavement right between the front door and the deck. As people were stepping over her on the way to the bathroom or when bringing food out to the deck, she would give a look of indignation as if "Hey, I'm laying here." It was part of her charm.

CJ was at the party and helped host but had his own party the next night. Some bocce was played but beer pong was the popular game of the

evening. As predicted, he was able to proudly announce that he built the deck. His friends were mostly his age hence unaware of the joys of home ownership. They could see his pride and were impressed with the magnitude of his accomplishment. It was good.

He waited until he had a pretty good crowd before telling the coyote story. Of all the times the story had been told this was the first time that the rabbits had a major role. CJ had noticed the near acrobatic moves that both rabbits had performed as part of their escape from the bigger assailants. This became part of the story complete with a cool reenactment. The coffee cup gestures were also included.

Harper and family were all listening to the activities when Haile asked, "What's that sound?"

All paused for a second listening intently. Most of the noise was standard with the occasional roar that accompanied a victory of some type. Haile's question was about a rhythmic clicking sound that preceded the cheer. All ears were turned to the source of the sound and then heads turned to Harper because certainly he would know. He didn't.

It might have been curiosity or just the need to continue to be the "one that knows," but Harper decided to carefully go out to investigate. As soon as he got to a position to observe he learned that the mystery sound was that of a bouncing ping pong ball. As he turned to go under the deck, he saw Lola a few paces away staring at him. Both paused while maintaining full eye contact. Finally, Harper said, "Thank you". He didn't know if he was going to go into evasion mode when finally, Lola answered, "Your welcome and thank you also."

The two continued to stare but the looks softened. What went unsaid but understood was that things weren't going to change. Lola was going to chase, and all the rabbits would evade. That's life, but it was recognized that what had happened was good. Both thought that it was unfortunate that in this world that this good could only be found by the presence of a bigger common bad. With a nod Harper and Lola returned to their positions in life.

Commented [CD5]: Across The Street Photo Needed

Jack walked up to the road and thought "Here's where I came over a year ago. I wonder if they missed me. I wonder if they'll take me back." He carefully crossed the street and hopped right up to Frontland. He joked to himself, "Let's see if they kept my room for me".

The first to see Jack was his brother Gary. "Jack is that you? We all thought you were dead."

"Nope, I'm alive and hoppin'".

Gary began again enthusiastically, "I can't wait until mom sees you, she's gonna' freak. Hey, you look a little rough". Gary had noticed some burrs stuck to his brother's pelt.

Jack said, "Well, I've been living on the path for about 10 days now. I've been through some thickets. I got out all the burrs I could easily reach. I was waiting for a more comfortable place to work on the couple that are left."

Gary volunteered, "Let me get them. We want you looking good to meet the family." With a couple bites and scratches the burrs were gone. Jack couldn't remember a time when anyone had done that for him.

As Josie approached Gary said, "Jack this is my mate, Josie. Ben's her dad."

Josie said, "I've heard a lot about you. I'm glad to see you are alive - back."

"Alive yes, back we will see. I don't know how mom and dad will feel about that. You have babies." Jack said excitedly.

Josie said proudly, "Yes we have three beauties. They are so little they haven't even been out of the nest yet."

Gary said, "Yeah, I'm introducing them to the world either today or tomorrow."

Just then Ule came hopping in from her nest in the back. "Oh my God, oh my God, I knew it, oh my God, you're back...We've all missed you, oh my God come here."

Jack moved over towards her slowly as she ran to him. A rabbit hug is a little different than most hugs. Heads go next to each other as right arms intertwine. Ule began to cry.

Just then Haille, Barry and Harper came in. Harper ran over to his son and welcomed him home. The kids could barely remember their older brother, but they smiled and said hello.

Harper looked at Barry and said, "Carefully go over to Uncle Ben's and tell them who's arrived." As Barry was leaving Gary quietly said, "Awareness."

After a few minutes Ben and family arrived and went through all the welcome back statements and glad to see you are alive stuff. During the introductions Jack particularly noticed a young rabbit named Jenifer.

Gary then asked, "So where have you been. Tell us stories of the wild world."

"Before I do, I need to publicly ask permission to come back. I know I hurt some of you when I left. Yes, I have been a few places and I have a story or two. I don't want to share if you think it might influence little ones to do what I have done. All I can say is after seeing a lot, I am hopeful of returning home and settling down."

Ule was the first to respond. "Oh my God, we are so happy to have you back. Certainly, you can stay."

Others began to agree in unison when Harper said, "Are you sorry you took your voyage?"

Jack paused for a second and said, "Actually dad I'm not. I'm glad that it's over but I'm glad I went out and got it out of my system."

Harper again, "Would you encourage young ones to follow your path?"

"Actually, dad it wouldn't matter. If they have the desire to go they will go. If they do I hope they are lucky enough to live safely and smart enough to come back."

Harper said, "That's as good an answer as I can hope for. Certainly, you are welcome son."

Gary again asked, "OK tell us some stories."

Jack began, "I've always wanted to see what's out there so one day I bolted across the street and have been running through the big world ever since."

"Isn't it dangerous" asked Barry.

"Yes, it is. But we don't give ourselves enough credit. We're smart, we're fast, we can hear what everyone is saying, and we don't eat meat."

"Why meat? Gary asked.

Jack responded, "Food is everything. Listen to the coyotes sometime. They spend all their time looking for food. We are never hungry. All we worry about is being food. As long as I am not surprised, I can outrun or out maneuver coyotes, foxes, basically all the land animals. Birds scare me. The good news is that I'm too big for most birds but there are some out there that could lift me up and take flight. As long as you keep listening you can avoid the bad guys. It's all about being smart."

He could see that everyone was still paying attention, so he continued. "I've traveled more than 30 days' worth towards the rising sun. I didn't walk it that way but that is how far I went. In there I stayed with four different warrens. One for just a few days, but the others for quite a while. Fortunately, at the first I met a wise old rabbit Donahue, who

taught me a lot about self- protection and protecting the home. That wisdom I was able to share with the other families I met.”

Gary was into what his brother was saying so he asked, “Like what?”

“Let’s start with self-protection. When you are living on the path you still have to sleep. Before you close your eyes the first thing you do is a concentrated listen.”

Gary knew what he meant. Jack continued. “You need to think about protecting yourself from enemies that can attack from either the sky or the land. When you are getting towards the end of that day’s journey you look for anything that can help you stay alive through the night. There have been days that I had to press on for another hour or two just to find something that would offer cover and/or concealment.”

Jenifer, Josie’s sister, who was totally into the story and the storyteller asked, “Like what?”

“A tree, a rock, a bush anything that can help hide you or get in the way of an attacker’s teeth. Those dam birds see great, even at night. Anything between you and the sky helps. Coyotes and foxes can smell you, so hiding under a branch isn’t going to help much. If the dirt is soft you can burrow in. In the heat of summer the land is rock hard. You try to position yourself where you are protected on at least one side. Maybe it’s a tree trunk or a rock. Before I go to sleep, I try to see where an attacker would come from. I then plan an escape route. If I am asleep and I hear anything I immediately spring up and without needing to think I run my route. On a couple occasions I was halfway down the trail when I discovered that my attacker was a field mouse.” Everyone chuckled as Jack began again.

“It is better to have some false alarms then sleep through one real and last attack.” Those chuckling began nodding their heads as they thought through the perils of living on the path.

Gary questioned, “So you do this every time you go to sleep?”

