Meet the Amazing Chris Mouse

#1 in the Chris Mouse series



Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 - A CHRISTMAS TAIL 3

CHAPTER 2 - CHRISTOPHER A MOUSE 10

CHAPTER 3 - DOING LIFE TOGETHER 20

CHAPTER 4 - DOOTY STATIONS 26

CHAPTER 5 - CHRIS TO THE RESCUE 30

CHAPTER 6 - GARDEN OF EAT'N 36

CHAPTER 7 - BEACH PARTY SAFARI 45

CHAPTER 8 - TREASURE OF THE CARIBBEAN 59

CHAPTER 9 - MOUSEKETOK 70

Chapter 1 - A Christmas Tail



My name is Franklin Dooty. My wife and I live in Southern California and this is the story of a remarkable meeting that took place one Christmas season.

The first time I met Chris he was sneaking around the baseboard of my kitchen, just walking on tiptoes, which is kind of hard with mouse feet, but he did it well.

I had just come downstairs to get a glass of milk. I had woken up in the middle of the night and was having trouble getting back to sleep.

I could always con myself into believing that milk would put me into dreamland. And sometimes it even worked.

Walking across the hall to the kitchen I was suddenly aware of a tiny voice making a noise that sounded a bit like singing. At first, I thought it was the refrigerator making a high-pitched hum but because I have tinnitus I quickly dismissed it as just more random sounds in my head.

Suddenly the sound stopped.

I could almost taste the milk. I needed it. Sleep was waiting for me.

I walked straight across the kitchen floor, padding quietly along on my bare feet.



As I opened the fridge door the light spilled over the floor and onto the wall, highlighting a small grey critter with a tiny body and big ears. He had small black eyes which glistened in the light, and whiskers on each side of a longish grey nose. The little guy was frozen in place, not moving an inch, except his whiskers, which were quivering.

Okay, I've seen mice before, so I had a good idea that this critter was one of "them," but I had never before witnessed what happened next. Suddenly he stood up on his hind legs, balanced himself with his tail behind him like a three-legged stool, and spread his front legs (uh, arms?) out wide. His little squeaking voice started up again with the sound I had first heard. He looked straight at me as he stood there mouthing words that I couldn't quite make out.

I leaned in his direction to hear better. It sounded like he was saying, "Merry Christmas."

That startled me, never having heard a mouse talk before.

"Uh, what did you say, little fellow?" I stammered.

His mouth moved and the tiny voice said something about "Christmas." I was sure he was trying to say. "Merry Christmas."

"Uh, Merry Christmas to you, too."

He replied quickly, somewhat louder this time, “No, my name is Chris Mouse, which is what I was trying to tell you. What’s your name?”

Well, at least I could finally understand what the little guy was saying, so I said, “My name’s Franklin Dooty, little mouse.” I squawked through my dry mouth because I hadn’t had my drink of milk yet.

“Hey Franklin. My name isn’t ‘little mouse,’ it’s Chris Mouse. And here’s the deal, when you address a mouse, you have to say their full name so they don’t think you’re talking to someone else with the same first name. One other thing. People always talk past us, or they scream and run, but they never talk right to us. That’s very disrespectful, you know.”

“Sorry, Chris Mouse. I will try to be a better conversationalist with mice from here on,” I managed, while stifling a smile. “So, where do you live?”

Chris Mouse immediately launched into a description of his home, explaining that he came and went through a closet door to his home. He said that he lived in a very comfortable tiny home inside the opposite wall. When pressed on how he could get through a closed closet door, he said, “Follow me” and led me into the second bedroom in our house, squeezing right under the closed closet door and then squeezing right back out again. It was a very convincing demonstration.

“Oh, for goodness sakes,” I exclaimed. “I didn’t know anything could do that.”

“That’s nothing,” replied the mouse, “you should see what we do on Friday nights.”

Now he had my curiosity up. “What happens on Friday nights?”

“You wouldn’t know, would you. You’re gone every Friday night,” he said.

“Correct. We go bowling that night,” I explained.

“Well, promise you won’t get mad, but the minute you leave, all of the rest of us that live here have a party. My wife and kids and uncles and aunts and cousins come, the cockroaches are there, and so are the earwigs and spiders and flies and mosquitoes. Everyone is there, and I’m sure I’m leaving a few inhabitants out of my description.

“We start in the kitchen and form a long line. Us mice work our way into the pantry and we bring out some really good food. I personally like Honey Bunches of Oats, but some like chips, and then there’s a big group that want the nuts in that big Mixed Nuts jar.

“Hey, do you know how many mice it takes to open a Mixed Nuts jar? It takes four of us. We have to tip the jar over, being careful not to break it. Then two of us get on the lid and hold on to the ribbing on the left side of the lid while hanging and swinging in that direction. Gravity

helps spin the lid off and the other two mice catch it before it falls down another shelf. Then we pass out the nuts to those that want them."

I was a bit stunned by this revelation, and even more so just watching this tiny creature who had climbed up the leg of the table and now seemed in full "maestro mode" with his arms outstretched reaching for the sky, gesturing the movements as he described the party.

"How on earth do you do this while we're gone?" I asked. "I never noticed anything out of place when we got back home."

"Well, you see, that's the tricky part," he explained. "We get everyone to help, putting lids back on, tipping jars back upright, muscling everything right back where we found it. For an hour's party it takes us almost two hours to get everything back the way it was before our party."

"Okay, so you eat nuts and stuff. I get that. But eating isn't all that happens in a party. What else do you do?" I asked.

"Oh right, I forgot to mention the conga line. We all line up single-file and then move like this," and with that he demonstrated by thrusting one leg out, hoping forward on his other leg, then putting the first leg back on the floor and thrusting the other leg out, again hopping forward.



He demonstrated the moves quickly, without any hesitation, moving a total of a couple feet, and finishing with style. "We conga all over the kitchen floor in a long, snaking line. Some of us make clicking sounds with our teeth to set the beat. It's pretty exciting."

I tried to imagine how that would look before I asked the question that had been in the back of my mind. "I can see how mice and cockroaches might like some of the food you mentioned. But what about earwigs, spiders, flies and mosquitoes?"

“That’s the interesting part,” he answered with a scrunched-up face. “Spiders like to eat flies and mosquitoes, so the party usually ends up with fat spiders and fewer flying insects. The spiders are happy, and the flies and mosquitoes don’t live very long anyway, so they’re sacrificing for the greater good, and what better way to do it than being the center of attention at a party?

“The earwigs? They usually crawl up into the houseplants and munch on dead leaves. Sometimes they crawl up the wall in the bathroom and eat the dried skin on your towels, gripping it with their pincers. That’s kind of creepy but I’ll say this, they sure can do a mean conga line. Especially when they stand on their hind legs and click their pincers. It’s impressive!”

I couldn’t have imagined this in a thousand years.

The little grey fellow continued, “But in the last couple of weeks there are some different and confusing things going on in the house. There’s that tree in the living room with the boxes under it. You know the one? The only tree? The one with the lights on it?”

“Oh yeah, right, we usually don’t have trees in the house and when we do they have lights on them, because this is a special time of year. This is when we celebrate Christmas,” I offered.

“What, you celebrate me?” he said quickly, with a surprised look on his face.

“No, Christmas is a holiday when we exchange presents, eat lots of food, and celebrate something that happened a long time ago, long before any of us were born.”

“But you said, ‘Chris Mouse,’” he said.

“No, I said ‘CHRISTmas.’ It means Christ’s birth. We celebrate the birth of the son of God who came to earth to give us good news that we live forever, even after we die in our bodies, and that if we follow Him we will spend forever with Him in a wonderful place called heaven,” I expounded.

“Oh,” he said with a suddenly soft and downcast face. “That sounds like a very nice thing to celebrate. But I was really excited when I thought you said ‘Chris Mouse’ because I never had any celebration when I was born.” Then he looked down at the ground with a wistful look on his little face.

An idea suddenly popped into my head. “Well, Chris Mouse,” I said, “I think we can fix that, although it’s a bit late for your birth. I’ve got an idea. What if every year when this holiday rolls around, we all wish each other a Merry Chris Mouse, as an expression to wish people to have a wonderful time?”

At that, Chris Mouse jumped up and down on his two back legs with his arms stretched upwards towards the ceiling. “Yippee,” he squealed, “I get my own holiday and everyone will be saying my name a lot.”

“Yes,” I said, “but only during that time of year. However, to make you feel even better, if you go outside during that season, you’ll see lots of people greeting each other, saying, ‘Merry Chris Mouse’ to each other.”

He had a quizzical look on his face. “They will?” He was barely able to squeak out this last part, his voice suddenly taking on a different quality.

“They will,” I assured him.

“And here’s what I want you to do. This Friday night, we’re not going bowling because of the holiday, so I want you to gather all the other creatures that live here, and I want you to party like you’ve never partied before.

“We’ll stand quietly in the kitchen and watch so we can have fun just being part of it, but we’ll keep out of the way, I promise. We wouldn’t want to step on anyone.”

His face wrinkled up, “Yeah, that would be bad if you big people stepped on one of us. Thank you for being so thoughtful.

“But, you’re sure it’s okay? We are all kind of shy around people.”

“Sure thing,” I said with a smile. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to get a glass of milk so I can go back to sleep.”

He winked. “Anything you want, mister.” And then, he dropped back down from standing on his back legs and was gone in an instant.

I put my empty glass in the sink, returned to my room, crawled into bed, and fell fast asleep.



A few minutes later my wife pushed my shoulder and whispered loudly in my ear, “Honey, are you okay? You’ve been talking in your sleep for the last half hour. What were you saying?”

I leaned over to her, kissed her on the cheek and said, “Merry Chris Mouse, honey.”

Chapter 2 - Christopher A Mouse

So now that you've met Chris Mouse, let's learn more about him. Here's the story of his early years, as he told it to me one day, shortly after we met that first Christmas.

- - - - - - - - - - -

I remember asking my mama for the story of our family. She was busy finding food for us to eat that morning and all I could think of was the natural question of every young one – where did I come from?

