

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

Chapter 1 – A morning of surprises

It was early, much earlier than the time I normally woke up. Rolling slowly over, I looked at the calendar hanging just above my nightlight. The “X’s” covered each of the day’s right up until today, June 11th, the day of my 10th birthday. The clock on the nightstand below it read 5:45am. Normally I didn’t have to get out of bed until 6:30 but I could already feel the excitement growing within me and I knew there was no chance now of falling back asleep. I wondered what surprises my family had in store for me today and my mind was already dwelling on what presents I might be getting. All I knew is that I hoped it wasn’t going to be something corny like underwear or socks which always managed to become at least one of the presents I received.

Chuga Chuga. Chuga Chuga. Whoosh. Wrrrrrrrr. I listened to a car’s engine as it started and broke the silence outside. One of our neighbors must already be up.

Our house was still quiet though. My nightlight shined brightly next to my bed giving the whole room just enough of a glow to move around without tripping over something. I pulled the bed covers down, slid as quietly as possible out onto my furry floor, and headed over to the opened window. After slipping up its shade, I peered out the screen. The sun was about to rise and light on the horizon was already making the street visible in front of me. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky and it appeared that a very sunny day would be my birthday forecast.

Ehhhhhhhhhh. The faint sounds of my father’s electric shaver broke the stillness in our house. His day had just begun, as this was his first task in his morning routine to get ready for work. My Dad works for some company called I.B.M., which stands for International Business Machines, but I have no idea what they actually make. What I do

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

know is that my father’s job entails shuffling a lot of paperwork from one pile to another. At least that was what I saw him doing when he brought me to work one day a few years ago. I also know he is something called a manager and that when you are one of those you get to boss people around.

The only person that I think I’d like to be the boss of is my sister, Laura, who in about 15 minutes will slam her door and begin her day by racing into the bathroom to start her routine of making herself look pretty. She always makes so much noise in there and takes so long doing who knows what.

Thankfully, in another ten school days our intertwined morning routines will end for the next several years as I finish the 5th grade while she finishes the 8th. For the past six years, I have endured attending school under the same roof as her. But next year she begins the 9th grade, which is in another, school altogether.

Don’t get me wrong, I really like Laura, after all she is my sister! But at school, she has the tendency to ignore my existence especially now that she is so popular. My mother says it’s just a teenager thing. I don’t really understand what that means, but luckily I don’t see her much during the school day.

I looked over at my desk for a moment. Next to my schoolbooks was a picture I had drawn in one of my notebooks last night before going to bed.

Unlike my sister who always needs to have the world revolve around her in the form of flocks of friends that never go away, I prefer my own company and spend most of my time drawing, reading, or daydreaming. At school, I know she enjoys the social aspect but I think she really misses out on the more valuable part, which is to learn new things such as in my favorite classes; math and English.

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

Math comes natural to me. I never have any problems with the equations our teacher assigns in class or with any of the homework we have at night. As for English, I love to spell, I am great with grammar, and seem to have a knack for speaking and writing in words that are well beyond my age.

I am great in my other subjects too which I think is in part due to what my Mom calls my photographic memory. In school we have to remember tons of information so thankfully when it comes time to be tested on all of it, I am able to visualize the words on the pages in my textbooks.

Bang! My attention was jarred from my cluttered desk. Laura was now up and as always, she had announced her morning presence with her ritual slamming of her bedroom door as she headed off to the bathroom.

Thump thump; thump thump; thump thump; I could hear her footsteps growing fainter. Why does she always have to make so much noise?! Cripes! I felt an urge to run out in the hallway and yell at her for waking me up even though she hadn’t.

Laura is even harder on me at home than she is at school. I’m not sure what’s worse, being ignored by her in public or getting picked on incessantly at home. But whenever the moment our paths cross, I feel like I am a bug that she tries to squash.

However, there is one thing that the two of us still have fun doing together these days. That occurs on Saturday mornings. Every Saturday, both of us will race downstairs just before 8:00am and grab our once a week allowed treat of a bowl of Lucky Charms. After which we will plop down in front of the television and for the next few hours watch re-runs of old cartoons on Boomerang. We would prefer to watch some of the newer ones but Mom and Dad say they are full of violence and language not suitable to two young

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

children. But it is during those few hours each week that my sister laughs with me and not at me and because of this I know she still cares about me.