“Even when I am in a warren, I always know where I am running with my first breath. I then learned how to do that for all members of the family. I take credit but it was really Donahue who taught me how to protect a family. First is the selection of the warren area. One thing you look for is a fallen tree, especially one that still has some leaves. This visual protection from above is especially good for the little ones. They can get some sunlight but still be protected from hawks. When you look under a fallen tree you can see paths that are big enough for us but too small for what is chasing us. I’ve seen a coyote run in full speed after food and trip and fall over the limbs. Sometimes they hurt themselves. It always slows them down. Usually that is all we need. We have exit paths worked out in advance. We even have a secondary meeting location, known by all, to be used if the predator hasn’t left yet. The first thing we have is a listening post.”

Jenifer again, “A what?”

Jack started again, “We have one spot that is inhabited every night. His job is to listen for coming danger. One family was so big and spread out that we had two. One night we were approached by two hungry foxes. The outpost heard them coming and sounded an alarm. Everyone, even the pups knew where to go. By the time the foxes picked their way through the branches the entire family had a good head start. The foxes went home hungry and we all survived.”

Harper asked, “Did your plan ever not work?”

Jack answered, “Not really but sort of. We heard a hawk coming. Everyone knew what to do. Unfortunately, one of the pups went the wrong way. In an instant he was gone. If he would have done what he was taught he would have been fine. He didn’t and paid the price.”

Ule said, “That’s why we like it here. We don’t have to worry about that.”

Jack said, "Sure you do, or should. You've got birds here. You've got Lola to deal with. I hear you even had a visit from coyotes. You've got the most dangerous of animals to deal with. Humans."

Ben spoke up, "Our humans like us. They wouldn't hurt us."

Jack again, "The problem is that people are great until they kill you. They're happy to have lawn pets until they decide you are a nuisance and then you are dead."

Ule said, "Some of us like the quieter lifestyle. We've pretty well got Lola figured out and we have the security of the deck."

Jack said, "I am looking forward to that life. I bet I will always be on the lookout."

Harper said, "That never hurts son."

Lots of conversations were taking place by and between all parties about the quiet versus wildlife. Gary and Jack moved off to a corner to talk privately, "How are mom and dad holding up?"

Gary answered, "They're good, still healthy. Dad still does a better double than I can."

Jack asked, "Can you teach me. I saw dad do it a couple times, but I left before he could teach me. It would be a good thing to know."

"I'd love to. It feels really weird at first but once you force yourself through it a bunch of times it becomes natural."

Jack then asked, "How about mom?"

"She was crushed when you left. She was the only one who knew you were still alive. The rest of us assumed you were dead. Spend some time with mom. I know she'd love it."

Jack nodded, "I got it. How is it being a family rabbit?"

Gary said with pride, "I love it. I love Josie, I love the kids. It takes a while to accept that I am responsible for my family. I can't wait to teach the little ones the stuff that dad taught us."

"Yeah, that would be fun. I've been thinking about settling down. I don't know if I can do it."

Gary cautioned, "You can't half do it. You can't make a family and then run back to the freedom of the wild."

"I know. I saw abandoned youngins of all types out there. They don't make it. Maybe I'm not ready."

Gary invited, "Hang with us for a while. I think you will like the family feeling. If not, move on."

Jack asked, "You don't mind if I crash with you in Frontland?"

"This place is huge. Make yourself at home. Go spend some time with mom. Tomorrow I will teach you the double."

Jack went off to talk to mom and dad. Gary went back to Josie and the kids. Jenifer was there. Gary began, "Well, today's been exciting."

Josie said, "Your brother looks like you except a little scruffier and he doesn't have the white spot on the shoulder."

Jenifer said, "I think he's beautiful."

Both Gary and Josie looked over with genuine concern in their hearts as Josie said, "Hey little sister don't go falling for a handsome rabbit who moves on down the line when he is through with you."

Gary added, "She's right. It's hard raising pups on your own. You need to know your mate is ready for the job of raising a family."

"I just want to have fun and hear more trail stories."

Gary and Josie looked at each other and shook their heads.

The next day Gary and Jack went to the front yard to train on the double. Jack was a good student. Gary was pleased on how he was teaching. Harper looked on, full of pride.

Jack was getting in his necessary flops and falls that are part of learning the trick. By the end of the training Jack almost had the right down. Gary took him through the visualization process that he needed to do before he started his second day of training. Harper could see that the training was winding down. He came up and suggested that they go to the learning wall. There were no humans present so Harper explained what happens when they do show up. Jack understood the value of eaves dropping on potential enemies.

Afterwards Jack and Gary went off to the back to check out all that the humans had built. Gary said, "I missed having a brother this past year. I know I have a brother, but he is a little brother. I wish we could have had fun like today. I sure hope you learn to like it here."

Over the next couple weeks Jack got more accustomed to life not in the wild. He liked playing with the nephews and nieces. He loved telling adventure stories to all but especially Jenifer. His interaction with Jenifer was noticed to the point where Ben and Harper decided to take Jack for a walk.

Jack could see what's coming so he opened the conversation with "I have decided to settle down and have a family. I see what my brother is doing and I like it. "Turning to Ben he said, "I am in love with your daughter and I think she loves me. I hope I am being accepted in the family because I want to stay."

Ben said sternly, "As long as you want to be a responsible mate and parent then you are certainly welcome. If you are just fooling around then for the sake of the family, I would ask you to move on."

Intentions were pledged and accepted. The first brother married the second sister and all lived in Frontland.

The number of rabbits were growing geometrically yet the size of the property remained the same. One morning at the learning wall Tim was talking to Linda. "Have you noticed how many rabbits we've got running around lately?"

Linda answered, "Hey they're rabbits. They multiply."

Tim said, "I think they're multiplying a little too much lately."

Linda quickly and firmly said, "Don't go hurting my rabbits."

Tim responded, "I'm just saying the population is getting thick."

Harper looked at Jack and Gary and shook his head. That was the day that Jack began his crusade to convince everyone to colonize across the street. Whenever there was a rabbit family gathering Jack would try to convince all that moving across the street was safer than staying put.

Ule kept saying that Linda would never allow Tim to put out poison. Jack's response was always that Tim would do it and not tell her. As long as he or the birds would keep getting rid of the bodies then she would never know. Jack could tell that the root of mom's argument was her fear of the wild and her memories of being just beyond the coyote's grasp.

Jack began again, "Mom, I need you to think through a couple things. I can make a new home across the street that will be at least as safe as this one. I know how. You are the matriarch of this family. You need to be looking out for everyone. We have to move or risk losing family members. If you can't bring yourself to move, some big chunk of us will still have to move. Now you will have grandkids out of your reach. It will take a couple weeks to decide where we will place the warren and make the necessary improvements. When I'm done, we will escort you over and let you inspect the new home. Hopefully, you will decide to join us."

Ule looked at Gary and could tell that he agreed with his brother. She - then said, "OK, I'll look at it. No promises other than I will look."

That was enough to put the plan in action. It started with Jack crossing over and staying for two days. Jenifer asked why he couldn't come back at night. He said, "I need to inspect what goes on over there after the sun goes down. I need to see if insects swarm anywhere at night. I need to check if there are any nighttime animals that you don't see during the day. You need a good hard look before you commit to a site."

While Jack was gone Gary with the support of Harper and Ben imposed some new rules that limit the number and hours of touring the front and back yard. The back yard really wasn't a problem. The garden was in the back, but everyone was told to leave that alone. Linda is an ally and we needed to keep it that way.

The front is where we are being noticed. First, we try to limit when we go to the front. Late at night, no problem. If we go during the day, try to stay in the cover of the bushes. The next rule that was implemented was what to do if you are in the front and a car pulls in the driveway.

