

The Rescue of Ralphie Ryan

My heroic efforts are rewarded with scratches and urine.

By Peter Gerstenzang

Most of us rarely get the chance to do something really heroic with our lives. Take me. Until recently, the bravest thing I had done in years was watch the director's cut of "The Ya Ya Sisterhood." Then I rescued Ralphie Ryan, a cat that had been missing for weeks. I spotted Ralphie and brought him into my house. He did not go willingly — he made scratches on my neck that looked like hieroglyphic directions to King Tut's tomb. Plus, the little fella soiled the hallway rug, like a frat boy after a kegger. The good news is that he is safely reunited with his family now. The rescue of Ralphie Ryan went down like this ...

This past fall, I was out jogging when I saw one of those heartbreaking signs taped to a telephone pole announcing a missing cat. It had a picture of a beautiful Manx, named Ralphie Ryan, with eyes as soulful as Johnny Depp's. Throughout my run, of course, I thought I saw Ralphie everywhere! That includes the possum I tried to coax out of a bush. And a small dog. I even picked up a cat I was sure was Ralphie and started home with him until his owner ran after me and demanded him back. It was only after an explanation that this was part of my new training technique ("Running with a cat strengthens the hamstrings!"), that I escaped prosecution.

Days passed. I sank into a depression, thinking of Ralphie, lost forever. Then, I caught a break.

One afternoon, I looked out the bathroom window and there, standing in the backyard with a dog companion, was Ralphie. A cat and dog traveling together? I looked in the Old Testament to see if this had any religious significance.

There was only one problem. Ralphie's bodyguard. Every time I moved toward the cat, the dog growled. So, I tried talking to them.

"Have you guys ever seen 'The Incredible Journey?' This is just like that!"

No response.

Then I lunged for Ralphie. I missed. The dog, however, abdicated his responsibilities suddenly. He ran off, leaving his pal. I called Ralphie's name softly. He didn't move. I snuck closer and closer. Then, I grabbed him. The cat expressed his gratitude in an offbeat way — he clawed ancient text into my neck. But I had him.

I got Ralphie inside, put him down and called his owner. Ralphie emphatically thanked me again by urinating on my hallway rug. I didn't mind too much. If he had been holding a beer and singing, "Louie, Louie," it would have been just like my last party.

Mr. Ryan came 10 minutes later. He shook my hand, his eyes full of tears. When Ralphie saw his owner, he hopped right onto his shoulder. I said goodbye to the cat, nuzzling him; he clawed my head. But, it's OK. I had done something good. I had saved Ralphie Ryan. And I don't like sentimental endings anyway.

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