My earliest memory was of being curled up and warm next to mom. I think I was still a baby at that point. It was comfortable, I had a full tummy, nothing better to do, so zzzzzzzz. I woke up a couple of times and curled over, maybe let out a little sigh and snuggled into mama's tummy again. Oh, it was great to be a baby mouse in this family.

My youngest months were spent being fed, growing, playing with my brother and sister, and trying to stay alive. There were lots of critters that like little mice, and my mom and dad told me all of the scary stories that didn't end well. I guess the lesson they tried to teach me was to know when a situation could possibly be dangerous and how to avoid it from the first hint.

When I got old enough to carry on a halfway reasonable conversation, something longer than "I'm hungry," I was constantly asking questions. I couldn't help it; I had an insatiable appetite for things I didn't know or understand. I was curious about everything.



Mama was patient but could get just a wee bit short with me if I pestered her too much with my questions. "Go chew part of a book," she would tell me, as if chewing on a book was going to give me the answers to the mysteries of life.

All I knew was that my mama and papa and my sister and brother all looked similar. We all had longish noses, we were sort of greyish, and most of the world we lived in was a lot bigger than us. For example, there were people.

The first person I ever saw was when I was about six months old which, given the life expectancy of mice years, is about 23 years old. Scared the mice poop out of me, it did. He was gigantic and moving and, I dunno, scary!

Of course, now I'm surrounded more by people than any other critters, unless you count bugs.

Then there was my brother and sister. My brother was okay, had a bit of an ego and tried to push his way around, but my sister didn't put up with any of that.



Angelique was really good when she was on her game. "Grayling," she would tell my brother, "you aren't tough enough to get away with that attitude and you better get a better grip on yourself or you'll be the reason you don't get a lot of opportunities."

As we all grew older, Grayling mellowed out, didn't think so highly of himself, and eventually met Celeste and they became a family. I was still with mom and dad but I would go over to Grayling and Celeste's hole in a nearby tree stump and have a good time, and really feel good about my brother. For his part, I think I rose in his estimation over time, as well.

I was earnest, but not the smartest member of the family. I was good at some things, okay at many others, and absolutely terrible at a few. But Angelique, I thought she was good at everything. I mean, everything.

She always was, too. When we were little my mom used to take Angelique aside and teach her things. As she grew older, Angelique became more independent, more capable and more confident of herself. I wished that my mom or dad would have taught me more, but I did get a lot from them and I know I owe them for that.

See, I don't think that my mom and dad owe me as much as I owe them. They raised me in a good home with good food and a comfortable life. They took me places and showed me things, got me ready for life as an adult, which is the desired destination after all. I look at some of the other mice my age and they don't have anywhere near the grasp on reality and how to live life

as I do. My mom and dad made the difference in what I became. And in what my brother and sister became, too.



My dad was a very busy mouse. He was always in motion, doing this or doing that. He was always around, and he was always friendly, but he was always, well, busy. Other mice called him industrious. When I got older, I would ask if I could just be his shadow during the day so I could see what I would need to do when I became an adult. He let me come with him every time I asked. I learned so much. I watched as he figured out when and how to do something. If he had a lot of things to get done in a day, he would figure out the priorities, how much time would be needed for each task, and the best time of the day to do it. Then he would just do what he figured out to do.

He got a lot of stuff done. I mean, Mr. I M Mouse had a plan to do everything, and he only needed more time each day so he could make a bigger dent in his list. What I learned about efficiency and how much you really can get done, I learned from him. And meticulous? Oo-eey. he was so picky about how things got done that sometimes you just had to accept and say, “Okay, whatever.” I didn’t really understand why he felt like he should be doing as many things as he could until one day when I asked him why.

His answer? “Because I can.”

That was the most motivating thing I had ever heard. I can definitely see the part of me that is him, and the part of me that is mom. What I didn’t know, was where I came from. Secretly, I wanted to understand what I was to become.

I’m nothing if not a prepared mouse and asking questions is how I learned.

I remember the one really meaningful, “what’s it all about,” moment with mom. I was standing by the crack in the wall that led to the human side of the garage. By the way, I grew up in, and we lived in, the critter side of the garage - the side that was inside the walls.

I was watching through the crack when mom walked up and asked what I was doing.

“Just watchin’ the crack, mom. Not much happening out there, and I don’t see one scrap of food or anything else to chew on.”

“Good job, son. You’re learning,” she said, which really boosted my confidence. Mom always made me happy with her encouragement.

“Thanks, mom. I’ve been curious about a lot of things lately,” I offered tentatively.

“You’ve always asked a lot of questions, but what are you curious about right now?”

“Well, for starters, mom,” I waded in, “where did I come from? I know you take care of me because you’re my mom, but how were you involved in my coming about?”

“Son, your dad should have this conversation with you but I can answer your questions,” mom began. “You are my son. Do you know what that means?” she asked.

“No, mom, that’s why I’m curious.”

“Well,” she continued, “your father and I wanted to be parents. We wanted to have children. So, we worked it out where I would carry you kids from teeny tiny to when you would be ready for the world, and your father would do all the work around here and help teach you. We made that agreement, and we stuck to it. So, when your brother and sister and you were teeny-tiny I carried you around in my warm body, giving you the nourishment you needed to grow. I couldn’t do much else but take care of you three kids, but after a while you all were ready to come out of my tummy and grow on the outside of me. So, you all came out one morning, and I fed you a liquid diet from my own body for a few months. And you grew. Now you’re getting close to being a grown-up and I’m so glad you’re curious because I think you can understand this better now.”

She paused to take a breath and find some water to drink and so I jumped in.

“Mom, I have some specific questions. How did I get my name? Who gave it to me and what does it mean?”

“You mean Christopher A Mouse? That name?” she asked.

“Yes, that’s the one. What does A stand for. Is that a middle initial for a longer name, like Anthony?” I added.

“Well, what species are you?” she asked.

“Mouse. I am a mouse.” I answered.

She came back with, “Okay, so you’re Christopher a Mouse. What’s hard about that? It’s very descriptive, don’t you think?”

I honestly never thought of it that way. I thought maybe the "a" stood for a second name, like Albert or Andrew.

“Uh, I guess. I don’t know,” I finally blurted.

“Well, you are a mouse and your name is Christopher, so you’re Christopher a Mouse. Plain and simple,” she finished, and with a sweeping hand flourish, I might add.

I was relieved but also still a little unsure. I was happy that it wasn’t a name that I would hate, but not sure that a descriptive name that just had a middle initial would make me very popular with other mice, either.

But, at least that was settled!

What remained to be settled was what I was to become.



Since I was a small mouse I dreamed of being a strong and resourceful mouse like my dad, but also having a family and most importantly, doing something really worthwhile, meaning something that I liked to do and something that benefited the world, if maybe just a little bit.

As I mentioned, I followed my dad around. I also spent a day every week with just my mom. She taught me a lot, just like my dad. Between the two I got a good education in life.

But once I became a teenager, I started to think more seriously about my future. I didn’t want to back into a way of life, I wanted to walk forward on purpose, looking for adventure, and my future.

So, I looked at the adult mice around me, the ones that lived inside buildings, and those that lived outside that we saw and hung out with when it wasn't too cold to go outside.

We garage dwellers are a bit spoiled and a bit dainty, you know.

There were the outgoing types of mice, always in everyone else's business, they lived through other mice's lives because they couldn't yet figure out their own.

That was the kind of mouse I didn't want to become. I wanted to figure out what I was supposed to be so I could be the very best at it. I figured if I knew who I wanted to be early enough then I could put all the pieces together over time to get there.

A couple of the adult males were aggressive types, picking fights, in fowl moods and snarling, just plain not-nice mice. They were always trying to make themselves look better, but they usually ended up looking worse than they hoped. Which made them even more angry.

There were the timid types. They hung back and didn't get out in front or get excited about much. They were afraid that someone would pick on them if they showed any emotion, so they just kept themselves neutral. They just rolled with the tide and went where the wind blew them, or where the more aggressive mice scared them to.

There were the know-it-alls. They acted like they always knew exactly what to do and were very forceful in communicating this fact. Ask any question around them and they would be the first to answer, with a paragraph-by-paragraph lecture. Funny, they were not that favored by the other adults, even though their intuitions often proved right.

There were the very experienced types. They had tried millions of ideas and could share which ones worked and which ones didn't. They weren't really intuitive; they were just experienced. They also could go on for hours in answer to questions but only about their own experiences. I liked their stories the best, because they were from experience, not opinion.

Each character of mouse was interesting to me, and I honestly didn't think I liked one that much better than another. I finally concluded that I didn't have great intuition, so I took on experiencing things and making mental notes about them. That along with my dad's resourcefulness really helped me to live past my youth, unlike some of my friends.

Each adult mouse that I came in contact with taught me something. I either liked what they were doing and the result of it, or I didn't. That gave me a good direction to point to, and I followed those directions as I grew up.

Not every mouse did what I did. I had friends and brothers and sisters that messed up by picking bad mice to imitate. If they picked a bad role model, they ended up with less than a great life, sometimes a short one. If they picked a good role model they usually ended up with a better and sometimes really great life. It was all in who they modeled their life after.

Here's what I concluded - we don't all come out of our mama's tummy with perfect instincts and a clear direction for life. We learn along the way, and those lessons, good or bad, help determine where we will end up at various points of our life. All I knew was I wanted to end up happy and fulfilled, not unhappy and feeling empty.

One of the great moments of my growing years was when I found good friends that were headed in the direction I wanted to go. I could see that their destination would be a good one, and I learned from them.

I also learned a lot from the mice I didn't want to be like. They did things that ended poorly, and I could simply draw a line from what I saw them doing to a point in time when they would be old, poor and not happy, or not still alive. I decided that I wanted to be the opposite and grow towards better role models.

One of the better role models was a young mouse friend named Felix. His family lived near ours in the wall of the garage, and we would often play together since we were close in age. Felix had great parents. They treated him well, gave him good direction, and celebrated all his achievements. I could see that his journey in life was going in a very positive direction. Every time I turned around Felix was getting celebrated for doing something good. His positive experiences affected me. I wanted to have the same thing, so I watched what Felix and his family did, and I tried to copy them.

