



JENNIFER FABIANO

WRITER

WHERE WORDS
COME TO
LIFE

HOME IS WHERE YOUR DOG IS

BY

JENNIFER FABIANO

IT SEEMED TO BE A NORMAL FRIDAY AFTERNOON WITH NO HINT OF WHAT WAS TO COME. MY TEN-YEAR-OLD SON'S SCHOOL FLAG FOOTBALL GAME ENDED EARLY, SO WE LEFT THE FOOTBALL FIELD SOONER THAN EXPECTED. MY DAUGHTER WENT HOME WITH A FRIEND FOR A FRIDAY NIGHT SLEEPOVER, SO MY SON AND I HEADED HOME, STOPPING FOR A TROPICAL FRUIT SMOOTHIE ON THE WAY. THERE WAS STILL NO CLUE YET OF THE UNEXPECTED EVENTS THAT WERE TO TRANSPIRE.

AS WE WALKED IN THE DOOR TO OUR HOME, JOY, OUR FLAT-COATED RETRIEVER, CRAWLED OUT FROM HER FAVORITE SPOT UNDER OUR LARGE KITCHEN TABLE, STRETCHED AND THEN GREETED US ENTHUSIASTICALLY WITH HER USUAL DOGGY SMILE AND TAIL WAG. HER NAME FITS HER SO WELL. SHE'S A BIG, BLACK BUNDLE OF JOY AND LOVE. WE'VE HAD HER SINCE SHE WAS SIX WEEKS OLD AND SHE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR FAMILY—ALWAYS READY TO GIVE AND RECEIVE AFFECTION. SHE LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY AND WITH HER WHOLE HEART. I KNOW SHE'D DO ANYTHING FOR US AND THERE ARE NOT MANY PEOPLE, OR ANIMALS, ABOUT WHOM YOU CAN FEEL THIS WAY.

WITH NO HOMEWORK LOOMING AND SPORTS FOR THE DAY COMPLETE, WE WERE FREE OF COMMITMENTS SO HE AND I DECIDED TO RELAX AND WATCH SOME TELEVISION TOGETHER. A RARE OCCURRENCE. HE CHANGED OUT OF HIS FOOTBALL UNIFORM AND WE SAT DOWN ON THE COUCH IN THE FAMILY ROOM AND TUNED TO THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL. WE FOUND AN ANIMAL SHOW TO ENJOY AND SETTLED IN. JOY JOINED US AND STRETCHED OUT AT OUR FEET CONTENTEDLY, HAPPY TO HAVE US HOME.

A SHORT WHILE LATER, JOY STARTED MAKING A STRANGE SOUND IN THE BACK OF HER THROAT, ALMOST LIKE A SHORT, LOW BARK. WE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT WAS WRONG AND SHE STOOD UP FROM HER SPOT AT OUR FEET AND KEPT MAKING THIS STRANGE NOISE. WE HAD NEVER HEARD HER MAKE THIS ODD SOUND BEFORE. MY SON SAID, "WHAT'S WRONG, JOY?" AND PET HER HEAD TO SOOTHE HER. SHE STAYED AT OUR FEET, ALTHOUGH A BIT ON EDGE, AND SEEMED TO CALM DOWN A LITTLE BIT SO WE JUST CHALKED IT UP TO HER "DOG EARS" HEARING THINGS WE COULD NOT.

THEN, ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES LATER, WE STARTED HEARING AN ODD POPPING SOUND. SNAP. POP. POP.

"DID YOU HEAR THAT NOISE?" I ASKED MY SON.

"YEAH, WHAT IS IT?" HE ANSWERED.

JOY STOOD UP AND BEGAN MAKING THAT ODD NOISE IN HER THROAT AGAIN, ONLY LOUDER AND MORE INTENSE THIS TIME. SHE WAS DEFINITELY DISTRESSED AND VERY UPSET ABOUT SOMETHING.

I GOT UP FROM THE COUCH AND WALKED TOWARDS THE LAUNDRY ROOM WHERE I THOUGHT THE SOUND WAS ORIGINATING. AS I WALKED BY THE PLAYROOM, KABOOM! THE LARGE, GLASS PLAYROOM WINDOW BLEW IN AND HOT FLAMES JUMPED INTO THE ROOM! THE OUTSIDE OF OUR HOUSE MUST HAVE BEEN ON FIRE AND NOW THE FIRE HAD JUMPED INSIDE!

FROM THE HALLWAY, I SHOUTED TO MY SON, "THE HOUSE IS ON FIRE! GRAB JOY AND LET'S GO!"