I wished I had a television in my room right now as I looked over at my clock and saw it was only just past 6:00. The morning was going by so slow!

Glancing back outside, I saw a woman with a large dog walking by my house. They appeared to be talking to each other as I could hear mutters from the woman and short barks from the dog. Then suddenly as I was straining my ears hoping to hear what she was saying to the dog, they stopped, turned and looked straight at me from the street and started to wave. Was I dreaming? Seeing a woman that I had never seen before in my neighborhood waving at me at 6:00 was one thing, but watching a large dog stand on its hind legs and shake its paw at me was quite another. I pinched myself thinking I must have fallen asleep but there they were, still waving. How did they know I was up here watching them? I glanced around quickly to see if anyone else was witnessing this and when I returned my gaze back upon where the two had just been standing, they were gone. That was weird. I must be seeing things. After a few moments of pondering, I decided I was just daydreaming.

Glancing around my room, I started to look for something to do for the next thirty minutes before my Mom would come and tell me it was time to wake up and get ready for school.

My room is like any other room that a kid like me lives in other than the fact I have this totally yucky wallpaper. It really gives me the creeps as it’s filled with all of these sailors who have strange expressions on their faces. I have no idea why they picked it. Why couldn’t I have had something like racecars instead?

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

One of the sailors was giving me a creepy look as I eyed my toy chest below him. Trying not to make eye contact, I quickly opened the wooden box and noticed my Game Boy on top. Grabbing it and the games, I jumped back on my bed and inserted one of the cartridges. Luckily I remembered to turn the volume off, as I didn’t want my mother to hear that I was already up.

I didn’t realize how fast time was passing as I played my game. At some point my sister had re-entered her bedroom and once again slammed her door closed. But I was so engrossed in my game that I wasn’t paying attention to the actual time. Suddenly my door opened and there stood my Mom with a big smile on her face who surely was expecting to see me under the covers sound asleep. Her smile rapidly went away and with me being so startled, I’m sure I had a face that read guilty all over it.

“I was coming in to surprise the birthday boy!” she said in frustration. “Why are you up already?”

I could hear the disappointment in her voice, as I’m sure she had planned this for several days.

“Well I woke up like 45 minutes ago and I couldn’t fall back asleep with it being my birthday and all. I’m sorry if I spoiled your surprise” I responded.

I tried to be as apologetic as possible seeing the slight sadness in her eyes.

My Mom then came over to my bed and produced a glass of orange juice and a piece of raisin bread with peanut butter on it that she must have been hiding when she opened the door.

“That’s ok Andy, Happy 10th Birthday!” she said smiling again. “I want you to enjoy this little treat before you have to get ready for school.”

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

And with that, she walked out of my room and down the hall leaving my door open. I glanced over at the clock in my room and saw it was already 6:30. Wow, thirty minutes sure flew by fast.

I listened to the sounds of my mother’s footsteps as she headed back to her room to continue getting ready for work. She works at the Town of Lagrange public library. Other than making sure books are checked out and brought back on time, I didn’t know much about what my mother did during her workday either. But I was glad that my mother did work there because she always brought me home some really great fantasy books.

One of those books was sitting on my nightstand. I decided to read a few pages of it while I ate my toast and drank the juice. After finishing my last bite, I set the book down and looked in my closet for what to wear to school today. After I grabbed a t-shirt, some jeans, a fresh pair of socks and some underwear, I headed out of my room. I was feeling slightly mischievous today and noticed that my sister’s door was still closed.

Bang. Bang. Bang. I rapped the back of my fist on her bedroom door three times and then quickly ran down the hallway, past my father’s cluttered office, and into the bathroom.

“Mom?! Would you tell Andy to stop banging on my door!!!” my sister shouted out into the hallway and then slammed her door.