As I grew older, I felt that I was being cheesy, forgive my words, but it seemed like others might think I was shallow for simply copying my friend instead of making my own way. To be honest, I felt totally justified because I was seeing the same benefit and results in my life that Felix was experiencing. That made sense to me, I concluded, so I continued to look for other mice like Felix that I could follow to get positive results.

Fortunately, for me there were plenty of those kinds of mice, but they usually weren't the ones I thought they would be. The best examples when I was growing up were either small, or they looked a little different, maybe their hair was a different color, or their eyes weren't the same as most mice, or they had bad teeth, or they were just not very comfortable around other mice. In other words, they weren't like every other mouse. Those were the mice that taught me the most and that I tried to use as examples.

That may sound odd, but the truth is, they were the kindest, the most earnest, the most caring, and the least likely to be mean or think too highly of themselves. They just wanted to fit in and most of them learned how, and they grew more resourceful.

Take my best friend, Frizz. His hair came in funny and he had kind of a bad leg so he didn't run or walk like most of the other mice. He half walked and half scooted, which worked out well because he could get around really quickly, but it just didn't look like how the other mice moved. His hair also stuck out more on one side of his head than the other.



Frizz was the one mouse my age that I could be totally honest with. He never judged me if I had strange thoughts or if I was having a bad day. He simply was my friend. I learned a lot about being a friend from him. And I tried to be the same back to him, which made us both feel good about our lives. We talked for hours, and dreamed about what we would do in life. I didn't have any idea for my future, but I knew that I wanted to be a good mouse, and eventually a good father and a good member of my community. That was about all the farther I got with future thinking.

Frizz, on the other hand, had big dreams. He wanted to travel, to see places far away and eat strange and wonderful food and do things that we couldn't do where we lived. He was the first mouse that I knew that found the beach. He showed up at my house one day, with his wild hair sticking out on the one side and one eye that kind of wandered a bit, and he said, "Guess, what Chris?"

Of course I was intrigued. Guess what about what, I wondered. So I answered, "What, Frizz? What should I guess?"

He answered, "I went through some pretty dangerous places with big things that make noise and could smash a mouse flat as a leaf. I just kept going until finally I came to a place that didn't have dirt, it had soft ground made up of very tiny little bits that squish down when you walk on them. And there was a loud noise, so I looked around and walked a bit further and there was strange water as far as you could see. The water was rolling toward me and then it rolled over on itself and made a loud, crashing noise. The wind was blowing, birds were everywhere, and there were people walking on the squishy ground down to the strange water and then when they got there they walked out into the water until you couldn't see their feet. Some of them actually went into the water and you couldn't see any part of their body and they splashed around and then eventually walked back out of the water and into the squishy ground again."

I was shocked. I had never ever seen or heard anything like this.

Frizz continued, "I was hiding in grasses when I heard some humans talking. One of them was talking about something called the beach. After a while I figured out that 'beach' was the name of the strange place where I was."

“Wow, Frizz, that’s pretty cool. I’d like to see that,” I exclaimed.

“No problem, Chris. We can go together. I’d like to see it again myself. Wanna go tomorrow?”

“Uh, well, I’m not sure. It sounds like a lot of trouble, and maybe dangerous and…”

Frizz stopped me right there. “I guess you don’t really want to see it then. That’s okay. I’m going anyway. If you want to come along, that’s okay.”

I thought about it for the rest of the day and the next morning Frizz came by to tell me he was going to go to the beach again.

I got up all my nerve and told him that I wanted to go with him. I almost passed out just talking about it, I was so nervous.

We went together. It was a bit scary, but Frizz is a very cautious mouse and he didn’t take any risks. We made it to the beach and back safely. That was the beginning of our exploring trips, to the beach, a neighborhood pond, a fruit orchard two blocks away, and a big flower garden in the other direction. It was Frizz’s sense of adventure that taught me so much about trying things I had never tried, and about being cautious so I wouldn’t get hurt.

Another good friend was Frak. Like Frizz, he was a bit on the different side, but he liked to talk and he liked to imagine things. He would see things in his mind and tell me about them and then I could kind of see them, too. The other mice stayed away from him, but I hung out with him because I also liked to let my mind wander and think of things I had never seen before and try to imagine how the things I did see were used and what they were for. Frak taught me so many things, and he also pushed me to dream about things I had never seen or experienced, which gave me a great sense of curiosity about everything. I like to think that I learned how to handle many different situations because of what Frak taught me.

Then there was Fiddle. He was the kindest mouse I ever knew. He was nice to everyone, and especially to the mice that were nice to him. No one that met Fiddle liked him at first, but before too long they could see him for who he really is - a kind mouse. He is the sort of mouse that makes you feel better and makes you want to be better, too. If Fiddle saw a mouse in trouble, he was always the first mouse to help them. He always had a nice smile, which made it look like he was always happy. I knew that he had some troubles at home, but he never let it show. I think his smile and kindness were like a mirror that warmed his heart and made him feel happy, even when things weren't great in his life.

These mice friends were my role models and they helped me become who I am today. I know I wouldn’t be half the mouse I am if they hadn't been in my life.

I still see them, even though we’re all grown and have families. Well, most of us do. Frizz was too busy to worry about girl mice and so he lived with three other mice that didn’t need to have

families, either. They were like big kids sometimes, just doing what they felt like doing. But they were also really good at making things. When we all got older Frizz and our friend Frak became well known as builders. When new mouse families moved into the neighborhood, Frizz and Frak would build them a place to live, whether a home in a wall or underneath a house, or even outside in a burrow or a bush. Those two mice are always busy and the other mice feed them and give them food to take home for the work they do building mice homes.

And then I met Christine. She was drop-dead mousterful! I met her one day and the next day it seemed like we were friends. We spent days together just talking about our lives and experiences. And then after a month or so, she looked at me with those beautiful eyes and I got the courage to ask her if she would be my wife.



A tear came down from her eye as she slowly turned to me and said, "I thought you would never ask."

Our wedding is another story, but the most important part of my life was the process of learning who I am. It's my identity and it was formed by all of these other mice. I learned from the ones I admired, and noted what I didn't care for in the mice I didn't admire.

So, that's how I can tell people I'm not "Chris just any old mouse," but I'm "Chris A Mouse." And I came to be who I am thanks to learning from the mice I wanted to be like and then trying to be like them. They were my models for life.

- - - - - - - -

I just chuckled at the end of his story and I said, "I don't have any story as good as that so I'm just going to borrow yours. It's a good story and I'd like to see how other people would react."

Chris looked straight into my eyes, twitched his whiskers for a second, and said, "I don't think anyone will believe that you live in a Home in a Wall, Mr. Dooty. You really wouldn't fit, you know."

Chapter 3 - Doing Life Together

The Dootys and the Mouse family have lived together for over a year since Chris and Franklin discovered each other that first night in the kitchen.

As they do things together, they grow close, take vacations together, have adventures together and the two families become great friends. The Dootys have supported everything the Mouse family wants to do and the Mouse family has done the same for their human friends.

But those stories are later. Here's how the relationship between them began.

Several weeks after the Christmas time encounter, Donna Dooty told Franklin, "We should have your little mouse friends join us for dinner. Wouldn't that be fun?"

Franklin smiled in agreement and the next day he talked to Chris, inviting him to bring his family for dinner that night.

"That sounds very nice, Mr. Dooty," said Chris, "but I'm not sure how my family will feel. We're a bit nervous about people, you know. But I'll ask them, okay?"

Franklin nods and Chris scampers back to his Home in the Wall to tell his family what he and Mr. Dooty have discussed.

His wife Christine and their kids Carl and Candy have excited looks on their faces as he explains the dinner invitation. Whiskers twitch and their bright eyes blink - they are a little anxious, but they all agree to try it.

That evening the two families have their first dinner together.

Franklin introduces his wife Donna to the mice and Chris introduces Christine and their kids to the Dootys.

Franklin has a surprise, and he places a small dollhouse table on the top of the kitchen table so the Mouse family can reach their food while sitting on their hindquarters at the four sides of their table. The Dootys sit on two adjacent sides of the big table just opposite the Mouse table.

Mrs. Dooty has prepared a nice meal with all the best mice foods. She sets out sausages, vegetables, nuts, fruit and berries in little plates, plus banana slices for dessert. All of these are in bigger portions for Franklin and Donna, and smaller ones for the Mouse family members. It is a wonderful dinner.

Conversations at this first dinner together are somewhat quiet as the two families get to know each other better.

Mr. Dooty stops the talk briefly. "We begin every meal with a prayer. It's one of the times in the day when we thank God for providing for us. Will you join us as we thank Him?"

Christine jumps in, "Oh, we're so glad you do that. We pray, too. We're members of the local Mouse Church and we believe that God has put us here for a reason. We are very thankful for everything that He provides."



"Excellent," says Franklin. "There is much that we have in common, and I'm so glad we share that important part of life."

All six dinner participants fold their hands or paws as Mrs. Dooty says a prayer thanking God and asking for His blessing on their time together.

After that, the dinner table seems to be an even happier place with every face bright in anticipation of a delicious dinner.

During dinner, Chris and Franklin are very talkative, perhaps because they have developed a relationship right from their first encounter. The two males rattle on about the weather, the house, the yard, what they like to do, and on and on, while Donna and Christine watch in amusement.

Donna is quiet while the males talk, but she is very kind and she soon asks questions of Carl and Candy, which helps break the ice for the young ones.

When Mrs. Dooty asks Carl, "So, what are some of the things you like to do, Carl?" he answers instantly, "Well, I like to play a lot. Candy and I chase each other, and I wrestle with other mice my age. We also play mouse games with our friends. We are studying in Mouse School so we can get smarter. It's not easy and it's not my favorite thing, but I'm learning a lot."

Donna asks, "That's interesting, Carl. What are you studying?"

