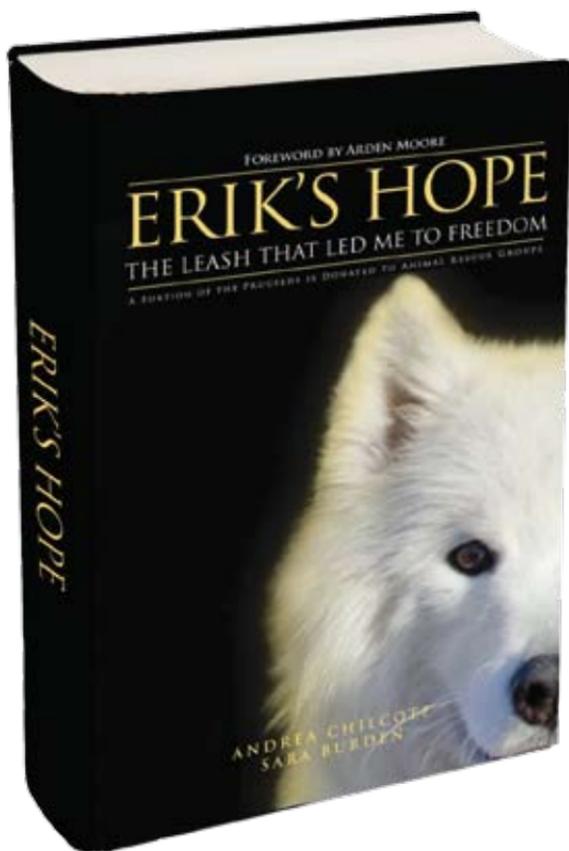


ERIK'S HOPE



THE LEASH THAT LED ME TO FREEDOM

- AN EXCERPT -





CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Erik ran to the open closet and pulled his leash off the shelf.

After Erik made several attempts at dragging his leash around the room and tossing it at her feet, Andrea finally picked up on his request and jolted back to reality. Erik was delighted when she said, “Big Dog, let’s go to the beach!” He liked it when Andrea called him Big Dog.

She knew that she would not be able to make a good decision by worrying over her desk; she needed fresh ocean air and a day of play with her best friend. She read the excitement on Erik’s face. “I know, sweet friend – we both need a break. We’ll walk as long as we wish, all day if we want. Thank you, Erik. Your timing is perfect. You seem to know just what I need.”

Erik was dancing. “A magical day,” he thought. “No deadlines! No hurrying about!” It turned out the day *was* magical.

As they walked, Andrea, her head filled with concerns still drifting about, noted that Erik was no longer beside her on the beach. He had run ahead and was dancing and barking to get her attention. When she focused her eyes on the subject of his excitement, she saw sand dollars. Not just one or two, but hundreds of white sand dollars scattered across the sand.

Andrea hurried to catch up with him. As she neared the collection of sand dollars, she marveled at the bounty before her. She slowed her walk and began picking up as many sand dollars as her pockets would accommodate. After gathering all her pockets would hold, she paused and ran her hand over one perfectly formed specimen. She looked down and locked her gaze on Erik. Their eyes met.

“That’s it!” Andrea exclaimed, and bent to give her dog a hug. She felt that now-familiar shiver again. “Erik, you helped me find the answer!” Jubilantly, Erik and Andrea raced and danced up and down the beach.

Andrea had set out that day to clear her mind of worry about her decision. The sand dollars had provided the needed distraction. And then – as if a

light bulb had been turned on in her head – she knew. The sand dollars themselves were a sign to her that the move to Atlanta was the right one. How they would get there was but a minor detail.

Legend has it that the five tiny, white bird-shaped bones inside the sand dollar represent five white doves, each waiting to spread goodwill and peace – at home, at work, at play and with each other. It became apparent to Andrea. The doves that fell from the broken sand dollars represented the work she would do to help people learn and grow.

As Erik watched Andrea he thought, “Just as she and I found each other, Andrea is now finding the pathway to her life’s passion – helping others in their growth. I know I’ve been an instrument in that discovery, and I feel good about my work.”

Erik continued to think, “And, I know I’m achieving my mission – my journey – and that feels good, too.” He straightened his head, gazed steadily at the horizon and received confirmation from White Wolf. Erik’s own intuition was accurate, and Andrea’s was finally coming back to life.

Reluctantly, Andrea realized it was time to bring this outing to a close. But this special day did not end at the beach.

Andrea led Erik to their car and they piled in.