Gary asked, "If you are in the front and a car comes home what do you do?"

After a short pause Barry said, "I run to the bushes".

"That's why you are seen. When the lights sweep over you just freeze. This passive evasion works better. Remember the goal is to not be noticed. They aren't going to get out of the car and chase you. If you freeze they might not notice you at all. If you are scurrying to the shrubs, they will see the movement."

Everyone agreed that this plan was better. They also felt that these new rules lessened their freedom. Sometimes freedom must be sacrificed for security.

Jack came back the end of the second day and met with Gary. He said "There are two good sites for our warren. Tomorrow, I will show you both of them. Then we will decide. I like one more than the other, but it requires more work to make it ready, I think it is worth the extra effort to get it right."

Gary agreed. He was excited about checking out the new place. He's always lived under the deck. Gary was glad that his brother had experience in these matters. He thought, I wouldn't know where to begin.

The next day the training began at the street. Jack said, "I keep talking about how smart rabbits are. Crossing a street is not something we are good at. Somehow cars freak us out. We see them moving at great speed with no feet. They also make a weird noise. We get confused enough that we don't notice the second one. We get so cranked up to run once the first car goes by that we forget to see if there is another coming from another direction. First rule, TAKE YOUR TIME. This street really isn't that busy. I've seen much worse. You need to look in both directions until you are satisfied that nothing is coming. Remember both ways."

They waited a while and then Jack asked, "Is it clear?"

Gary looked and saw that a car had just passed. Then he looked the other way and saw another one coming on fast. "Not yet." He waited a little longer and saw that it was clear in both directions. "Now it's good."

Jack nodded and smiled. They both ran across. Gary started to stop as they cleared the hard surface. Jack motioned to continue until they were under a bush. "Never stay out in the open unless you have to. Alright, the first place we are looking at is right here. Look at the fallen trees. They are perfect for our defense. The warren is just past them going up to the other road. Because of the recent rain the dirt is soft enough to dig but firm enough to keep its shape. I did some sample digging and I have a plan."

Gary was totally impressed. Jack could really do what he said he could do. There were times when various rabbits questioned if Jack's stories had more fiction than fact. Gary could see that Jack certainly knew how to lay out a warren. He asked, "You said there were two sites, where's the other?"

"Actually, this fallen tree is part of that site as well. We would burrow in just over there. It would be a lot easier to occupy but I can't defend an attack from over there. We could have good exit plans, but they'd be on us a lot quicker if they knew to attack from over there."

Gary looked over the basics of both plans and said, "They'd know to attack from over there. I know it's harder, but I think we need to work this site. If we agree on this site, then we can focus on improvements. How long do you think it will take to get it ready?"

Jack pondered for a moment and then said, "The first couple days it will be just you and me. Once we've set up basic security, we can bring over a work party of another three or four. If everyone knows what they are doing, we could be done in another four or five days."

Gary asked, "other than burrowing, what needs to be done?"

Jack took a breath then said, "Lots of things actually. Let's start with the two fallen trees. This one, unfortunately will be easy. Most of the limbs have fallen away. The leaves and branches on top offer good concealment from our flying friends but the underneath is open. Certainly, a fox could run through as quickly as we do. The coyotes will have more of a problem, but they will make it."

Gary asked, "How do you fix something like that?"

"Remember our first goal is to slow the attacker down to give us time to escape, even the little ones. When the tree limb gets closer to the stump they came from it becomes more protective. Just by looking at it you can see three ways in. Unfortunately, there is only one way out. We will need to either clear or burrow two other escape exits. The other tree is

perfect. It looks inviting or easy to get through on the edges. Once the bad guys are two steps in it becomes a nightmare for them. It will take about a day for a couple of us but we will create three different paths that are just our size. You've got to remember how the bad guys hunt."

Gary thought he only has one time to remember. During the evening of Gnash and Snarl Gary didn't think or learn much. It was pure survival throwing down doubles as fast as he could. He was almost embarrassed to tell his brother. Finally, he said, "Jack, I don't know much in this area other than the evasion tricks dad taught us."

Jack looked at his brother and said, "Just listen and learn. Let me use coyotes as an example. Other land enemies think the same way. First, they've got to find you. With the size of our family that won't be hard. Until they can see you, they are led by our scent. We give off a smell from our bodies. We can't do much about that. We give off a stronger smell by our urine. Wherever we decide to go, it will give off a strong smell for a couple days. We need to use that as a tool to make our hunters go the wrong way. I don't know if I can do it here but once I saw a coyote led into a thicket that he couldn't escape. It took two days and the help of his pack to finally release him. It was great to watch. Anyway, we need to create a pee plan. "

Gary looked on with amazement. The thought of a "pee plan" had never entered his head. The thing that interested him the most was the intensity of his brother. Jack kept looking at things and seeing opportunities that Gary would have never noticed. Finally, he said, "Brother, you really know your stuff. Can you really give mon the safety she is looking for?"

"I think so. I know I can't protect her from Tim's poison. Anyway, back to the pee plan. It's as important to pee where you are supposed to as to not pee where you shouldn't. That will probably be a problem."

"Why?"

Jack said "Because rabbits get lazy. If you must go and you don't feel like hopping 27 times to get to the right spot, you say screw it and let it go. We will have to impress upon them the value of a good defensive plan. Anyway, as a coyote is following his snoot towards us, we want to lead him where we want him to go."

"Away from us or better yet into danger."

Jack continued, "We don't have an offense. We can't fight a coyote. We can only make him miss us, hurt himself or better yet both." Jack continued describing what improvements would be made prior to moving in and what would be done after. "The warren basically has two areas, the buckled down home and the somewhat protected outside. The home part we must finish first. I've checked the dirt next to the stump and it digs well. There are three underground areas. First is the area for mom, dad, Ben and Jamie. This also becomes the birthing area and the last defensible position. If we are attacked and we have someone injured or having babies they hold up there. They'd be too slow for the evacuation. This spot needs extra protection. We'll know better once we start digging but I bet we can use the roots of the two trees to make a place that intruders won't be able to access. Just adjacent to that will be the nests for us and the older kids."

Gary was still amazed by the plans that his brother was coming up with. He asked, "Each of them has a way out?"

"Yeah, two each actually. One to each fallen tree. The direction of the assault will determine which one to take."

Gary asked, "How will we know?"

"The lookout. Come here. We will build a look out post here. Initially it will only be protected by this overhead branch, this stump and rock. As we stay we will burrow in for further protection. There are commands that are necessary to learn. What would you want to know at the beginning of an attack?"

“Where are they coming and how many.”

Jack said, “Good, it also helps to know what. Fox, coyote, Owl etc. I thought you would agree that this was the site to go with, so I ran a sample attack. I became the fox and figured out how I would attack this warren. Once my nose tells me that you are in there, I think I would storm through here.” Jack points to open grass leading up to the fallen tree. If I had a couple friends helping, I would attack over here at the same time.

Gary had never envisioned an attack on anything, let alone his home. For the first time he got in the mind of a would- be attacker. He could visualize running through the low grass right up to the fallen tree. There he would have to slow down enough to jump over the limbs of the fallen tree. No problem. Finally, he said, “What’s going to stop him from getting in the warren?”

Jack answered, “I don’t know if we are going to stop him, but we will slow him down. The limbs here aren’t real thick until you get close to the trunk. After we make a good inspection of his probable path we will add or subtract a few things to make his journey a little more exciting.” He could see that Gary didn’t understand so he continued. “If we know he will jump in a particular place then we will burrow out where he is going to land. You don’t need a big hole, just a big surprise. If where he lands is armpit deep, then he will tumble. A different landing zone might have a layer of thorns. If you know where an enemy is going you can mess him up. The tricky part is knowing where he’s going.”