"'Family Dynamics' is one class at Mouse School that we all take," says Carl. "It teaches us how to get along in our family and how to be responsible members of it, with. our siblings and parents. I like that class okay, but it's not my favorite. My favorite school activity is sports."

Candy chimes in, "Carl likes sports, but I like health. I like to care for others that have physical problems, and this year our class adopted a neighbor mouse that got his leg caught in a trap. We made a splint for his leg and now he can walk pretty good. Our teacher said that maybe later this year we'll see if his leg has healed enough to take the splint off. That's pretty cool.

"I also like writing. I sometimes think I could be a writer when I grow up, because I like to write about things that are going on. My writing teacher encourages me to be careful to write facts and not my opinion. I guess that's okay, but sometimes I want to share my opinion, too.

"But, of the two I think I'll probably go into health when I get older because I just think it's really important that we take care of each other."

"I'll say it is," says Mrs. Dooty. "I always liked those classes myself. I wanted to be a doctor when I was younger, but for humans it takes many, many years of school and working and testing before you can become a doctor."

Candy has a surprised look on her face. "That's a big commitment, Mrs. Dooty. I can see why that would be something you would have to really think about before you did it. Mice don't live as long as humans, so it would be hard to do anything for many years before we could actually do that work."

Franklin joins the conversation, "Carl, what kind of sports do you like to play?"

Carl responds. "I like chase and hide-and-go-seek. We play those games very seriously and the best players are very popular. I'm pretty good at chase but hide-and-go-seek is taking me a while to get good at it. Both sports are what my teacher calls survival skills.

"I also like PawBall a lot. It's a team sport that requires strength and also good strategy. And I like Mouse Pull, too. But the most interesting game is a physical skill game called Mouse Tower."

Chris and Christine have been watching these exchanges with interest. The Dootys are such nice people to talk to their kids. It shows both mice parents that their host couple are kind people.

Christine joins the conversation. "Mrs. Dooty, I really like the food. How do you get it?"

Donna answers, "Some food we get at a local business called a grocery store. Inside there are lots of different kinds of food. Everything we're eating tonight is from the neighborhood store. But, I would like to plant many food items in a garden. That's a large section of ground where we can grow vegetables of all kinds.

"Would you be interested in helping in the garden? You could have a section just for your family, to grow the kind of food you like. Of course, you would have to take care of that section, but it's very rewarding."

"I would really like that," answers Christine. "If you can show us what to do in our section, we can take care of it. That sounds like a very good family activity, and we all like fresh vegetables and other garden food."

Later in the dinner, both families have learned more about each other, and there is a genuine feeling of friendship and warmth. As the Mouse family excuses themselves, they walk back to their home, which they call "Home in the Wall," and talk about their new friends, the Dootys. They're very happy to make friends and they talk about how great it is to be friends with the people in whose house they live.

During dinner earlier, Mr. and Mrs. Dooty suggested that the two families have dinner together once a week, whenever possible, and Carl and Christine quickly agree. It's a very nice thing to look forward to.

Over the next several months, the two families find other ways to get closer together.

When Christine's birthday comes around Mrs. Dooty bakes a special carrot birthday cake for her and the Dootys give her a very pretty hand mirror that was made for a human doll but is the perfect size for a female mouse. Candy "oohs and aahs" over the mirror and Mrs. Dooty makes a mental note to get one like it for Candy's birthday.



Franklin Dooty's birthday is a great, two-family dinner. The Mouse family gives him a small present, wrapped in nice paper. When he takes the paper off, there is a button that came off of his favorite shirt many months before that Carl found and showed his parents. They decided to keep it for just this moment.

When Franklin sees the present, he gets a big grin on his face and says, "That's very thoughtful! I haven't been able to wear that shirt because it was missing this one button, and your present gives me back my favorite shirt."

Over the next several months, the Dooty and Mouse families become like a special, extended family. The only thing they don’t do together is active sports, because the size differences between humans and mice are just too great. So, Franklin and Chris watch football and baseball on the big tv in the Dootys' living room. Before long, Carl joins them to also watch the games. As the two male mice learn more about the games that humans play, they talk about them later and both think that the similarities between mouse games and human games are very interesting.

During that first summer, the Dootys even go to some mice games, which scares many of the mice participants until Chris and Carl tell them that the Dootys are nice and also the people they share a house with.

Franklin and Donna cheer for Chris and Carl's favorite teams, which is fun and a nice way to share life with their friends.

(More details and information on mouse games are described in Book 3 - "Life in a Chris Mouse World.")

Donna and Christine are also becoming good friends and get together every so often to talk about the garden that they discussed at their first dinner together. Each one describes what they would like to plant in each part of the garden, and they read gardening books and magazines together. It's fun and they laugh often about what they want to do. But, that's another story, and it's shared later in this book in Chapter 7, "The Garden of Eat'n."

Chapter 4 - Dooty Stations

As everyone knows, there's a responsibility when you live in a house - you have to keep it clean and kept up. Franklin and Donna Dooty have a few rules about their house and those include keeping the house dirt-free and well maintained.

The result is a home that looks good, feels good and is a comforting place in which to live.

The two families have their own ideas on how to keep things up. They live in the same house, but each family has their own rules about housekeeping and upkeep for their living space. Chris and Christine Mouse have a weekly and monthly list of what is needed to keep the Home in the Wall the way they want it to be. Franklin and Donna have their lists of chores in the Dooty household. In many places the two lists are the same.

The Chris Mouse family's chores are generally about how to keep their home clean. Christine is what is called a "clean freak." Dirt is not welcome in the home and that includes dust, mud, paw prints, claw prints, and other things that Christine says are not acceptable in her house.

Every week, Carl and Candy are required to clean their room. Room cleaning includes all of the usual dust and dirt cleanups, as well as making sure their sleeping nests are clean, shaped well, and look neat and orderly.

Every other week, the entire Mouse family pitches in to do whole house cleaning. Every room is dusted and then cleaned with mouse hair mops and water. This house cleaning is done on a Saturday, starting in the morning and finishing when Christine declares it is done, after she inspects every room and decides that everything is clean.

Carl and Candy grumble a bit about the cleaning tasks, but every family member admits that they are proud of how their home looks. Friends and neighbors that visit usually remark that they are impressed with the neatness and cleanliness, which is a source of pride for the whole family.

While the Mouse family has their chores, the Dootys' chores are a little different.

Franklin takes care of house maintenance, making sure everything works, from plumbing to water, to heating and of course, to the structure itself. If a door or window doesn't close well, he fixes it. If something gets broken, he repairs it.

Donna is responsible for cleaning, as well as other personal chores like keeping clothes clean and in good repair.

Both Franklin and Donna share the cooking and other cleaning chores, and both also share responsibility for the outside - the yard and the exterior of the house. It seems fair to them to divide up the duties of maintaining their house and home, and both are happy with their arrangement.



In the first Spring after the Mouse family is discovered by Franklin, Donna notices that some of the chores around the Dooty household probably should be shared by the Mouse family.

At the next dinner together, Franklin and Donna bring up the subject of home care with their new friends and housemates.

Donna is the first to mention it. "We love having a nice home and we're so glad to share it with your family. You are wonderful friends. Of course, there are a few areas where we both add to the need to keep the house clean, so perhaps we can talk about how to keep everyone happy and also not add to anyone's burden."

"Sure, Mrs. Dooty, that sounds totally fair," says Christine. "What do you think we can do to make that happen?"

Franklin jumps into the discussion, "I can see where we might have some overlap between our two households. When we walk in the house, we all track in dirt and mud, especially if it's been raining. Since we all do that, we all could help out by helping clean up the messes when we make them."

"Good point, Mr. Dooty," says Chris. I noticed that, too, and I was trying to think of a good solution for that."

Mrs. Dooty offers, "Well, maybe we could do a once-a-week cleaning of the floors, from the doors to the bedroom closet where your home is located. How about that?"

"That makes sense," Christine agrees, " and we certainly don't want to be a burden on you, plus of course we should share in the responsibility for keeping our common areas clean."

"Great, let's put that down on a list. Honey, can you make the list?" says Donna to Franklin, to which he nods in agreement, because as a husband he knows that he can hardly say no to his wife.

"Do you or your family notice any place else where our overlapping activities can create cleaning or maintenance issues?" from Donna.

"Well," says Chris, "When we have our parties on your bowling night, we try very hard to return everything to the condition it was in before you left the house. But, I've noticed that after our two-family dinners together, you end up cleaning everything up. That doesn't seem fair to me."

Donna responds, "Oh, thanks, Chris. That's very thoughtful of you. I don't mind but it would be fun if we could all clean things up together. We could make it our own two-family afterparty."

"Good," says Christine. "That's a good idea and, like you say, Donna, it could be fun, too."

Carl and Candy have slight frowns on their faces. They each have their own list of household weekly chores and adding to it isn't a pleasant thought, but they both admit that it does seem fair the way the adults are describing things.

"How about the outside," asks Chris. "What can we do to help there?"

Donna replies, looking at Chris and Franklin, "I'm glad you asked that, Chris. Christine and I have been thinking about a garden, and we'd like to add a section that your family

can use to raise food that you like. She and I could use help planting, weeding and harvesting. Are you guys interested?"

Franklin shakes his head in agreement, but Chris just sits listening.

Christine jumps in to that topic. "Doesn't that sound great, Chris? We can grow some of our favorite things and it will be very healthy to be outside doing good work that will benefit our family, right?"

Chris isn't so sure, but he can see that Christine has her mind made up. When Christine is in that mood, there is no use in arguing with her. Chris is a smart husband.

"Sure, honey. That sounds fine. I know Carl and Candy can help with that. Let's talk about that later, okay?"

Christine adds, "Great, thank you, dear. Donna and are I going to get together to plan the garden and since we can count on both of you guys, that makes it so much better."

After that, a list is made for each family to follow in keeping things up. As time goes on, some chores are added, some are taken away, and some change a little. It is working out to be a great arrangement that everyone benefits from.

Every household member keeps their own calendar so they can mark off what they need to do and when.