My mother was busy drying her hair as I could hear the distinct muffle of the hairdryer running in her bathroom. She does have her own bathroom, which I never quite understood why my Dad didn’t use the same one as her. He, my sister, and I all share the same one. My mother has said that she has her own because of the amount of time and

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

the amount of things it takes a woman to look pretty. It really didn’t matter to me as I only have my toothbrush and toothpaste to store and was still too young to start shaving or use deodorant. I was usually out of the bathroom anyway in less than 10 minutes.

I glanced up at the clock that I had asked my dad to put above the bathroom door and saw it was only 6:40. Being such a prompt and punctual person as he, I still had plenty of time, as my school bus didn’t leave until 7:30 so I didn’t feel the need to hurry.

After I finished in the bathroom, I re-emerged into the hallway and saw that both my parent’s and sister’s bedroom doors were open which meant they were downstairs already. I tossed my dirty clothes in the hamper and headed down to the kitchen towards a wonderful smell that was drifting upstairs.

Passing by the front door and the entrance to the formal living room, the house was too silent. As I pushed open the sliding door that entered the kitchen, I was suddenly greeted by a very loud “Surprise!” There sat my sister, my father, and my mother along with several balloons tied to each chair. As I made my way over to the chair I normally sat in, everyone said “Happy Birthday” to me. I could feel my face beaming. Today was my special day! I noticed a group of presents on and next to my chair when I got closer to it. My stomach was really gurgling and rumbling now as I identified the source of the delicious smell. Mmmm, a plate of French toast sat in the middle of the table. I love French toast, especially when I douse it with cinnamon and powdered sugar and then top it with a heaping amount of maple syrup. A huge smile covered my face and I felt as if this was going to be my best birthday ever!

“The presents aren’t to be open until after school today” said my Mom with a knowing look as she placed several pieces of French toast on my plate.

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

She must have noticed I was eyeing all the gifts incredulously.

“Can’t I open just one, please????” I begged.

I tried to put on my best puppy dog eyes but she wasn’t budging.

“You can look forward to enjoying the rest of your birthday when you get home today after school. There are lots of surprises in store for your tenth birthday that you can look forward to” she said with a slight grin.

I was bubbling with excitement now and wished I could fast forward the day to where I boarded the school bus and headed home. I carefully placed the presents on the floor away from the chair and took my seat at the table making sure to prepare my French toast the way I always enjoy it.

“Lots of surprises for me today huh?” I said to my parents with a slight hope that I might get some clues.

“Andy you’ll just have to contain all that excitement and wait until this afternoon. I know you are going to try to get some clues from us but we’re not budging” my Dad said grinning. “You know, you sure are getting to be a big boy! Pam I can’t believe how fast ten years has flown by!”

“I know. It seems like he was still wearing diapers just the other day” she said with a loving smile.

“Mom! Don’t embarrass me. I’m 10 years old today, not two.” I said turning red as I heard a snicker come out my sister’s mouth. “So because I’m getting to be such a big boy now, does that mean I get really big presents?”

I changed the subject quickly back to my gifts as I didn’t want my Mom to get into a long discourse about my life as a baby.

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

“You’ll just have to wait and see!” my sister snapped.

“Now Laura, watch your tone and be nice to your brother, remember it is his birthday” my Mom responded coming to my rescue. “Andy, do you know you are now a decade old?”

I knew she was trying to mention a word that she probably thought I didn’t know.

“A decade equals ten, a half century is 50, and a century equals 100” I rattled off.

“Geek!” my sister glared at me.

“Now that’s enough out of you Laura! Say you’re sorry” my Mom said sternly to my sister.

“I’m sorry!” Laura said stubbornly.

It was a pathetic apology but one nonetheless. I looked over at her, stuck out my tongue, and gave her the biggest smart-alecky smile I could as she continued to glare at me.

“So how old are you guys now?” I said to my parents with a grin.

My father always told me his age when I asked, but my mother, well, she never has revealed it to me. No matter how many ways I could ask her, it seemed to be her biggest secret.

“I’m 39 Andy. Almost four decades old.” Dad smiled as he answered my question first.

“Mom, are you finally going to tell me how old you are?” I asked.

I looked at my mother with wide eyes hoping finally to get the answer I’ve asked her to provide me on each of my birthdays.