Gary just stood there in awe. Finally, he said, “Ok, I know you haven’t figured it all out yet but what other good stuff can you share?”

“Ok here’s one. I don’t know why the humans put up this orange fence. It doesn’t seem to do anything except keep humans out of here. But it will help us. The fence is staked down good so you can’t run under it. By biting the plastic between the holes in advance you have a getaway door that nobody sees. The size will be big enough for us but not for what is

chasing us. If we get this far it will be perfect. Are you feeling better about the plan?"

"I'm feeling better about how much you know. Everything you are saying makes a bunch of sense and I wouldn't have thought of any of it."

Jack said, "My time on the road did some good for the family. There are a few other things I could show you, but it will be better to wait until we are actually working on them. I think you and I should start the improvements alone. After we have burrowed out our first "safe spot" then we can add a couple more to the work party. At that point we will need another eight to ten days to complete."

"Do you think mom will be convinced?"

Jack paused for a second and then said, "I don't think mom will ever be convinced. I think she'll come anyway because she won't want to miss the family. It's gonna' be hard for her either way."

Gary then said, "I forgot to ask you, what is the plan for when it rains? Remember this whole area gets flooded during the big rains. When it rains hard the water comes up all the way into the front yard. It goes back pretty quickly."

Jack said, "My guess is that after a big flood we will need a couple days to fix everything that got ruined. My only plan is to go back to the deck. When we do we will not go outside at all. We just wait until the warren is safe again and then return."

Gary and Jack reported to the family. Ben and Jamie were quick to support the plan. Harper was as supportive as he could be with Ule questioning everything. The next day the brothers began the colonization process. As they worked, more details of the plan became understood by Gary. The whole thing was quite impressive. The first job was burrowing out where people would live. The good news was that the soil was easy to work with.

Gary noticed the things that made the plan special. For instance, as dirt was dug out it was moved next to what they were building. This allowed for the top of the new nest to taper off to the outside. This provided more stability for the area underneath. The area dug was quite large. It was small by deck standards but about the size of Ben's home under the shed. What made the living space roomier was the two fallen trees. The new nesting area had paths to both trees. By adding these places to the overall warren, the living area became very big.

As Gary kept burrowing the nest to a larger size Jack began work on the trees. Rabbits have been hiding under fallen trees forever, for the protection it offered against birds of prey. Jack was now planning how to use them for protection from land animals as well. This part of the plan was time consuming and complicated. The problem was that you had to be working two sides of the tree at the same time. You need to build exits where they make sense on the inside and still have landing zones that make sense outside. The one tree was easy. There were four logical spots to create small pathways to the outside. Once you get outside it is all just high grass.

The other tree was more of a challenge. This one had lots of limbs touching the ground. Many of the limbs were large with lots of good sized branches. One path was obvious. The problem was that it was too tall. This was going to be the decoy. The hunter will be able to run through it. As soon as you think you are breaking free you hit a gathering of thorny limbs that you can't penetrate. This will become a regular pee spot. We want the coyote to run fast through this open path following the scent of his prey. He will then abruptly hit a painful trap.

Three other shorter, less obvious paths had to be created. You didn't pee here. It was the same area that both trees exited to just short of the orange fence. The whole plan was coming together in Jack's mind.

After two full days of burrowing the inside nest was looking good. The boys knew that the wives and mothers will need to change things around

for no apparent reason. That's ok. Most of the work on the tree traps was planned out. It was time to bring over the work teams.

By now Haile, Barry and Clem were almost full size, the same with the married sisters. Gary and Josie's first litter of four were pup size learning awareness and evasion. Both Josie and Jenifer had bellies full of their next litters. They were due in about three weeks. The brothers wanted the move complete before this next batch arrived.

The first work party included Ben, Barry, Clem and Haile. The first lesson was on crossing the street. By now Gary was so comfortable with the crossing that he taught the class. Once on-site Gary and Jack gave a tour. Everyone was amazed. Work assignments were handed out after the class on where to go if attacked today.

There were still lots of burrowing to do so Barry and Clem started in with direction from Gary. Jack taught Ben and Haile how to work on all the paths to make them rabbit friendly and coyote nasty. Once they knew what to do Jack began thinking through how to improve the listening post. In the days that followed Harper joined the team and quickly saw the beauty of the plan. He was proud of both of his boys.

Gary and Jack both believed that the fence would offer the final line of protection. Just in case, they planned a street crossing if necessary. This is not the same street that they initially crossed. This other street was just as dangerous, now made worse by being crossed only if pursued. This required special training.

As the warren was being completed to offer more protection for the workers the size of the team got larger. After a couple days their new home was almost complete. It was time for the big test. Would Mom feel comfortable enough to make the move? Her visit was well planned.

Most of the family had moved over the night before. Harper, Gary and Jack came up to Mom and said, "It's time for your visit."

Ule was terrified but felt better being surrounded by the men she loved. They approached the street. Gary could see mom's fear and said, "I used to be afraid of the street too. Jack taught me and the rest of the family how to cross safely. It's just something you learn Mom."

When the street was clear they all hopped to the other side. Ule was still scared. She and Harper followed Gary with Jack right behind them up to the dug-out home. At each spot Gary or Jack would explain why and how it was built. Ule didn't feel safe yet but was impressed with how well it was built. She was led to what would be her nest. Impressive. Harper began explaining the defensive plan from Listening Post to escape routes and traps for the enemy. She was amazed with how well it was all planned. As she asked a question it was answered calmly showing that the layout was well designed. It was impressive.

What convinced her was seeing all the other rabbits working on their individual nesting areas. The rest of the family has decided that this is their new home. Ule let out a big sigh and turned to Harper and said, "I guess we're doing this."

Harper said, "It's going to be fine. You will be even more comfortable when you see more of what your sons have built here. It is beyond impressive."

"We do have good boys, don't we?"

Harper looked into her eyes and said with a smile, "Yes we do. We certainly do."

Gnash and Snarl had found an extensive family of raccoons that they dined on with easy hunting for a couple weeks. When that ran out they began to prowl looking for more food. Gnash said, "I smell rabbit."

Snarl said, "In case you forgot we haven't been too lucky with rabbits."

"That was a long time ago. Come on they just got lucky. I'd really like to eat that dog. Look, they are just dumb rabbits. I smell 'em and I'm going to eat 'em."

Snarl said, "I don't know, I just have a bad feeling about this, but rabbit does taste good. OK, let's follow our nose but let's be careful."

"Come on these rabbits are going to be easy picking."

Clem was heading out to his turn at the listening post. On the way he relieved himself in a designated area. A huge rule is that you never pee anywhere near the listening post. He thought to himself that he seems to get this duty more often than others. Other rabbits are doing other stuff and complaining doesn't get you anywhere, so he took his post and settled in.

After about an hour he thought he heard something. He perked up his ears and could actually hear coyotes talking to each other as they began their attack. He immediately sounded the alarm. "Two coyotes, one left, one right." Most coyotes can't understand rabbit, but the family had worked out a code just in case. Clem repeated the alarm. Everyone had heard the first alarm and was up and moving. He then began his planned retreat under the fallen tree and in to the escape hole. It was no problem for him to pee all the way. Once in he followed the tunnel that ran to safety.

Everybody knew what they were supposed to do. Now the question was would they, do it? So far Clem has done his job.