The young Mouse family members, Carl and Candy, learn that as members of the family, and also as part of the Dooty household, they are responsible for maintaining a certain standard of cleanliness. Chris and Christine also remind them that when things are clean there are fewer problems with dust allergies and other bad things that can grow and cause health problems later, like mold.

These are lessons in responsibilities that both young mice will pass on to their kids when they have their own families in the future.

What both families decided during their meeting together is a great example in how to work and live together with others. Arguments about responsibilities are best avoided by agreeing on things ahead of time.

Chapter 5 - Chris to the Rescue

It’s 3 o’clock in the morning, Franklin is walking around, and he thinks to himself, "I swear I’m not making this up. I’m walking in a daze, and I woke up just a few minutes ago with a terrible thirst. Why does this happen?"

He looks to see where he's going but everything’s bleary and he feels just a bit wobbly. If he had a drink earlier, he would have at least something to blame this on. But he didn't so he is as sober as a lynx on a prowl.

He thinks he should call out to his wife, Donna, but then he remembers that she is staying overnight with her sister in another part of town.

So, instead he finds his way to the bathroom door, opens it slowly so as not to make a sound, and stares inside at nothingness. Black. He can’t make out a single thing. It’s like black everything in front of him with no detectible lightness, no texture, no shape, no dimension. Nothing. Just black.

A gentle light comes on when he puts his hand up to where he imagines the switch to be. The light immediately shines from within a recess along the top of each wall.

He loves the intelligence of that switch and the soft, bathing, green light it controls. The light and its smart switch is soothing and illuminating, a combination of qualities that makes it perfect for guiding him at night.

The bathroom rug feels soft and comforting to his bare feet. Especially comforting since the weather has been unusually cool at night recently. Walking outside after dark isn't very comfortable unless you're wearing a sweater or warm shirt.

But tonight, after coming out from under the warm comforter on the bed, he's glad he doesn't have to feel cold tile under his bare feet. The plush bathroom rugs are also perfect because that is exactly what they’re there for. To be plush. Plus, they’re comforting at just the right time. Like almost always.

Five, maybe six, steps toward the door and he's suddenly blasted with a single bright light shining straight up into one of my eyes.

“Ow,” he says out loud and to no one. “What the heck is that?”

A tiny voice shouts out from the vicinity of the light. “Halt, who goes there?”



“Oh, for goodness sakes, Chris,” he calls out. “Can’t you wait until morning. I could have stepped on you and then what? A crushed mouse in the house? You can’t even make up a story like that.”

“I was just kidding with the ‘Halt, who goes there?’ question,” responds the tiny voice. “I heard a sound and came in here to find out what caused the noise. Then I saw you, Mr. Dooty, and I’m just a little curious why you’re up this late,” continues the small, furry Chris Mouse. "You never are up this late."

“I don’t know why, either, Chris,” Franklin replies. “I just woke up with a very dry mouth, a condition I might add that is irritated by proximity to small, grey, furry critters with long noses,” a comment that he means to be a joke since he has no allergies and he and Chris are the best of friends.

"Why are you here?"

“Well, I have a very good reason for being here,” Chris responds haughtily. “I was asleep and then I felt like something was going to happen and I was supposed to be somewhere for it. So, I got out of bed, left the Home in the Wall, and I have been spending time in each room trying to see if that’s where I’m supposed to be.

"Already, I’ve been in the kitchen, laundry room, dining room, guest bath, the breakfast nook, the pantry, two closets and one bedroom. I had the feeling that I had something very important to do, although I can’t seem to figure out what it is. That’s the best I can tell you.”

“I’m having a very similar experience, Chris,” says Franklin. “Except I’m starting to get dizzy and my arms are really hot. I’m just not feeling very good.”

“Hmm, that’s a might curious. Are you at all feeling like you’re having to breathe harder for air?” Chris replies.

“Funny you should mention that," says Mr. Dooty. "It sounds more like that’s what you’re feeling and you’re trying hard not to be alone.”

“Yeah, that’s kind of it, Franklin. But I am curious. How’s your breathing?”

“Chris, my breathing is fine. But you look a little peaked. How are you feeling? Are you having to breathe harder?”

“Yes, I am. But I’m expected to. Mice sometimes carry around something called hantavirus. It’s not very good for humans, and not all that good for my kind, too.”

“So, what do you do about this, when you get it?” Franklin asks. “How do you recover quickly from it?” Now, he's actually curious because he has felt a little under the weather recently.

“All I know is that it’s pretty mild for us, but it can be deadly for you."

“Good to know,” Franklin answered.

That was the last time he sees Chris before…

…he wakes up lying on the floor. His face is wet, he's sweating all over, and he feels like he is just waking up from sleeping. He looks around and there is Chris, standing on his chest, jumping up and down.

“Hey,” he yells, “what on earth are you doing?”

The fog in his brain is lifting and now Franklin can clearly see that his body is curved sideways, wrapping slightly around the claw feet of the bathtub.

Chris stops jumping, looks straight at him and says, “You’re alive. Whew! I thought you were a goner. One minute you were there and the next minute your eyes rolled back in your head, and you crumpled to the ground like a blade of grass after your lawn mower cut it in two.”

“So, why were you jumping up and down on my chest?”

“I didn't know what else to do. I saw it on a television show that you and Mrs. Dooty were watching one night. Remember, we sometimes sit right under your feet while you watch tv from the couch. I like some of the shows.

"Anyway, this one time some human was flat on the ground and another human was pushing on his chest with his hands. The human on the ground looked like you did, and so I thought maybe what they did on the show would work for you. But even if I pushed hard with my paws, I still wouldn’t be able to move your chest, so instead I used my full body weight to jump up and

down to move your chest and hopefully it would help circulate your blood. I'm a beefy mouse, I am." (Chris always was a big braggy about his physique.)

"Well, whatever you did certainly didn't hurt me and here I am, back from whatever happened. So, thank you, Chris. You are such a good friend."

"You're welcome," Chris replies. "But you should probably go see someone who knows something better to do than jumping up and down on your chest."

And that's exactly what Franklin decides to do. Three days later he and Donna are sitting in the doctor's office listening as she tells them that tests show that Franklin has experienced a mild heart attack, followed by a slight stroke. She tells them that if Franklin hadn't fallen the way he did he might have died because she saw evidence that his heart had stopped during the incident. And then she stuns them both by telling Franklin to sit down while she says, "And if someone there hadn't done modest chest compressions then even the fall probably wouldn't have been enough to save you."

Right after Donna got home the day after the incident Franklin had told her what happened the night before and what Chris had done. Both people are now amazed to hear that a mouse apparently saved Franklin's life.

After coming home from the doctor's office, they talk about it, and that night Franklin whistles for Chris to come out of the Home in the Wall. A minute later Chris is standing in front of the Dootys with a questioning look on his little furry face.

"What up, my friend?" he says.

Franklin asks Chris to have his family come out and join him and Donna. After the mouse runs back to his home, within a few minutes Chris, Christine, Carl and Candy are all standing in front of the Dootys, curious about why they were needed to come out. Looking at them, Franklin thinks to himself, "they sure make a very handsome mouse family."

Franklin pulls out a bag of cashews and peanuts from under his coat with one hand, and with the other he produces a tiny-framed certificate, just the right size for the Home in the Wall. As he rises to his tallest, Franklin draws in a big breath and says, "Mr. Chris Mouse, in appreciation for your heroic and quick action, along with your clear thinking in the face of an emergency, I present you with this framed certificate designating you 'The Official Mouse of this House.' You saved my life by doing chest compressions after my heart attack and I am alive today because of you. By the way, this honor has never been awarded to any other mouse in this house or in any other house that I know of. That means that you are a special hero."

Then Mr. Dooty hands Chris the small certificate and continues, “Of course, this recognition is not alone. Donna and I also want to present you with this gift, a bag of fancy cashews and peanuts for you and your family. May you all enjoy each and every nut as our small way of thanking you for your heroic deed.”



For the first time in the experience of Mr. and Mrs. Dooty, Chris is speechless. He just stands there staring as though he can’t believe his own big ears… or, like he doesn’t know what to say. In any case, he hangs his head down, grabs the certificate, hands it to Christine, grabs the nuts and, dropping back down to all fours, he scurries back to the wall, following it along the mopboards to the bedroom and then under the closet door and into the Home in the Wall, trailed by his family.

Most of the time, the Dootys see Chris almost every day, but he is suddenly missing for several days. Just as Franklin and Donna are bordering on getting worried, Chris shows up. And Franklin almost steps on him because Chris has silently padded into the room.

He looks up at Franklin and waves his hands over his head as if to get his attention. Mr. Dooty stops and kneels down next to him, asking right away, “So, how have you been?”

Franklin had really wanted to have a more serious conversation when he saw Chris next, but he is too relieved to see him to do so.

“Thank you for your concern,” Chris answers, “but I just want to thank you.”

“For what?” Franklin asks.

“For being my friend, for letting us live here so comfortably, and letting us have the run of your house. And then, to be able to help you, that was a big thing for me. I wasn't sure what to say, so I just chose to stay away for a while until I could think of how I should act.”

Chris furrows his brow, and Franklin is afraid his little friend is about to cry. It is a serious moment for the two friends.

And then Chris adds, “And one more thing I want to thank you for?”

“Oh, what’s that Chris,” Franklin asks.

“For not rolling over on me when you were passed out.”

At that, they both start laughing, softly at first and then with rolling, hilarious laughter, the kind that curls your toes.

Over the next several weeks Franklin and Donna talk about the whole incident, with Franklin reliving the moment over and over again.

His last comment on the topic is to Donna. "I will always be grateful to Chris for saving my life. His death-defying act was heroic, and I was glad to honor him in front of his family. They are becoming our good friends. I am so happy to have them live in our home with us. And I'm also glad that because of him I am able to enjoy more time getting to know these terrific housemates."

This episode in the lives of both families reminds is a lesson that when you see something that doesn't seem right, do something. When a human or a mouse are laying on the floor and they can't find a heartbeat, start doing chest compressions immediately. For more information, find out about CPR. You may be the only way to save someone's life.