HE JUMPED UP, GRABBED JOY BY HER COLLAR, I GRABBED THE NEARBY CORDLESS PHONE AND WE RAN QUICKLY OUT TO THE FRONT YARD THROUGH THE GARAGE.



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WE STOOD TOGETHER ON THE FRONT LAWN AND I DIALED 911 FRANTICALLY. MY VOICE SHOOK AS I REPORTED THE FIRE AND OUR ADDRESS TO THE OPERATOR WHO REMAINED ON THE LINE WITH ME. MEANWHILE, MY SON WAS STRUGGLING TO HOLD ONTO JOY BUT SHE WAS DESPERATELY PULLING ON HER COLLAR, FRANTIC TO GO BACK INSIDE THE HOUSE TO HER PLACE OF "SAFETY" — UNDER OUR KITCHEN TABLE.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, SHE BROKE FREE OF MY SON'S GRIP AND RAN INSIDE.

"MY DOG'S RUNNING BACK INTO THE HOUSE!" I TOLD THE OPERATOR.

BY NOW, BLACK SMOKE AND FLAMES WERE BILLOWING OUT OF THE WINDOWS OF OUR HOUSE. IT DIDN'T SEEM REAL -- HOW COULD THIS BE HAPPENING? I COULD HEAR SIRENS WAILING IN THE DISTANCE BUT I HAD NO IDEA HOW MUCH LONGER IT WOULD TAKE THEM TO REACH OUR HOME.

"DON'T FOLLOW HER," THE OPERATOR STERNLY INSTRUCTED.

"MY SON JUST RAN IN AFTER HER!" I YELLED TO THE OPERATOR.

I MADE MY DECISION QUICKLY AND THREW DOWN THE PHONE AND RAN TOWARDS OUR FRONT DOOR, INTENDING TO RESCUE MY SON AND MY DOG. THANKFULLY, JUST BEFORE I REACHED THE DOOR, MY SON CAME RUNNING OUT, COUGHING, GRASPING JOY FIRMLY BY THE COLLAR. BY THIS TIME, A NEIGHBOR HAD COME HOME FROM WORK AND SEEN THE FIRE AND HE RAN OVER TO US. MY SON AND I WERE FIGHTING TO KEEP JOY UNDER CONTROL, SO HE OFFERED TO TAKE HER TO HIS HOUSE. SHE WHIMPERED AS HE LED HER AWAY AND KEPT LOOKING BACK TOWARDS US AND THE HOUSE. WE LATER LEARNED THAT HE HAD TO LOCK HER IN THEIR BATHROOM BECAUSE SHE WAS SO FRANTIC TO GET BACK HOME.

THE FIREMEN FINALLY ARRIVED AND WE STOOD THERE IN SHOCK WITH THE NEIGHBORS WHO HAD GATHERED, WATCHING THEM PUT OUT THE FIRE. I CALLED MY HUSBAND AT WORK AND HE RUSHED HOME. WE DISCOVERED LATER THAT THE FIRE HAD STARTED IN OUR SHED, WHICH WAS ATTACHED TO OUR HOUSE. THANKS TO JOY'S EARLY WARNING BARKS, WE WERE ABLE TO LEAVE THE HOUSE SAFELY AND THE FIREMEN WERE ABLE TO EXTINGUISH THE BLAZE BEFORE IT JUMPED OUR FENCE AND BURNED DOWN TWO OTHER HOMES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. NO ONE WAS HURT AND OUR PETS, INCLUDING MY SON'S CORN SNAKE WHICH WAS KEPT IN A TERRARIUM IN HIS BEDROOM, WERE SAFE.

THE FIRE AND THE AFTERMATH WERE TRAUMATIC FOR MY FAMILY BUT WE SURVIVED AND REBUILT OUR HOUSE. WE LEARNED THAT THINGS ARE NOT WHAT MATTER — IT'S FAMILY THAT MATTERS, INCLUDING OUR LOVED AND CHERISHED PETS. WE ALSO LEARNED FIRSTHAND THAT "HOME" IS WHERE FAMILY IS — IT'S NOT A BUILDING OR STRUCTURE. WE NOW HAVE GAINED A NEW APPRECIATION FOR OUR BEAUTIFUL, BLACK, FURRY FRIEND — JOY ALERTED US TO THE FIRE AND SAVED US. AND MY SON RETURNED THE FAVOR BY BRINGING HER SAFELY BACK INTO OUR ARMS. ❁