Everyone woke up with the first alarm except a couple pups. Moms got them going quick. Once they saw that everyone was out of the nest Ben led the way to the left escape route. Moms were in the lead, pups in the middle and dads at the end of each family. Harper, Ule and Jamie had designated spots along the way to keep everyone moving. Jack alone stayed back at the entrance to the nest to check on how far the enemy had penetrated.

Snarl was only three strides behind Clem and licking his chops. He ran into what appeared to be an opening and crashed full speed into a thorn bush. He was moving so fast the bush closed in behind him.

He screamed as the thorns cut into his skin. It took only a second for him to realize how bad it was. A move in any direction spiked the pain. He called out to his partner for help. "Gnash, get over here, I need help."

At that time Gnash had his own problems. He was following the scent up to the other fallen tree. He was smart enough to slow down as he walked through the thin outer branches. As they got thicker, he knew he had to either jump over or duck under. He jumped the first with ease. Feeling more confident he picked up the pace with the smell of rabbit filling his snoot. He took the next two jumps.

"Owe damn owe!" Both back feet had landed on nasty thorns. He reacted to the pain and jumped higher over the next limb. This time he landed in a trench filled with thorns. Because it was deeper than expected he stumbled forward hurting his right front leg while thrusting his throat into more of those spiny devils growing up and over the back side of the trench. He hurt everywhere but at least he could get out. After a retreat of a couple painful steps, he stopped to remove the thorns from the bottom of his feet. He still had a dozen or more all over his body but at least he could limp to safety.

His buddy was still screaming "Gnash get over here."

As he started to move, he realized just how much his leg hurt. The thorns kept digging in adding to his misery. Finally, he yelled back, "I'm coming the best I can." When he got there, he saw what his friend was screaming about. "Dude, how'd you do that?"

Embarrassed and in pain he said, "I was chasing that damn rabbit. I don't know where he went but I ended up here. Get me out!"

Gnash asked "How?"

"Bite off a couple of those branches."

Meanwhile Gnash's leg was hurting, and a couple of the barbs were really killing him. He began biting out the ones that really hurt.

Snarl again pleaded, "Come on I can't move."

"I know, I know. Just let me get these couple that are killing me and then I'll work on you." He then began to bite through the bottom of the first branch. As he bit the barbs at the base of the limb kept sticking his gum. It hurt. It took a while, but he finally got through. He bit down on the end of the branch and began backing up. The other end was intertwined with other branches and Snarl. It wasn't budging. As he pulled Snarl screamed, "Hey that hurts."

"It's gonna hurt more by the time we're done." As Gnash pulled harder one of the thorns dug into the roof of his mouth. He kept pulling.

Snarl said, "You're getting it. It hurts but you're getting it."

With one more big pull that hurt them both the branch broke free. Snarl could now move his front and rear left feet. "Come on get this one" he yelled as he lamely motioned towards another branch.

"You can help too, you know."

Snarl answered with "OK, get this one by my face and I think I can pull free."

He could see the branch he was talking about. He followed it down to its base. Luckily it was thinner than the first and had no barbs at the bottom. With a couple quick bites and some hard tugging in reverse he got it free. Gnash sat down puffing in pain. Snarl could see that his friend needed a break. Now that his head was free he could push with his left legs while swinging his head to get more power.

Every inch of freedom came with pain. Finally, he gave one big pull while leaning as hard as he could and broke free. "That damn rabbit. Did he get lucky again or did he plan this?"

Gnash answered, "Come on it's just a dumb rabbit."

Snarl asked, "What happened to you?"

"I jumped a branch and fell into a hole filled with those dam thorns. I hurt my leg in the process. You aren't thinking of still chasing rabbit?"

Snarl just shook his head. They knew the evening hunt was over. It took over twenty minutes just to get the worse thorns out of themselves and each other. They returned home to work on the rest of them.

Jack heard both traps working. With that he knew the coyotes were at least slowed down. He yelled the signal up the line not to cross the road. When the collective family made it to the orange fence, they quickly found the pre-cut hole and went to the other side.

Ule was scared but not showing it. She kept all the young ones moving. Between the fence and the road was a section of tall grass that hid everyone nicely. Jack had previously told everyone that while escaping one enemy you had to protect yourself from the ones in the sky. He knew the owls would hear the yelps from the coyotes and would circle above looking for meat in the open.

Jack had given Gary the job of watching out for both of their families. As soon as the alarm was sounded Gary got Josie, Jennifer and all the kids lined up for the escape. Because of the training the older pups watched

over the younger ones. Josie took the lead with Jennifer in the middle and Gary while stationed in the back kept running to the front of his line of responsibility and then stopping watching and counting to make sure all members of both families were accounted for.

Haille and Barry had the job of road guards. Even with the signal not to cross they knew they had to take positions in case the battle changed. Barry checked for traffic and then crossed. His sister took her covered position on the near side. Everyone waited for another signal.

Jack had stayed back as rear guard. His job was to see how the defenses held and what they should do next. He knew both traps worked but did not know if they worked enough to stop the enemy or just slow them down. He knew gnash was hurt but mobile. He thought Snarl was in deep. Jack signaled to his family to stay put. He moved a little closer to the front lines to better hear the coyotes. Gnash had just limped over to help his partner. He could tell by the conversation that Snarl was going to be trapped for a while. He thought their spirit was broken but wanted to make sure they were going to retreat when able. He signaled again, "All good, stay put."

Basically, he told them nothing but knew they would be reassured. They needed that. Finally, Jack moved up to where he could see the empty trap. With a hard look and listen he knew the battle was over. He then gave the signal all had been hoping for. "All clear, watch the sky." The only one that didn't hear it was Barry until his sister relayed it across the street. They all knew how to return using all cover available. They knew not to talk.

Finally, when they got back to the nest they were able to release all their penned-up emotions. The next hours were filled with what they saw and what they heard that others saw. Through all the tales what was mentioned most was the success of the defensive plan and the wisdom of their leader Jack.

That night, without any discussion or election Jack became the leader of the Warren.

The next day life went on. Everyone responded as Jack put them to work repairing the traps that were sprung while building new ones in case the same enemy returned. Through it all Jack received lots of praise. The best came when mom came up and said, "Thank you. I'm so proud of you. Your plan saved us all. It was brilliant. You had us all trained and it worked so smoothly for everyone except the coyotes."

They both laughed. Harper and Gary came over and all agreed with Ule. Jack humbly tried to pass the praise along. "First the real credit goes to Donahue. He taught me all this. Second, did you notice how every member of our family did their job? No questions, no second guessing, everybody just did their job."

Gary said, "They were afraid to do anything else." All chuckled.

Jack continued, "We have a good family. We should be able to live here for quite a while."

Then an enemy surfaced that was too big and too powerful to defeat. Man, and machines.

THROUGH LETA'S EYES

CHAPTER 10

MAN IS COMING

It started when a message came in from a day's walk down the way. The 'next' road has never been seen by anyone except Jack. The other side of the next road was full of buildings that the humans built a couple years ago. The word just arrived that they have moved across the street and begun work again. When they start, they use these huge machines, much bigger than their cars, to scrape all the trees and grass from the ground. Once they have it clear and flat, they come with truckloads of wood and lots of people to build things.

As the word came in Gary and most of the rabbits said, "Oh, that's so far away, they'll never get here."

Jack said, "It may seem like a long way for us but it's just a 10-minute car ride, or worse yet machine ride from here. We have to move again."

When the rabbits realized what their leader was saying panic struck. "Oh my god, we're all gonna die,"

"Let's move back under the deck"

"Let's go to the other side of the road in our escape plan."