Chapter 6 - Garden of Eat'n

As Spring continues, the conversations between Donna and Christine about having a vegetable garden are getting more serious. The two females read gardening tips together when they meet. Donna makes copies of articles from gardening books and magazines and shrinks them in size, printing them on the Dootys' computer printer, which Christine takes to the Home in the Wall to read and share with Chris.

It's fun for both ladies as they read and study and plan their sections of the garden. When they get together, they talk excitedly about what they each have learned.

In two weeks, it's time to put their plans into action.

They decide to take a small section of the Dootys' yard and remove the grass down to the roots. This is a job for Franklin, which he does in two afternoons, resulting in a nice, large patch of bare dirt.

While the garden seems small to Donna it seems very large to Christine, for the main reason being that the two females are two very different sizes.

A large portion of the land will be used for the Dootys' garden since the two humans are bigger, eat more and are able to care for a much larger area than the Mouse family. Donna and Franklin have decided on what they want to plant, and they draw a diagram of where everything will go.

At their next get together, Donna shows her friend Christine her plan and they talk about how the Dootys will take care of it.

Christine has also been thinking about her family's portion of the garden plot. The conversations she and Chris have had have been lively, which means they don't exactly agree on everything but each of them agrees to give in a little to get their plan together. The Mouse plan is to grow carrots, lettuce, cabbage, and broccoli in their part of the garden. Chris wants to add bell peppers, and after a few arguments, Christine agrees. Their garden plan is now complete.

Chris makes up a quick diagram of the mouse garden plot, which Christine shares with Donna the next day.



Donna goes to a local garden supply store and buys the seeds for both sections of the garden, plus several plastic trays and soil in which they can sprout the seeds. Candy and Carl are put in charge of planting all the seeds in the trays, with each family's seeds in separate trays. It's fun and both young mice can't wait to see what happens next. After they have planted the seeds, Donna waters the newly planted trays with a small watering can as the two young mice watch with satisfied smiles on their faces.

Donna places the trays on the window sill in the kitchen where they will get full sun. Every day for the next two weeks Carl and Candy come to check the trays and put drops of water on dry soil. There is great excitement when the first tiny ittle plants poke their heads above the dirt.

The two young mice run to the Home in the Wall yelling, "Mom, Dad, you have to come see this. The seeds are sprouting, and you should see the plants. It's so cool!"

Of course, Chris and Christine dutifully follow their kids to the kitchen where they all admire the new baby plants that are peeking above the dirt. It seems like a miracle. The Mouse family has never seen anything like it, and for the next couple of days it's all anybody can talk about.

Donna and Christine decide that planting of the sprouts should take place in one week, which means that Franklin will need to dig up the dirt and Donna will need to add what she calls amendments to help break up the garden soil, letting air in and helping the garden to not dry out too quickly. That will also keep moisture in the soil for the valuable young plants.

Chris and Christine offer to help with the process, but it's a lot of heavy work, even for humans, so it's decided that their family can scratch in the amendments like compost and stinky manure in their plot while the Dootys use a machine called a rototiller to work in those same ingredients into their much larger section.

Later that week, Franklin brings home the machine and the soil additions from the local home improvement store and a little more than two hours later he has the soil broken up and the ingredients worked into the Dooty plot. It is so quick and easy that he goes ahead and works on the Mouse family plot, too, while the Mouse family stands and watches in amazement at how quickly the equipment does the job.

That afternoon, both plots are all ready for planting, which each family decides to do the following day. "Amazing," thinks Chris, having been concerned about how much work this would all take.

Almost every hour the next day Carl and Candy ask if it's time to plant yet. Christine is thrilled. She's never seen her kids so excited about anything. She's so pleased that the garden is a project that their whole family is taking on.

The next morning it's finally time to plant. Donna and Christine organize the effort. Donna gives directions to Franklin and Christine directs her family. It's a beautiful day, with clouds and mild weather, just perfect for gardening.

The two garden sections are separate, and each family can work without interfering with the other. Donna and Franklin have the larger patch, but they're also bigger and can do their work quicker. They go down each row, planting, patting down the disturbed dirt around each plant and putting a little water on the young seedlings.

Christine, Chris and their kids are smaller, but they're also closer to the ground, which gives them a distinct advantage. As Christine indicates where each type of plant goes, and instructs her family on how to plant them, Chris lifts the plants out of the Mouse family tray while Carl and Candy dig each hole, their little paws throwing up dirt in the air. Candy uses a tiny watering can to



add water to each plant after it's been set into its hole.

The work goes quickly and by the end of the afternoon the Mouse family has all of their young plants in the ground. The family stands on their hind paws and everyone raises both front paws in the air for a victory pose. Everyone feels excited about the work they have done. They stand and admire their part of the garden which looks very nice with row after row of small plants with tiny leaves.

Franklin and Donna have almost finished with their plot when they look over and see the four mice dancing with paws in the air. The two people smile at each other. It's been a very good day. After they finish planting their garden portion, Donna goes into the house, brings out a jar of apple juice with four tiny cups and two human size cups and fills each, handing cups of the sweet liquid to everyone for a celebration.

"Ahh," are the sighs of satisfaction as the fruit juice splashes down dry throats. The sugary liquid returns a little energy into every tired body.

It's been a unique day for both families and both are excited by how their gardens look, as they try to imagine what they will produce.

Christine turns to her garden partner Donna and says, "What should we call this beautiful garden, Donna?"

Donna thinks for a second and then says, "I think we should call it the Garden of Eat'n. What do you think?"

"I think that's a great name for it. Let's get our guys to make a sign with that on it."

And that's what they do. The sign is put up in front of the entire garden patch signaling to them every time they see it that their efforts are going to pay off with some wonderful, fresh food.

Over the next month, the garden plants grow and spread out. Of course, they're not the only things growing. Every day both adult females go out to inspect the garden. One day Christine turns to Donna and asks, "I think there's a problem. What are those plants growing between our vegetables?"

"Oh oh," answers Donna. "Those are weeds. They just happen and every garden gets them. They're not good because they take the good growth energy from our veggies. We have to pull them all out while they're small."

"Okay, I'll get my kids to help," and Christine goes back in the house and into the Home in the Wall, finds Carl and Candy, and leads them back out to the garden.

It's not easy, but the weeds are still new, and in just a few hours the young mice have all the weeds pulled out and stacked up outside the garden. Donna picks up the useless debris and puts the weeds into a box that she calls a "compost pile." She explains that it is a place where unwanted greenery can break down with the warmth of the sun and eventually become good soil for later use in the garden.

In the coming weeks the weather gets warmer, which helps the plants mature and begin to produce beautiful looking vegetables.

Nice weather and growing plants bring another challenge.

One day Donna notices more birds in their yard and going to the garden area she sees several of them picking at vegetables. "Oh no," she thinks. "That's not good. I better get this taken care of before they eat all of our hard work."

Donna goes in the house, calls out to Christine, and the two females go out to the garden to survey the problem. Donna says that this is just another common challenge with growing vegetables.



Donna runs into the house, walks into the closet where she stores the Christmas decorations, and pulls out tinsel from last Christmas. As she brings tinsel bunches outside, she shares her idea with Christine, "Let's string these on our plants until I can get to the garden store and can get some netting."

That does the trick for several days. The birds don't like the reflected sunlight flashing from the shiny strings of tinsel, and they retreat to nearby trees to stare at the twinkling garden.

Two days later Donna returns from the garden store with a big roll of netting. Franklin is enlisted to help and the two people stretch netting over every row in the garden. That works really well, and the birds are no longer a threat, flying away to find easier pickings. Christine is

impressed. It's a great idea. It solves the problem, and the mice family can still crawl under the nets to tend to the garden!

A week later a pesky rat is walking through yards looking for trouble to get into, and he spots the garden while Chris is in one of the rows. The rat scratches his chin and thinks to himself, “Hmm, that looks like a free lunch to me.” As he walks toward the garden Chris spots him and shouts loudly, “Not in my garden,” and he runs into the house to tell Donna.

"Okay," says Donna, "The nets should work, but he might still be able to dig under them. I know that rats don't like coffee grounds so I'll bring some out and we can scatter it in each row. Can your family help?"

"Sure thing," says Chris and within two hours the Mouse family puts the grounds between each garden rows, that are now protected by scattered coffee grounds. The rat is watching all of this, and as soon as the families go back in the house he scampers over to the gardens to munch on some tasty lunch.

"Yuck," he says when he smells the coffee grounds. "That smells terrible. That just ruined my appetite."

That's the last they see of the rat. Another danger to the garden has been stopped.

As days go on the garden continues growing. The two families divide up the responsibilities for maintaining the entire garden area, with the Mouse family doing the work that needs to be done at ground level, and the Dooty family handling efforts on the taller parts of the plants. It's good work and a good system, and everyone is satisfied with their jobs and the results.

There's just one more problem to overcome. Christine is checking on the garden when she notices that some of the leaves have what looks like bites out of them. She can't see anything that could cause this but it sure looks like something is trying to eat their leafy greens. Then she looks down at the base of the plants and sees a slimy trail between them. She's not sure what causes that, but when she brings Chris out to inspect, he immediately knows what's causing the leaf damage.

"Good news, Christine, there's a snail in our garden. That means we'll get some other food out of this garden, too. We just have to catch him and then we'll have snail for dinner. Yumm! I'll come out a few times each day and see if I can spot him."

The great snail hunt is on. Over the next few days Chris and Carl find and capture several snails in both portions of the garden and the Mouse family feasts on the delicious food for a week. That solves that problem, and later they also solve an insect problem because mice love to eat grasshoppers, too.

When Christine shares this information with her friend, Donna is delighted to hear how the critters that could destroy their garden are providing good meals for their friends in the Home in the Wall, while also protecting garden crops.



After another few weeks of wonderful garden weather, a freak rain storm drowns the entire garden, creating deep puddles of water. Donna and Christine look out the windows nervously, concerned that their precious garden will be drowned. Fortunately, the next day the sun is shining and the ground slowly dries. The plants, of course, are very happy because the watering goes deep to their roots and the moisture lasts just long enough to provide good nourishment without hurting the growth.