“I’m 29 and holding” she said deviously.

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

“You say that ever year!” I said frustrated. “Dad always tells me his age!”

It just didn’t make any sense why she never told me how old she was.

“It’s just the proper thing not to ask a woman how old they are Andy” my father said.

“Fine...” I mumbled in disappointment as I took in another bite of French toast.

It’s frustrating being an analytical person. I always feel as if I need to know the answer to everything and usually when someone doesn’t answer something I’ve asked them, it makes me want to find out the truth all the more.

“Dad, aren’t you going to be late for work?” I asked in between bites.

I changed the subject again as I could see I wasn’t going to get any more answers on this topic either.

“Now do you think I wanted to miss my birthday boy’s special breakfast?” he said with a glow.

I spent the rest of breakfast occasionally going back and trying to discover more about the birthday surprises and even also tried to work in several indirect questions to my mother about her age which I almost did finally figure out. After mentioning that in our history lesson we had studied past presidents of the United States, I asked her who was president when she was my age. She started to answer but I failed to contain a grin that gave my trickery away.

I glanced up at the clock in the kitchen as my mother cleared the dishes from the table. It was 7:10. I licked my lips to wipe off the remains of my last bite of French toast. My stomach was stuffed. I finished the orange juice in my glass and after asking to be

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

excused, I headed upstairs along with my sister to quickly brush my teeth and grab my books for school.

“Why do you have to be such a dork?” she said as she bounded up the stairs ahead of me.

“Why do you have to be so popular?” I retorted.

“I’d rather be popular than a dork!” she responded.

“Well I’d rather be a dork than popular!”

“Whatever!”

We both brushed our teeth in silence. I finished first, grabbed my books and headed downstairs. A few seconds later, my sister stood beside me. Dad and Mom gave us our usual morning hugs and kisses goodbye, wished me a great birthday day at school, and handed us our lunch money as we headed out the front door for the bus stop.

As we walked in silence down our driveway and did the customary wave goodbye, our parents stood in our front doorway waving back. I looked up at my sister, who was only a few inches taller than me, and had hoped she might treat me better today because it was my birthday but it didn’t seem to be looking that way. Once we had rounded the corner and were out of sight from our house, she sped up ahead of me so that, as always, she would arrive at the bus stop alone. Oh well.

Squeak Squeak.

A strange noise broke the crunching noise of the street gravel that I was walking on.

I looked around for the source of the noise and didn’t see anything.

Squeak Squeak.

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

It sounded again and this time it was slightly louder. It appeared as if it was coming from just below me.

I looked down and there on the ground was a small gray mouse. Mice don’t really scare me. In fact I think they are kind of cool but what this mouse was doing did slightly bother me. Standing no higher than a few inches on its back legs, one of its tiny hands was waving at me.

Like earlier this morning, I thought I was seeing things again. I looked to see if my sister was close enough to observe this but she had already reached the bus stop. When I looked back down, the mouse was gone. What’s wrong with me? First a disappearing waving dog and now a disappearing waving mouse, ten years old is too young to be losing my mind!

VrroooooOOOOOM. An engine noise was getting louder. Immediately, I looked down at my watch. It was 7:25. I ran quickly towards our stop not knowing if it was our bus and totally forgot about the mouse.

As I reached it, a large truck passed by. Laura looked over at me as she stood there with her best friend Emily. She rolled her eyes and then turned her attention back to the conversation she was having.

Emily was almost as popular as my sister. Between the two of them, I think they knew just about everybody in school. On top of that, all of the eighth grade boys always spent their time staring, pointing, and smiling at them. Most of them thought my sister and Emily were pretty. As much as I hate to admit this, I guess they were. What’s even worse is that my sister recently won a beauty contest whose prize was to model for a young girl’s magazine. This has made her more popular than ever. I think my mother

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

entered my sister in this contest because my mom had won the same kind of thing when she was a teenager. Laura looked just like her. They both were tall, slender, and have long wavy blond hair. I, on the other hand, think I look much more like my Dad as we both share a prominent nose, darker hair, and very broad shoulders. Everyone believes that I’ll be much taller than him someday. I’m already five feet tall at ten years old and he’s only six feet.

