

The Big Hairy Dog

Zach looked at all the presents under the big Christmas tree. Most of them were for him. He picked each one up, shaking it for a clue as to what might be inside. Zach wasn't smiling with excitement as you might imagine a boy would be surrounded by a sea of gifts, each brightly wrapped bearing his name. He knew the only thing he really wanted for Christmas wasn't under the tree. More than anything else, Zach wanted a dog. A big dog. A big, hairy dog.

Many times, Zach asked Papa for a dog. "Every boy should have a big, hairy dog," Zach would say.

But the answer was always the same. Papa had allergies. Even the tiniest little dog would make him cough and sneeze. "And besides that," Papa would say, "you are blessed with so much more than many boys have. You must learn to appreciate all the things you already have."

As Zach poked through the gifts, he thought, "I'd give all these away for one, big, hairy dog. Zach's eyes moved from the grand Christmas tree to the garland clad window. Through the snowflakes, Zach saw something in his snow-covered yard. It was the biggest, hairiest dog he had ever seen. Zach quickly slid into his jacket and out the front door. The big dog was romping and wallowing in the snow. "It's a Christmas miracle," he said to himself. "You must be my dog. I think I'll call you Hairy."

Zach reached out to pat Hairy. Hairy playfully moved back and began romping along the sidewalk. Zach followed close behind, not quite as agile on the snow covered walks as Hairy.

"Come on Hairy," Zach would say from time to time, "Stop and let me pat you." Hairy seemed to be enjoying his game of follow the leader more than a pat. Zach zigged and zagged with him up and down the sidewalks. Finally Hairy stopped romping. He shook the snow from his long hair. Zach laughed. It looked like Hairy was creating his own blizzard. Hairy jumped up and nuzzled his wet face around Zach's cheeks. "What a good dog you are," Zach said as he rubbed Hairy's long hair. "Now we're making friends. You are my dog." Zach patted and hugged Hairy. Zach was so happy, and he was sure Hairy was too.

Then Zach began to look around. Suddenly it seemed that the bright sun which had been shining all day was now disappearing, making way for night to creep in. None of the buildings towering over the streets looked familiar. Zach had followed Hairy to a neighborhood he had never seen before. The houses weren't neatly in a row, bearing snowmen and Christmas lights like in his

neighborhood. Instead, the buildings seemed big and menacing. He looked around at the strange surroundings. Now he wished he had put his gloves and boots on before he left the house. His hands and feet were cold. His ears were cold too.

“How are we going to get home,” Zach asked Hairy as he stroked his head. Hairy didn’t seem to be worried, but it didn’t appear to Zach that he would be much help in finding their way back home.

Hairy’s ears perked up when he heard footsteps in the snow. A boy drudged through the snow from around the corner. He was dirty and his clothes seemed ragged. To Zach, he seemed so big and scary looking. “What are you doing with that dog,” the boy snapped in a gruff voice.

With a tremble in his voice, Zach answered, “This is my dog, Hairy. I got him today. He’s my Christmas miracle.”

“That’s not your dog. He’s my dog. Now beat it,” the boy demanded.

Hairy left Zach’s side and began to lick the boy’s hands. Zach felt sick in his stomach. He realized that Hairy wasn’t his dog after all. Not only that, but now he was lost, and cold. Since it was getting close to suppertime, he was getting hungry too. Zach was doing his best not to cry. With a cracking voice, he said, “I, I can’t go home. I don’t know how to get back. Do you know how to get to Maple Street?”

“Why should I tell you, kid? You tried to steal my dog,” the boy fumed.

“I didn’t mean... I mean I didn’t know... I’m sorry. Won’t you help me? I want to get home for supper.”

“Supper, huh? Whatcha’ havin’? “

“I think Mama’s making chicken,” Zach answered. He quickly added, “She’s the best cook in the world. You could stay and eat if you want to.”

“Chicken, huh? Okay, kid, I’ll take you home,” the boy said.