Each week, like with every garden there are new challenges and new victories and then finally some of the produce is ready for picking and eating. Donna goes into the garden with a big basket, with Christine sitting in her shirt pocket to help guide the process.

At the next weekly family dinner Donna and Christine make several dishes using the fresh produce which everyone enjoys eating. Smiles of satisfaction are on every face.

Donna and Christine slap hands-paws together and then do the same with their family members. The garden is one of the most satisfying things either one of them has ever done, and even better, they did it together.

As the victory meal ends Chris leads everyone in a cheer and the members of both families celebrate their wonderful accomplishment.

Donna has bought some magazines and books about cooking vegetables, and she sits down with her friend and garden partner Christine to produce a cookbook for mice families. Their book turns out to be really helpful because the Mouse family plot is producing way more vegetables than their family can possibly eat.

Here are just a few of the mouse-and-kid-friendly recipes from their book that you can make and eat. Try making these for your family with a parent helping you.

Easy Mouse tacos



Ingredients:
Shredded Lettuce
Avocado
Hamburger meat
Shredded cheese
Tomato paste
Crisp taco shells

Directions:
Cook the hamburger until done. Place the hamburger, lettuce, slice of avocado into a taco shell, cover the ingredients with tomato paste and cheese.

Eat and wiggle your nose with happiness!

"Mouseonya," (mouse lasagna)

Ingredients:
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1/2 lb spinach
7 oz ricotta cheese
1/4 cup parmesan cheese - grated
1 - jar of Bertolli Traditional Marinara, Italian Herbs & Garlic Pasta Sauce tomato sauce
4 lasagna noodles (no boil kind)

Directions:
Cook the spinach in a pan until it's soft.
Cook most of the cheese and tomato sauce until hot.
Add the cheese and tomato sauce to the spinach
Put two lasagna noodles in a small pan
Add half of the cheese and cover with tomato sauce
Add the other lasagna noodles on top of that
Cover the top noodles with more tomato sauce and top it all with the last of the cheese.
Bake in the oven for 40 minutes at 450 degrees, or until brown. Check it regularly and take it out when it's brown.

Eat and twitch your whiskers. Oh, right, you're not a mouse so give someone a high five!

Tussle Salad

Ingredients:
Romaine lettuce
Tomatoes
Hard-boiled eggs
Shredded carrots
Cheese
Salad dressing

Directions:
Slice the eggs, tomatoes and lettuce. Shred the carrots and cheese. Mix it all up in a salad bowl and spread thin lines of salad dressing on top.

This is what mice love to eat so when you eat it, think about how great it would taste if you were Carl or Candy.

Mouse cake (Mice love chocolate)

Directions:
Buy Betty Crocker Super Moist Chocolate Cake mix
Follow directions to mix and bake

Eat your delicious cake and blink your eyes with a big smile of happiness! Yummy! Now rub your tummy and say, "yippee!"

Chapter 7 - Beach Party Safari

The first time Franklin Dooty heard of the Mouse family planning to go to a beach party was when Chris asks if he might be able take some of the Mixed Nuts from the pantry.

Honestly, Franklin is a little bit surprised because he never thought that mice would travel to the ocean for a party, even the very smart Mouse family.

Franklin is working in the yard that day, when Chris comes up to him with his whole family and asks, “Mr. Dooty, me and Christine and the kids are invited to a beach party. We’re going to teach the kids safety in traveling in urban areas. But we sure would like to take something to contribute to the party and those Mixed Nuts are always a fave among us and our friends.”

Chris is genuinely nice about it, which is his general demeanor anyway.

Of course, Franklin is equally nice, being in a good mood because of the recent warmer weather and also recognizing a gracious request. So, he answers, “Sure Chris, you can take all the Mixed Nuts you want. We know where to get more. But, I didn't know that you knew how to get to the beach.”

"Oh yes, Mr. Dooty. I used to go with my friend, Frizz, before I met Christine. He and I went several times, and I really liked it. Now that my kids are older, I want to show them the beach, too."

"Okay, well I know you'll be careful so have a good time and bring back some interesting stories," is how Franklin finishes their conversation.

Chris nods his head in agreement and as one, the whole family, Chris, Christine and the two kids practically skip away toward the house.

The Dootys are outside a lot in this weather, sometimes working on their portion of the joint garden and sometimes Franklin is just working on the yard. The Mouse family also enjoys working in their part of the garden, but mice outside are more prey than predator so the Mouse family is very safety conscious.

We haven't mentioned this before, but there are cats in the neighborhood. Oh, and coyotes, too. Plus, owls and other raptors that think a mouse makes a pretty good meal. But Chris and his family are very cautious and know how to be outside and protect against the risks. And, you have to hand it to Chris, he is one clever mouse. Plus, he’s a good dad and husband; much better and more protective than most.

Donna, who is known to the neighborhood kids as Mrs. Dooty, is the cautious one in the Dooty family. She always helps everyone to prepare for danger because she has learned that not all danger is obvious, so it's best to be ready before it hits.

"Franklin, I don't think it's a good idea for their family to go all the way to the beach. You know the challenges that we face, even driving in our car. And they're much smaller than we are," as she shares her concern.

"Yes, I know, dear, but Chris is a pretty cautious mouse, and I doubt that he would knowingly risk his family's health," Franklin replies. "And I certainly would like to help him if he's committed to going."

"Well, I still don't think it's a good idea, but I guess with our help they can at least be as prepared as we can help them be." Donna is generally very agreeable even when she disagrees, but Franklin is grateful that they don't have a long discussion on this.

Two days later Franklin sees Chris at night as they are both walking down the hall. "Hey Chris," he calls out, "when is the beach party and how long do you plan to be gone?"

Chris puts his paw under his chin and scratches it. "Well, it's about a two-hour scamper, the party will last for two hours, and it will take about two hours to come back. The party is this Saturday at 11 in the morning, so we'll leave about 9 and get back about 3 or 4. I like to travel during the daylight when we can see any potential danger."

"Okay, it's Wednesday now. How about you make a list of what you need and Mrs. Dooty and I will help you get it together?" Franklin asks.

"Sure, sure, Mr. Dooty. Thank you. But we can't carry much so we'll pretty much just be taking the Mixed Nuts. I don't know that there's much preparation needed."

The two friends decide that the Dootys will provide some kind of carrier, two tiny backpacks that Chris and Christine can wear to carry the nuts.

"It's a good thing that Donna is very clever with making things," Franklin tells Chris. "I'll get her to help."

He explains to his wife the very next morning what the Mouse family needs, and the two get started. They need straps and a container, a carrier of some type that will hold the nuts.

Donna says that the packs probably won't need to be totally waterproof, or even rigid. They should be able to just use fabric, tie it into a bag with string, and then use more string as the straps. After Donna has an idea of how that could work, she directs her husband to get the shoelaces from an old pair of his tennis shoes.

She explains that thin string would probably be uncomfortable when traveling any distance because it could possibly cut into mice bodies if they're wearing the carriers for a long time. She reasons that the wide shoelaces will spread out the pressure, making the whole experience much more comfortable for Chris and Christine.

Of course, she is always way more practical than me, Franklin thinks.

"How can we get the packs to stay on Chris and Christine's backs," asks Franklin.

After thinking about several options the couple decide to make the packs so they fit sidewise on each back, one half on one side, the other half on the other, kind of like saddlebags. The nuts can go in each side to balance out the load, and the shoelaces will be tight because Donna and Franklin will tie them to Chris and Christine's backs on Saturday morning. Coming home, the bags will be empty, so they will be light and easy to carry back and they could even be left at the beach in a garbage can.

When Mr. Dooty explains this to Chris, his eyes suddenly brighten as Franklin mentions the garbage can. "Oh man, I love those things. The most fun Christine and I ever had was the day we got married. We spent the first afternoon of our honeymoon in a dumpster. It was fabulous."

Franklin smiles at the thought of he and Mrs. Dooty spending an afternoon in a dumpster. "We would never ever be willing to do that," he thinks, "because we both would think that would be a stinky idea." But, he smiles at the thought.

The next day, Donna brings out the two tiny fabric sacks with shoelaces sewn to the middle and Velcro on each end. Franklin has to admit, it is a clever design, and just in time because the Mouse family leaves tomorrow morning for their beach party.

Chris and Christine try on the packs and help each other with the Velcro shoelace ends. The two mice don't have much trouble, because they're both very resourceful and also, the design works very well.

The Dootys get out the mixed nuts, put an equal amount in each sack, and watch the two mice balance the packs on each other's back and then fasten the Velcro ends for each other. The design works well, and the mice don't need any help to cinch the packs tight.

Chris looks perfect. His pack fits exactly right. Christine's shoelace straps, however, are a bit too long for her smaller body, so Donna lifts off the bag and makes a few adjustments. The result is just exactly what is needed, and the bag now fits great, even with nuts in it.

With that settled, Chris and Christine take off the two packs and place them on the floor near the kitchen door. All is ready for the next day's adventure, and a day ahead of time.

Saturday morning comes early in the Mouse family's Home in the Wall and everyone is excited. Chris wakes up Christine and the kids to get everyone moving and ready to go. He has been planning this trip for several weeks, starting when they first got invited to the party, so he has a pretty good game plan, which begins, of course, with everyone getting up out of their nests and getting ready.

Both kids are still drowsy, wiping their eyes with their paws. Christine is scurrying around getting food for everyone to eat. Breakfast is part of a discarded hot dog that Chris found in a neighbor's garbage can, plus some granola that Mr. and Mrs. Dooty thought was old. (Just so you know, mice prefer food that's been aged a bit.)

Chris puts on his family-leader hat and, glancing at his family, he gives the kids some last-minute instructions. "Candy, you need to clean your whiskers, and Carl, help me with my pack after I help your mom."

Both kids mutter some form of "Yes, dad," and each does as they are told.

Chris helps Christine get her pack on and balanced and then adjusts it fairly tight. Then Carl helps his dad get his pack on. "Dad, you need to lose a little weight," Carl offers as he tries to get the Velcro laces tight.