VroooooOOOOOM. Another engine noise was growing louder and cut through the conversations of those at the bus stop. My watch now read 7:29.

The large orange bus pulled up, halted, and its doors opened. As I climbed up its steps I noticed we had a substitute bus driver. It was an older woman who if I’d have to guess was in her sixties. She had curly locks that were blond and her face had begun to show signs of wrinkles.

“Adopto Ter” said the woman followed by a smile and wink as I passed by her.

Who was she talking to? And what did she just say? She couldn’t have been talking to me. I took my seat two spots behind her and watched my sister board shortly thereafter. She proceeded towards the very back of the bus. Once everyone was seated, the bus driver closed the doors and headed up the hill. I let out a sigh. The houses passed slowly as we began to ascend. I wished my parents would drive me to school.

One of my not so favorite things about a school day is the actual bus ride there. All of the bullies and those considered cool sit in the back and those known as a dork, nerd, or geek sit towards the front. Initially I tried sitting somewhere in the middle but I started getting hit with spitballs. I’m sure everyone that has ever been to school has heard of them. They are so gross when one of them hit the back of your neck or head. I usually

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

tried to sit close to the bus driver as most never shot them in that direction. If by some chance I am forced to sit closer to the back, not only do I have them to deal with, but there’s also the constant taunting and kicking of my seat from behind. Fortunately, it’s a short bus ride so I don’t have to deal with these unpleasant experiences for very long.

As we approached the next stop, I pulled out *Treasure Island* and began reading it so as to avoid making eye contact with anyone. This is a preventative measure that I follow so that no one picks on me or sits with me. Most of the time if I am self-absorbed into the pages of a book and not on any of the eyes of students boarding the bus, that everyone just walks right on by. Thankfully, I don’t have any archenemies or bullies that live in our neighborhood so as long as I avoid the back of the bus, I’m ignored.

Soon the bus had completed its remaining stops and was now turning left at the bottom of the hill. I glanced down the aisle briefly towards the front and it appeared that the driver was looking right at me in her rearview mirror. I stared back at her for a moment wondering if she really was looking at me. Suddenly her mouth moved like she was talking, then she smiled and winked again. Ok that was strange. I scooted in towards the window out of her sight and slumped down enough so that I couldn’t see her anymore.

I watched the bus pass by entrances to other neighborhoods, then some woods, and beyond that, lots of farms. It’s about a five-mile drive to school and I usually look at the animals on all the farms to pass the time. Even though most of them are normally just lying around, eating, or standing still, I find them fascinating to observe.

As I peered out the window at one of the pastures rolling by, I saw something that I think just about confirmed I was going crazy. A horse and a cow were standing next to

The Adventures of Andy Anderson – Sebastian’s Gift

each other and each one had a leg raised in the air. It looked as if they were waving their legs back and forth in order to say hello. I stood up for a second and looked around to see if anyone else saw this, but no one else seemed to be noticing anything strange. I looked back but the pasture was now too far behind us.

I watched closely as we passed by other pastures. The animals on them were doing the usual types of things with the cows all lying down and the horses’ simply eating the grass.

I couldn’t be going crazy! Animals waved at me three different times today. Note to self, get more sleep and eat less French toast the next time my birthday rolls around! I’ve read about sleep deprivation causing hallucinations but maybe this is what happens when you have a sugar high.

The bus was passing the last farm just before it would reach the school. I looked over at the horses and cows half expecting them to be playing a game horseshoes right there in the mud but instead they were doing nothing other than eating some grass and chewing on cud.

The top of the school could be seen just ahead and my anxiousness to get back to any real sense of sanity overcame my normal sense of safety. I grabbed my backpack and stood up while the bus was coming to a halt in the circle in front of it, causing me to lurch forward. The bus driver grabbed me before I had a chance to fall. A couple of kids made fun of me by calling me a geek.

“In a rush today are we Andy? I do hope you’ll have a Happy 10th Birthday! Adopto Ter. I’ll be seeing you again!” the bus driver said with yet another big smile and wink as I stumbled down the steps in alarm.