Sandy and sweaty, it occurred to her that they were making a mess in Arthur's prized 280Z. She smiled at the thought of him complaining about it later, while secretly enjoying the fact that she shared his love for his quirky old car. She was glad she'd chosen this vehicle today. What it lacked in modern conveniences like adequate air conditioning, it more than made up for in soul. Soon, they were speeding away from the beach, T-Tops down, wind in their hair.

The sun was setting over the marsh as they drove. Andrea turned up the stereo's volume as she caught the opening notes from "The One." *There it was again!* In that moment, the lyrics seemed to be written precisely about the bond she had with her dog.

Erik, sitting in the back seat, noticed Andrea looking at him through the rear view mirror. The expression on her face changed suddenly as the music played on.

"Am I getting some kind of message I should be paying attention to?" she silently asked herself.

All at once, Andrea recognized that Erik had brought her this far. Erik sensed her acknowledgment even before the tears began. That day, as the song goes, the pieces finally fit for Andrea.

Erik's unconditional love for Andrea was palpable. For those few moments in the car, time stood still.

Every sense was triggered. Blazing sunlight burned the smell of low-country tidewater. The music and lyrics took a heady experience to a transformational level.

“Maybe she’s finally beginning to understand my purpose in her life,” Erik thought.

Andrea *was* beginning to understand Erik’s unselfish mission. He had suffered much as a young dog. Andrea knew that none of that mattered to him, not as long as he was with her.

Andrea smiled, thinking about the sand dollars piled up in the passenger seat next to her. They served as a symbol that the new business plans were solid. Somehow, the events of this day confirmed that her instincts about the location were right too. Erik had given her a beautiful gift. If not for him, she would never have felt the freedom to spend the day wandering the beach – and she would not have discovered the message of the sand dollars.



Andrea was anxious to show Arthur the sand dollars and to discuss a move to Atlanta. As she entered the foyer of their condo, Arthur met her with excitement in his eyes.

“Andrea, guess what?” he asked eagerly.

“What?” Andrea smiled at the thought that his mood matched hers, but she never could have predicted what he would say next.

“Well,” Arthur began. “I just got a call from my friend Greg in Atlanta. He was transferred there last summer and wants me to interview for a job.” Arthur held his breath as he watched Andrea’s response.

She grinned from ear to ear and hugged Arthur until her arms ached. He took that as a good sign. “I’ll tell Greg I can fly over this weekend.”

Andrea had indeed been cleared to land in Atlanta.

Late that night, Erik and White Wolf talked about the moment in the car when Andrea had experienced his unconditional love.

“White Wolf, I think I understand what you were trying to teach me about the present moment being the time of great creativity.”

“Yes. And you know something, Erik? Dogs live in the present moment all the time. They don’t fret and worry like the humans do. That’s one of the reasons you were chosen as Andrea’s teacher.”

“Ah, yes.” Erik thought, pleased. White Wolf was pleased too.

REFLECTIONS

Being Present



We've all heard the adages:

"Everything you need to know is available to you."

"God will handle the details."

"Never bet against the person with pure intention."

What is the mechanism at play here, and why do these so-called universal principles seem to only work some of the time?

At any given moment, we each have a choice to step into an experience from the heart and feel it with all our senses, or to remain inside our heads, thinking about it – or think about the past or future events related to it. This condition of living experientially (in the now) versus conceptually (in our heads) applies to mundane experiences such as airplane flights or to seemingly more important events such as a decision about one's future career.

While the human brain is a remarkable thing, access to our innate knowing, our intuition and the source of creativity does not reside there. When Andrea relaxed and became present to the sights and sounds from her airplane seat, she received a message through her senses – senses that were waking up after a long period of numbness in which her clever brain had convinced her it was all she needed.

Fortunately, she paid attention to the messages, and with Erik's help, she used the same process of becoming present at the beach to clarify her intention to move to Atlanta. It seems almost counter-intuitive, because that's the point at which many of us would try to "figure things out" – the very thing Andrea was doing at her desk when Erik interrupted.

The transformation at the beach was simple but profound. Atlanta moved from "thought" or "idea" to commitment. This intentionality was the seedbed in which the "details" manifested. This famous passage reminds us of the principle.

"The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's

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favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.”

W. H. Murray in The Scottish Himalayan Expedition, 1951, referring to German poet Goethe's couplet:

“Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!”

While there are many wonderful tools and techniques for becoming more present – things like meditation, yoga – or hugging your dog – it does not have to be an “event.” Being present is the human condition. Try it now.

Become aware of your body and your breath. Can you feel your arms? Your feet? What do you see? What do you hear? Notice any smells, tastes or other sensations. What are you feeling right now? Where in your body is this feeling most pronounced?

It's really that simple.