“Thanks,” Zach replied, “112 Maple Street.” Feeling a little braver now that he was going home, Zach added, “and my name’s not kid. It’s Zach. What’s yours?”

“David,” the boy answered.

Zach and David made their way through the snow to Zach’s house, with Hairy leading the way just a few feet ahead. When they arrived, Mama opened the door. She greeted Zach with a tight hug, followed by a stern look. “Where have you been? We’ve been worried sick. Papa’s out looking for you right now.”

Zach and David went inside, and Hairy laid outside by the door. Mama gathered the boys in front of the fire. “You must be cold.”

“And hungry, too,” David added.

“Well, dinner’s been delayed, since I’ve been looking for a certain missing boy, but I’ll get some hot chocolate and cookies.”

While the boys sat in front of the fire sipping their hot chocolate and munching Christmas cookies, they told Mama the events of the day. Mama listened intently. No matter what, Mama always understood. She always knew just what to do to make things right.

“How long have you had Hairy,” Mama asked David.

“Just a few days.” Tears began to fill David’s eyes.

Zach thought that now this boy didn’t seem scary at all. He didn’t even seem big anymore. Just a boy. Just like him.

David went on to explain, “My dad lost his job a few months ago. Things have been pretty tight. They turned our gas off, so we don’t have any heat. My mom was worried that I’d be cold and get sick. It just so happened, that same day, Hairy followed me home. Nobody in the neighborhood had seen him before. My mom said if I took care of him, he could stay with us until we found his owner. That big, hairy dog climbed in bed with me that night and kept me warm. He has every night since.”

As David finished his story, the door burst open. It was Papa. He greeted Zach with the same warm hug and stern look. Zach and David stayed by the fire. Mama went aside with Papa and retold the boy’s story.

Papa came back into the room. “David, since it seems this big, hairy dog has brought us together, let’s go get your folks, and we’ll all have dinner together.”

David got in the car with Papa, but Zach didn’t want to ride along. As soon as the car was out of sight, Zach headed for the Christmas tree. He began changing the name on the tags from Zach to David.

Papa was back in no time. David and his parents were with him. Mama had a beautiful table set, full of the best chicken ever made. They even took some out to Hairy.

After dinner Mama and David’s mom talked in the kitchen. They traded recipes and other motherly things. Papa and David’s dad talked in the den. It seems Papa gave him a job at his factory and even arranged to get the heat turned on.

Zach and David spent the evening just gazing at the beautiful Christmas tree. Papa allowed Hairy inside, and he was right there beside them. Amazingly Papa didn’t sneeze once all evening.

Since they had an extra room, Papa invited David's family to spend the night in the warm house. David doubled up with Zach, and Hairy curled up in front of the fire.

The next morning was Christmas. Everyone was there. The presents were there. But the big, hairy dog was gone. They even looked outside. There was no sign of him, not even a paw print.

David's mom said, have jokingly, half seriously, "Maybe he was an angel." Even Papa said he was the best dog in the world.

Zach and David knew they would miss Hairy, but they couldn't be sad, because Zach got his Christmas miracle. For one wonderful day, he had a big, hairy dog, and David knew that Hairy was moving on to warm the life of another boy.

This holiday season our prayer is for all of us to be truly thankful and appreciative for all that we have been blessed with and to show compassion to those less fortunate.

After all, Christmas is all about Jesus. We should strive to be like Him. At this time of year, we remember how Jesus came to earth as a baby in Bethlehem, but sometimes forget that He grew up to be a perfect man. When He walked among men, Jesus showed compassion to everyone. He loved the lowly. Jesus gave hope to the hopeless and help to those in despair. Jesus is our example.

His love for us was so great that Jesus gave His very life for us. The bible teaches us that we all have sinned, and our sin will prevent us from entering heaven. However, Jesus shed His blood on the cross at Calvary to pay for our sins. If we believe that in our heart and ask Jesus to forgive us, and with His help turn from our sin, when this life is over, we can have a home in heaven.

Merry Christmas!