Jack listened to all and then said, "In the last year our family has doubled in size and doubled in size again, if not more. We were too many for the deck when we left. Now, that plan is impossible. Moving over there", he pointed to the West, "would only buy us a year at best. I didn't tell you

this before, but when I came back, I traveled through the buildings down the way. When these humans get going, they move fast. I was hoping they didn't need this land for anything. I guess I was wrong. We need to move to where they don't want to be. I'm working on a plan."

The fear in the crowd died down. The fact that their leader, who knew how to cross streets and defend against coyotes had a plan was good enough. They just needed to wait until his plan materialized. They all went back to living their normal day.

After everyone left Gary asked Jack, "OK, so what are we going to do?"

As he looked into Jack's eyes, he could tell that there wasn't a plan other than calming the fears of the Warren. Finally, Jack said, "I got nothin".

Gary looked at him with fear in his eyes. "Nothing?"

Jack began, "Well the first thing we need to do is quit making babies."

Gary lost it, "What? Our home is being taken and your grand plan is to stop making babies. It's what we do. We like it. We're good at it. It's what we do, and now you say your plan is to stop. How is that going to change anything? Tell me Donahue taught you more than that." Then even more sarcastically he said, "Oh yeah, we stop making babies and the humans go away. Great plan."

Gary had worked himself up so much, he was breathing hard as he finished. Jack calmly said, "Now you understand my problem."

He continued, "Other than me and maybe dad, you are the smartest rabbit in the family. You lost it mentally when confronted with the truth. If you go bonkers, what do you think the rest of the family is gonna do. The plan isn't birth control. Whatever the plan will be, will be easier to do if we have less babies and less pregnant mommas. More importantly, all plans will be easier if we aren't running around screaming the sky is falling."

Gary paused for a moment, then calmly said, "What can we do?"

"Well, the first thing I need to do is recon. I know the humans are coming from the East. They have everything to the North. I've never been West beyond the next lot, and I haven't seen what's South. After I say goodbye to Jennifer and the kids, I'm going to take off West. Once I know what's out there, I will travel South to see if we have an opportunity there. Although this is troubling news, we have to keep everyone's morale up. There will be time to freak out later. Now we must plan what is best for the family. I should be back in a couple days."

Gary knew that his job was to watch over Jack's family while keeping everyone else calm. The second half of that is the hard part. Gary just kept telling everyone that Jack was going to work it out. He soon saw the power of strong leadership. Although everyone was terrified, they calmed down at the word that Jack had it under control.

It took three days for Jack to return, and he was not a happy rabbit. He knew enough to swing by Jen and the kids before he reported to Gary. His face was grim as he reported, "There's nothing good out there. I saw my first golf course."

"What's that?"

Jack said, "I guess it is kind of a game that humans play. They take a stick, hit a ball and then walk to it and hit it again. I guess they enjoy it. There sure are a lot of people doing it."

"Strange."

Jack nodded agreement and said, "Yeah, they use a huge plot of land to do it. It all looks pretty. When I saw it I thought this would be great for a new home, then I met Dan. He has a small family, four total, and he is looking to move. Although it is big, humans come every day and cut the grass. Then other humans play their silly game. Clearly the humans don't want us there. They've got poison out everywhere. Dan is so scared there that he is out looking for a home also. With his small family, he can find a place. There is nothing that way that could support us. I then went up the hill to the south, that doesn't work either. It's totally full of people.

My last hope is back to the East, where I traveled before. I need to see what the humans have been doing over there. I hope they at least left a trail that we can use to escape further East. I know they couldn't have built on all that land, we just would need to get there. I'm going to stay a day with the family and then go out again to check it out."

Gary said, "Everybody in the warren believes that you can fix anything. Don't spoil the feeling yet."

Jack shook his head and said, "I know they think I can fix things. I'm scared. I don't think I can cure this one. I'm hoping my next trip shows me something I can work with, but I don't have a good feeling."

Neither of the boys noticed that Ule was listening. Ule told Harper and Josie. Josie told Clem and Jamie. Jamie told Ben and..... By morning the whole warren was in a state of freight. If Jack didn't believe he could solve the problem, then it couldn't be solved. Nobody confronted Jack before he left in the morning, but they certainly complained to each other. Gary started to quell the rumors the best he could, but it was near impossible. A negative funk swept over the land.

An alarm went out. Humans, from the street. Everyone ran to their appointed positions. Gary was left as the rear guard. His job was to determine the threat and call for appropriate action. These two didn't look dangerous at all. He stood his ground as the pair approached. He kept wishing that there was someone that could help he and Jack plan for the family. He hadn't noticed that while wishing he vocalized his plea. Then he heard the female say, "Don't be afraid, I want to help you."

Gary thought, wait a minute, humans can't hear us. She talks rabbit. Gary looked at her and said, "Can you really hear me?"

She said, "Yes. I don't know how or why but I can. I want to help you."

Gary looked at the male, who had no idea what was going on. He then looked back at the female and said, "My name is Gary."

She said with a smile, "Hi Gary, I'm Leta."

This can't be happening. Humans can't hear us. How does she do that? From all the stories I have heard from Dad, Uncle Ben and even Jack, humans can't listen. Well, it looks like I found one who can. She said she wants to help. Can I trust her? It doesn't hurt to keep talking.

We didn't talk much; I think because we were both surprised that we could. She keeps saying that she is a friend that doesn't want to hurt us, in fact help if she can. She said she is coming back tomorrow with another friend to help.

I've never studied humans too hard. The only ones I ever really see are Tim, Linda and CJ. Actually, they are quite nice. Tim did hint that he was going to control our population with poison. That's how this whole thing got started. We left before he was put to the test. Now I've got this young woman who can hear me and says she wants to help. God, I wish Jack was here. He isn't going to like this. He really doesn't trust humans.

I didn't even make it back to the nest before I was swamped with family asking questions. Dad had followed me and overheard my meeting with Leta. Now everybody knew. I kept telling everyone to calm down. When you don't have many options to stay alive, any hope is big news. I kept telling everyone that we would know more tomorrow. Then I got lucky.

Jack's back. As he got to the warren, he could hear all the rumblings. He hopped to his family. "I'm ok, what's going on?"

After a quick hello and I love you, Jennifer said, "You've got to talk to your brother. He found a human that can hear us."

"What?"

"Talk to him."

Just then Gary entered. "Yeah hi, oh, I've been thinking about how to tell you what's going on. First, what did you find out there?"

"Nothing good, what have you got?"

Gary began, "This young woman and a friend showed up. She can understand us."

"Don't trust humans. What have I always said, don't trust humans." Jack said.

Gary tried to respond, "I think this is important."

"Don't trust humans."

Gary tried again, "But she cares and understands what we are going through."

"I'm sorry but I've never seen anything good come from humans. They say one thing and do another. Can she really hear us?"

"Yes, and she is coming tomorrow. You need to at least talk to her. Anyway, tell me what you found."

Jack paused and then began. "It would be rough. We'll lose lots of youngins. I've been thinking about this on the way back. We need to split up the family. You should take mom, dad, Ben Josie and about four more and go back to under the deck. I think I should take most of the rest. We'll go across the street to our escape place. I'm going to need your help in building the nest and setting up the defenses. I think we should encourage our young adult males to think about exploring to the East. I can guide them past the human stuff to the open."

Gary interrupted, "Jack, Jack, as always you have done a great job. But listen Leta thinks she can move us to safety. All of us."

"Don't trust humans."

"Not all humans, just her. I trust her. She's coming tomorrow. Just talk to her."

Jack said, "If my plan was any better, I would drag my paws in the ground. I really don't think they," he paused, "she can be trusted."

"Will you at least meet with her and see what she has to say?"

