

HOLE IN MY HAT

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The Legal Stuff

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FIRST EDITION

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“THE START OF THE MATTER”

Matt lived in a large, rambling house with a huge back yard which would be big enough for *most* families. The human residents were Matt’s Mother, Father, older brother J.T., younger brother Dan and baby sister Ashlee. Now add two dogs, four cats and three parrots. The house was CROWDED! The activity and the noise never seemed to stop, like a whirlwind spinning around him.

The pace was increased today, since Grandpa and Nana were leaving. For years Nana had been waiting for the trip of her lifetime, to see America. Something had always prevented them from taking off in the RV and journeying the open road. But with their house sold, possessions either given away or stored, they were finally leaving. It was this reason that had brought Matt to the beach.

Matt sat alone, on a rock jetty, watching the gulls swirl overhead and occasionally dive into the water for their meal. Poppy, as Matt called his grandfather, had always paid attention to him. Poppy had fueled his curiosity for life, since he’d taught him many things. They were like best friends, always together. **“How do you say goodbye to someone who’s been there your whole life?”**

The sea gulls trilled back an empty reply.

With a heavy heart, Matt got up to go. **“Poppy’s probably waiting for me right now. I love him. The words will come. If they don’t, he’ll understand that too.”**

As he slowly trudged towards the beach’s exit, he noted how empty it was today. He passed a very round woman in a black bathing suit wearing a big hat. She sat under a beach umbrella. A man, probably her husband, lay face down on the blanket next to her. . A young boy & his German Shepherd raced past him to the water. The boy was tossing a tennis ball & the Shepherd was running, barking and enjoying the game. A young mother was digging in the sand with her band of squirming young kids that she couldn’t seem to control. On another blanket sat a teen-aged couple kissing

A moment later, Matt would've been gone. But he heard the sound of a scared kid, screaming. Matt turned and saw the Shepherd in the water and the boy at the water's edge. The dog was in trouble. His thick coat was weighted down with water and he was struggling against the tide.

Since it was a week-day, there was no lifeguard. The few people he'd noted seemed either paralyzed or preoccupied to do anything. Matt raced to the water and dove in. Matt quickly reached the dog, but the animal was scared. At first the dog tried to get away from Matt, growling and snapping. This caused the dog to sink faster.

"Boy, I'm here to help you. Relax!" Matt reached out for the dog's neck. **"Just let me touch you."** Matt pet the dog, who seemed to calm down a bit. But a seaweed filled wave crashed over them both. Matt was pulled under rolling with the dark weeds and sand. When he resurfaced, he'd lost sight of the Shepherd. On shore he could hear the little boy screaming the dog's name.

"Joshua, where are you boy?"

The dog surfaced, further out in the Sound. He was weak and the current was carrying him out. **"I'm coming Joshua. Don't fight it."** Matt reached the dog as quickly as he could and held him tight. **"Okay, Joshua, let's go home."**

The dog weighed more than Matt, since his fur was drenched. Matt, threw one arm around the animal and tried to swim for both of them.

Back at the house, the adults grew restless. Grandpa went out to check the oil and wash the windows and mirrors. Nana joined him. **"You did that already."** Then more softly, **"Maybe Matt doesn't want to say goodbye."**

Grandpa responded, **"No. Something's held him up. Let's give him a few more minutes."**

Matt had the dog half-way back to shore, but he was tiring. Matt wasn't sure if either of them were going to make it. Joshua's tongue was hanging out of his mouth and his breathing was shallow.

Matt shifted the dog to his other arm and treaded water. He cupped his free hand to his mouth and yelled. **"I need help! Get me something that floats."**

The boy looked frantically around him. He saw a large multi-colored beach ball, stuck in the sand. He ran to it and released it. Returning to the shore, the boy waded into the Sound as far as he could go. He then pushed the ball towards Matt.

Matt waited, for what seemed like an eternity, for the ebb of the tide to float the beach ball to him. Finally it came close enough and Matt snatched it. It took every ounce of strength he had left, but he heaved the weight of the dog against the ball. He got behind the dog and put an arm on either side of Joshua, placing both his hands on the ball. This way he could hold Joshua securely and the ball would keep them both buoyant. Matt began kicking with all his might.

Steven, Matt's father, exited his house and walked over to his father. **"Dad, Mom's all ready. You don't want to start your trip with a fight. It's okay to go now."**

"You've been married a long time too."

"I'm trying to keep the peace, Dad."

"You're right, son. Tell Matt, I left something for him in the house."

"What, Dad?"

"When the time is right, he'll find it. And he'll know it." With that he pulled the RV keys from his pocket and then hugged his son. As he was about to call for his wife, she appeared with the rest of the family.

"You men, you're so mysterious. Why don't you make it easy on Matt and tell him what to look for?"

Grandpa kissed each of his grandchildren goodbye. **"Steven, tell Matt what I said."** He boarded the RV & got behind the wheel.

"Bon Voyage," Matt's mother Susan said.

"Good Luck," said Matt's dad.

In unison the rest of the family waved, barked or meowed their respective goodbyes.

"Luck has nothing to do with it," said Grandpa as he pulled out of the driveway.

By now, Matt had about reached the shore. The fat lady's husband and the teenaged couple came to his aid. They helped pull the dog ashore.

The little boy threw his arms around the exhausted animal and cried.

“Give the dog some room. He needs water,” Matt commanded.

Someone obliged with a bottle.

Matt poured some fresh water into his hand & the dog weakly lapped it. **“He needs a Vet. I'll stay with Joshua. Go get your mother.”**

The boy hesitated.

Matt reassured him. **“I'll let nothing happen to him. Go.”**

The boy started to run off, but turned around and called, **“Thanks for saving Josh's life.”**

Matt just nodded. He looked at his watch and groaned. **“They've gone by now! Doesn't matter what I wanted to say.”**

The large lady joined her husband and gave Matt a bottle of water and a towel. The man said, **“You did the right thing.”**

Matt accepted the offering. **“I had no other choice.”**

“You did. But you chose the right one.”

“Not everyone's going to see it that way,” replied Matt, as he dug his heels into the sand and waited with Joshua.