"Yeah, yeah but you know..."

Gary finished his statement, "I know, don't trust humans but we can talk and learn more."

"OK we'll meet."

The conversation ended with a little more small talk. Jack went home. Jennifer and the kids hopped up to welcome dad. After a bunch of, "I missed you" and "Glad you're home" Jennifer asked, "Do you believe a human can hear us?"

"I have to believe what Gary said. I guess she can listen. I don't believe she is trying to help us. I think it's a human trick to hurt us. We'll see tomorrow."

The next day the word came down that humans were approaching the warren. Jack and Gary went to where Gary had talked to them yesterday. The female had a bit of a glow about her. Gary introduced us. The male's name was Louis. He couldn't hear us, but you could tell that he trusted her.

Jack asked, "Why should I trust you. You've got machines lining up to kill us."

Leta said, "Hey, that's not me. I'm trying to help you. By the way, the machines will start in two days. They're starting over there but will get here in about a week."

Jack started believing her a little. He kept looking at her glow. If she was telling the truth, what could she do?

They asked permission to walk away to talk. This was perfect. No better way to know what their plan really is than listening when they think they are alone. Jack hopped up close but hidden. He could tell they were really trying to help. What convinced him was their fear that they couldn't do it. They came up with a plan that might actually work. The big issue was solved. Jack now believed that this special woman Leta was really trying to help.

When Leta and Luis returned to talk they discovered that Jack had heard everything they had said. The good news was that now that the trust issue was settled, they only had to work on how to make it happen.

Leta asked, "What do you need in a new home?"

Jack answered, "No human development, now or later, water and no predators."

Leta pushed back, "Hey, I'm protecting you from humans, you've got to take care of the coyotes on your own."

Gary said, "Yeah, you're right but would you mind not dropping us off next to a pack of a dozen hungry coyotes?"

Leta said, "Yeah, that makes sense, but I don't know where coyotes live."

The plan became, Jack and Gary would look at sites that Leta picked. She had to call her mom to get a car. Then she did something special. She said, "I'm going to have to pick you up to put you in the car. Are you going to be ok with that?"

She understood that we've never been touched by a human before and that it might be scary. These days the rabbits had so many things to be afraid of, one more wasn't going to matter.

Jack and Garry nodded their approval. Plans were made to return with a car.

A little later a car pulled up with Leta, Luis and Leta's mom driving. Jack and Gary came out with Harper and Ben. The boys were always willing to take advice from their elders. Harper and Ben just wanted to see the listening human. After introductions Ben went back home as Gary Jack and Harper allowed themselves to be picked up and put in this dangerous thing called a car.

Gary and Harper sat in the back with Luis while Jack rode up front with Leta. After a little while the window in front of Jack magically lowered letting in a rush of wind. At first it was terrifying. Soon it became fun. Luis lowered the back window. All three rabbits were standing on the laps of humans looking at the world flash by quicker than they have ever moved before. The wind was great.

The car pulled up to the first site. Jack and Leta got out of the car to inspect the site. It didn't take long to see the poison pellets everywhere. This site wouldn't work. Back in the car to try again. The second site looked interesting. Leta's mom had driven around this lake site and pulled up to get out. Jack asked if she would drive around again. She did.

There was this big lake in the middle. The land around it was anywhere from 10 to 100 feet before being fenced off. The fence was chain link and secured well at the bottom. This was good because a rabbit could dig a small hole for entry and escape if necessary but coyotes would have a hard time. If they were going to dig an entry it would take a while, offering rabbits time to get away.

Jack came back and reported to his brother and father. He then asked Leta, "If I stay here tonight could you bring these guys and a couple others tomorrow?"

Leta said, "Yeah, I guess so. Don't you want to see the other site?"

"No, I think this will work fine. I need to spend the night to make sure. If it's ok, then tomorrow's team can help me prepare it for the family to come a day or two later."

After a couple minutes of rabbit goodbyes Jack ran off into the bush. Leta picked up Gary and Harper and headed back. This time Harper got the front seat.

Leta said, "You must be proud of your boys."

Harper replied, "Yes, they really are good rabbits. In addition to being real smart they are great husbands and dads. Yeah, I'm proud."

Gary was listening from Luis' lap and felt good.

They got back to the warren and were unloading when Gary said "Poke."

Leta said, "What?"

"I think Tim just saw us. He doesn't know what you can do, does he?"

"Not yet, but that might be changing."

Everybody said goodbye and made plans to meet again tomorrow.

When Harper got home he was cross examined by Ule. "What's the place like? Is it safe? Can we all fit? Does it have coyotes or foxes?" and on and on.

Harper said, "It looks great. The big thing is Jack seems to like it. He's the one that knows this stuff. We'll know tomorrow when we go back and see Jack."

Ule said, "I don't think I'm going to make this trip. I survived the last one, but this is to a place I've never seen before. We don't know what horrible thing is living over there just waiting for all of us to arrive. I don't think I can go."

Harper sighed and then said, "Ule, we are together for life. Once we know more about the new home, I know I am going to want to join the family. But first I am with you. If you can't bring yourself to go then we will move back under the deck. I will miss the boys and the rest of the kids but if you can't, you can't. I will never leave you."

Ule never felt so loved. She knows how much Harper wants to stay with the family. What a sacrifice he is willing to make for her.

The chatter in the warren was endless. Harper and Gary had given everyone a description of their possible new home. They also told of the car ride in great detail, including the open window, view and feeling of wind rushing in their faces. Before everyone was afraid, now they are hopeful, excited and afraid. This is better.

The plan was laid out including Jack's stay and the return tomorrow with a work party. Many volunteered to go. The conversation finally got down to how the family would get there after Jack's inspection and work party preparation. Yes, we get into a car or truck actually.

Everybody stopped talking to allow the thought to sink in. We get in the open back of a truck. Really.

The next day the car arrived with the same humans. Leta and Luis came to their meeting place and saw eight rabbits. Gary and Ben were obviously in the group that included six others. There were more introductions including names and who was related to whom.

Everyone had been warned that the first scary thing they would have to deal with was being picked up by a human to be put in the car. Even with the warning it was really scary. Harper and Gary got to ride up front with Leta and Sandy. The other six were in the back with Luis. Everybody wanted to look out the windows and feel the wind in their face.

Sandy remembered that she didn't need to ask Leta to translate as she asked, "Please don't pee in my car." Everyone giggled. We don't know who, but one didn't comply.

They drove up to the site. Leta got out to check if the coast was clear. There were no humans watching but there was one rabbit, Jack, waiting. Before unloading Leta asked Jack, "Is it ok? Do you want your guys?"

"Yeah, this place is better than ok. It's almost perfect. Let them out."

As the rabbits were being unloaded Luis could feel that a couple were shaking with either fear, excitement or both. Everybody gathered in front of the car, not visible to the street. Jack reported. "You're going to love it here. There are no predators inside the fence. There are no swarming bugs. There's lots of food and the digging is good. As you can see, it's huge."

This news made all the rabbits feel good. Finally, Gary asked, "What do we do now?"

Jack continued, "I've been around the whole lake. I picked out a good site for the warren. I know where and what we must dig. With a crew this size and no coyotes to worry about we could be ready tomorrow. Leta, do you need more time than that?"

"All I need is to borrow a truck. I can do that. I need one of you, maybe Gary or Harper, to go back to train and organize the others for loading on to the truck."

There was a bit of a pause when Gary said, "I'll go."

Harper then said, "Actually I need to go. I still don't know if Ule is going to come. If she won't, I will need to go back under the deck. Leta, if I stay, could you ask Tim to promise not to put poison out?"

Leta could tell that Harper was afraid he wasn't going to make the move. She could also tell that Harper really loved his mate. She said, "Hopefully she will come along. If not, I promise I'll talk to Tim to make sure he won't hurt you."

Jack and Gary realized for the first time that if mom is too afraid to come that they won't even get to say goodbye to her. They both hopped to their dad. Gary started, "Dad, you've got to convince mom to come."

Jack said, "Tell her how great this place is. We've got room to grow the family as big as we want. No coyotes, no poison, she's got to come. Convince her dad."

"You know I'll try. You also know what a hard head she can be. I want so much to come but I won't leave her."

Gary said, "Tell her that. You both have to come."

Leta could tell, and later described to Luis that this is a family emergency. This one they had to fix themselves.

Leta held Harper on her lap for the return trip. She could tell he was nervous. While stroking him she said, "Do you think you can talk her into it?"

"I don't know. I hope so."

The car pulled into place. Leta lifted Harper, gave him a hug and said, "I bet she'll do the right thing."

With a rabbit smile, he said goodbye and hopped back home.

All the rabbits ran up to Harper asking if Jack liked the new site. Harper explained that Jack was thrilled with the new home. He explained about the water, how big it all was and how the fence kept the coyotes away. Everybody was excited talking about their new home and the car ride to get there. Harper said the car trip is actually fun once you get over the fear of being in one of the big machines.

The timing of the move was important because the bulldozers began scraping the land today. They didn't get very far but what they did scrape

was scary. All the trees, shrubs and grass were pushed away. Once the machine got going it tore up everything in its path. Everyone knew that in a couple days their home would be no more. It is time to move.

When Harper got to the nest, he saw Ule sitting there worrying. He said, "Are you ready for this?"

She looked up and said, "I really don't know."

"You really have to see this place. It's beautiful. It's huge, with nobody chasing us. Our family could grow and grow, and still not run out of room. You're going to love it."

"What if I can't go?"

Harper began slowly, "I told you that I'd never leave you. If you have to go back to the deck I will join you. We will both miss our family. It will be lonely with just the two of us. What worries me is what will happen when one of us dies? I don't want to be alone and I doubt if you do either."

"I know, I know. I don't know if I can handle another move. This time it would be to a place I've never seen and to get there I have to get inside one of those machines."

Harper said, "It's called a car and I've done it twice. It's kind of fun actually. Leta and Luis have been great. I met Leta's mom. She's nice. They just found out that Leta can listen. It's weird for them."

"Do you really believe it will be safe over there?"

"Ule, not only will it be safe it will be wonderful. Jack said it's like Disneyland. We don't really know what Disneyland is but all humans talk about it like it's really special. This place is really special."

"We'll see."

Harper said, "We're going to see pretty quick." We either get in that car tomorrow or not. If we don't you'll never see Gary or Jack again."

Ule took a quick breath. Somehow, she thought she would at least get to say goodbye. Realizing that she would never see her boys again brought her to tears.

“Tomorrow is going to be exciting and confusing for everyone. If we are not going we need to say goodbye to the rest of our kids and everyone else before the car gets here. Once we start loading we need to get it done. I don’t need a bunch of screaming rabbits.”

Ule continued crying.

Finally Harper said, “Ule, I’ve never asked much from you. If there is any way you can stay with our family, I would love it. If you can’t I will organize tomorrow’s move and then move back under the deck with you.”

Ule just kept crying.

Morning came and everyone was up and running around. Rabbits don’t pack. They have no possessions. Even so they all seemed quite busy. Harper was busy organizing all of the family units. Except for the rabbits on the work party all parents were keeping track of all their kids. Some of the kids were full grown but mom and dad of each was making sure that all rabbits were accounted for.

Harper’s side of the family was all gathered together. They were broken down into groups of 6 to 10 with Josie and Jennifer each running one and Haile and her mate running another. Barry was now ‘married in’ to the other side of the family with a group of his own on Ben’s side.

Everybody was ready as the cars showed up. Actually, they weren’t cars, they were vans. I guess Leta figured out that we could make it in one trip if she had bigger cars. Harper was the only one that saw the smaller vehicles from previous trips. The other rabbits could care less. They just

wanted to get out of a place that had bulldozers lined up to scrape their home from the land

Ule was hopping from group to group keeping everybody calm. Harper thought this was going to change her mind. How could she leave all this family?

Leta got out of the van and walked up to Harper. "How's it going?"

They both knew it was a loaded question. Are Ule and Harper coming or not? Harper looked up, shrugged his shoulders and said "The family is ready. I still don't know if we're coming."

Leta could tell which rabbit was Ule. She walked over and said, "You must be Ule. I'm really impressed with Jack and Gary. You must be proud of your boys."

Ule really wasn't prepared to meet this special human that can listen. She said, "Thank you. I am proud of my boys. I'm proud of my whole family."

As they were talking Leta was slowly moving away from the rest of the rabbits. When far enough away, she said, "Please tell me you are coming. I know how important it is to your boys."

"I'm so afraid."

Leta said, "You are so lucky. Not only do you have this great family, but you also have Harper. I see what a caring rabbit he is. I see the love and respect his sons have for him. He wants to go so badly, but he loves you so much that he is willing to surrender all of them for you. Maybe that amount of love happens all the time in your world but in mine it sure doesn't. "

"I know and you think I'm horrible to deny him his family. You don't understand how scared I am."

Leta paused for a second and then said, "Ule, I will hold you and Harper in my lap all the way to the new home. When we get there Gary and Jack will walk you to a warren they have been working all night on. You will have a wonderful place of honor. Within a day or two you will be totally

comfortable visiting grandkids. You are going to love it and your family will be thrilled.”

Harper had hopped up just as Ule said, “Are you sure it is going to be safe”

Harper thought to himself, ‘yeas, we’re going’.

Leta said, I promise that you are going to be safe all the way to your new home.”

Ule said, “OK I know I should, OK, I’ll do it. Harper”, she called out.

Harper said enthusiastically, “Yes darling, we will be safe and you are going to love it. The boys will be so happy.”

Leta told Ule, “Now is the time.” With that she picked Ule up and placed her on the seat and immediately picked up Harper and placed him next to her. She then said, “I’m going to check the other car to make sure everyone is loaded.”

She came back, put both rabbits on her lap and closed the door. Off they went.

There were 22 in this van and 19 in the other. All rabbits were accounted for. Harper asked for the window to be opened. Ule was initially terrified but started to like the view. It was a good ride.

When the cars pulled up to the site Gary and Jack hopped out to greet them. As soon as they saw their Mom they looked at each other and cheered. When Leta set mom down they welcomed her with rabbit hugs. It was a happy moment for rabbits and humans.

As promised Gary and Jack escorted mom and dad to their nest. It was beautiful. It was so roomy it reminded them of life under the deck. Gary said, “Jack and I have to go say thank you and goodbye to Leta.” With smiles all around they left.

The boys came up to the cars just as the last group was heading to the warren. Jack said, "Well you did it. I guess it's OK to trust you now."

Leta said, "I'm just happy it all worked out."

Gary said, "I'll never forget the day that you heard me."

"I won't either."

Jack said, "We want to say thank you to you, Luis and your folks. You saved our lives. From talking to Dad, I guess you saved my family too. Thank you."

Leta was beginning to cry. She knelt and hugged them both. After a moment Jack said, "You can come and visit. Just hit the fence a couple times and we'll come out to talk and listen."

Leta said, "You know, I might just do that."

The boys hopped back to their home and families. The humans loaded up and drove away.