"Hey, you little rascal. Just tighten those laces and we'll get some exercise on the journey to the beach," Chris replies with a laugh and a smile.

Once his pack is tight, Chris glances at the big clock on the kitchen wall. 9:00 am. Perfect timing for their departure.

Chris quickly shoos everyone to their exit from the house. The kitchen door had a cat door when the Dootys moved into the house, left behind by the previous owner, Chris has guessed, because Mr and Mrs Dooty don't have any animals. The mice find it pretty easy to push the flap of the cat door and come and go as they please. That's both good and bad, as you'll see in a different story later.

Chris pops through the door first and once he is satisfied that there isn't any danger outside, he signals to the rest of his family to come through. Within seconds the whole family is standing together on the porch.

Chris motions for everyone to come close and then explains the plan. "Today is an important opportunity to learn how to be safe when we're traveling outside. Kids, you need to listen to me and do exactly what I tell you to do. It can be dangerous outside, and there are lots of possible hazards on our way to the beach – birds that want to eat mice, and cats and dogs that want to play with us or even hurt us. To travel safely we will need to stay hidden as much as we can. To do that, we'll be moving very quickly from one hiding place to another. I'll lead the way

and then show you exactly what to do. When I signal to you, do exactly what I say to do and scurry to where I'm at. Then we'll regroup and repeat the process. Any questions?"

"Just one, Dad," Carl asks. "Do we all run together when you signal, or is it better if we go one at a time?"

It is a good question and it shows that Carl is maturing.

"I will tell you how to proceed with a signal," Chris answers. "If I want only one of you to come, I'll hold up just one paw. If I want everyone to come, I'll hold up both paws. Whichever signal I give you, move as quickly as you can and move like you saw me do.

"Does that make sense?"

Christine and the kids nod and Chris can see a little worried look on the kids' faces so he adds, "Don't worry. I've traveled safely like this many times. If you do what I just told you, and what you see me do and I signal you to do, we'll all have a fun and safe adventure, and we'll have a great day. Just one more important point – when you all run at the same time, spread out and don't run in a tight group. You'll be a lot safer if you're not all together.

"Okay, the next step is to practice before we go very far. I'm going to run from here to the gate. When it's safe to follow me, I will face you and signal you."

And with that, Chris hurries down the steps and scampers to the fence. He peeks through the fence for a minute to see what is on the other side. One thing Chris has learned as a mouse – when you're outside the fence you're more exposed than when you're inside it.

The grass in the yard is a bit taller than Chris thought it would be, but it does provide a bit of cover so it isn't all bad. He hadn't counted on the dog across the street that can see him through the fence.

"Bark, bark, bark!" The dog is telling the entire block that something is not right in the Dooty yard.

Chris waits at the gate until the dog stops barking. Like most dogs he is easily distracted, like now when he spots a tennis ball in his yard. Once he turns his attention to the ball and he is no longer a threat, Chris faces his family and holds up both paws as a signal.

He's relieved to see them running across the lawn and they join him at the gate in seconds.

"Great job. You all ran exactly the way I did. That was perfect," and he high-fives each of them.

With a hand wave to them, they all crawl under the gate and stop as Chris surveys their next moves.

“Okay, guys, here’s what’s next,” he offers. “Now that we're out on the sidewalk we're going to be more exposed, so this is where we need to be more careful. See that fence with the bushes growing around it?”

Chris points to the fence along the sidewalk in front of the next house. They all nod. “I’m going to run to the base of the fence where the bushes will hide me. Watch what I do and then do the same thing.”

Again, three nodding heads, no one saying anything, but all are in agreement - nods are good and also easy. This early in the trip, Chris is concerned that his family members are a bit nervous but he's relieved to see that they are quiet.

He waits until there was a break in traffic on the street and then he starts running. Chris never runs straight because he knows that It’s too predictable. All a predator has to do is see where their prey came from and watch where their straight line will take them. Then it can just run or fly faster and get there before they do. At least that’s the lesson Chris was taught by Frizz when he was younger.

Chris zigs this way and then zags the other way, getting to the fence and the protecting bushes very quickly. Looking back at the bush by the gate where his family is waiting, he also notices a person rolling a bag on wheels down the sidewalk, stopping at most houses to deposit thin white paper objects in a slot in their doors. Chris has seen lots of mail people come to the Dooty house before, and they always seem pretty harmless, but he doesn’t want to take any chances so he waits until the person with the bag passes and then he holds up one paw.

Carl does exactly what he saw his dad do, and within seconds they are standing together. They both look up and down the street. No one coming, no animals or large birds, so Chris holds up both paws and Christine and Candy race to join the other two in the new location.

This is going okay, but Chris knows that they need to keep moving if they are going to get to the beach by 11.

The next stage of the trip is longer. Chris gives instructions to his family. He will run along the sidewalk next to the fence for four more houses and then stop at the corner of the block. Christine and the kids will watch him and when he signals them, they will follow.



He sizes up the distance, looks for any sign of danger and, seeing none, he races off. The fence changes with each house, from wooden slats to chain link to vinyl fencing and finally to chain link again. He's glad to see that there are no threats in sight. When he has made his way to the fence at the corner house he turns around and looks for his family. He can't see them. "Oh no," he thinks, "did something happen? Are they scared and in hiding?"

He takes a deep breath to compose himself and then looks back again, trying to focus. Pop, first one head and then pop, another sticks out from the fence bushes in the distance. It's his family! He holds up two hands and watches as all three scurry quickly down the block, joining him at the corner.

Whew! That was a big test and the family has passed. Christine and Chris check each other’s packs to make sure everything is still secure and then the whole family does high-fours. (Mice only have four digits on their front paws so they can't possibly do high-fives!)

As Chris has instructed the family, this journey is going to test all of them. They will have to watch out for every type of danger but being smart and working together they will be able to make the trip to the beach and return safely. This is a big adventure and there are many types

of threats, but they are the Mouse family after all, and they are very clever. Today, Chris will see if his instruction will pay off and his family learns the value of teamwork.

Chris stops to think. They are doing good but still have 10 blocks to go, and his family now faces their first really serious danger - they have to cross a busy street.

Chris has crossed streets many times, but he's an adult mouse, which is an age a mouse doesn't reach unless they're reasonably smart and quick.

This next challenge poses two problems.

The first is they will be easier to spot by people or dangerous critters because they will be out in the open. They will have to move quickly to limit the time they are visible.

But, the second problem is bigger. It's the cars that roll along the street, sometimes very fast. Chris has told his family about cars and he has sometimes pointed them out through the fence in their yard.

What Frizz taught Chris when they were younger mice, is to stay hidden in the bushes and watch. Usually, cars pass by in groups, followed shortly by one or two that are slower. The key is to wait for the big cluster to pass and then watch for the stragglers. You don't want to get caught in the middle of the street thinking it's okay to cross and then get hit by a following car.

Other mice call cars "smokers" because you can smell them when they pass. Lately, it's not been so easy because there are quiet ones that don't have any smoke or smell. That makes it important for mice to watch and listen very carefully.

Chris and his family huddle under some convenient foliage along the street as he watches the traffic. One cluster of cars goes past. He waits. Just as Frizz taught him, there's a straggler following behind. He still waits and then not seeing any more cars to the right or left he runs across the street as fast as he can. When he is mostly across, a surprise straggler comes roaring toward him out of the blue. Yikes! Chris doesn't freeze in his tracks because that's when mice get hit, so he keeps running and the big thing roars past right behind him. It misses him, but he thinks to himself that he almost lost a little fur over that near miss.

As he stands on the other side, looking back at his family and shivering at his close call, he calculates in his mind if he thinks they can also get across. Again, he watches as clusters of cars follow one after the other for a few minutes and then nothing. No cars, no sounds, no anything. He holds up both hands for his family to see, and in a flash they are running across the street, ending up safely beside him. Whew! That was exciting for Christine and the kids, but it was a little scary because they had seen Chris and the close call.

The family continues their journey and, except for one cat and a little snarling dog, the rest of the trip to the beach is easy. Nerve-wracking? Yes, a bit because crossing streets is always

dangerous. But mice are quick. The family has been traveling along a pretty big street that leads straight to the beach and fortunately all the remaining streets they have to cross are residential side streets, which means very little traffic.

After almost two hours the Mouse family arrives at their destination.

Christine and the kids just stand quietly, staring at sights that they have never seen before. They see the sandy beach, hear the sound of the waves and the screech of the seagulls, and they smell the salty air. They just stand there in wonder, soaking it all in. Even though Chris described it to them before, they didn't imagine anything as big or as loud as this. Plus, the smell of the salty air is very exciting.

Chris looks around to find the party and there, in the middle of some dunes, he spots a familiar sight. It’s Rags and his wife Matilda and their four kids, Fickle and Sophie and their two kids, and Tricky and Famous and their three kids.

The Mouse family scurries over to the others and are welcomed with a joyous greeting. Candy and Carl run to play with the other kids while Christine and Chris take off their packs and set them next to the goodies brought by other families.



The sound of mice kids playing is like music to the adults. Carl and Candy like to wrestle and Chris can see them tussling with the other kids as they run and play, their small voices blending together like the sound of an orchestra. Fickle's son Bobtail has found a small, plastic ball in the sand and all the kids are soon happily playing with it.

“Oh yeah,” Chris says to himself, “there’s nothing like a beach party!” Watching the kids play gives Christine and Chris some adult time with their friends while the kids enjoy some fun social time with other kids.

After the adults have shared stories about their lives since they last saw each other, it’s time to set out the picnic, so they put all of the goodies on a log for the best part of any picnic – food!

The Mouse family's Mixed Nuts are clearly a hit. They line them up on the log next to the assorted other gleanings and gatherings. The nuts are one of the first foods to be eaten. Most of the food has ripe odors coming from it, signaling that it’s perfect for mice to eat. The kids rejoin their parents, and everyone munches away on an enjoyable lunch.

The sun is shining, there’s a gentle breeze blowing, every mouse is with friends and family, and the ocean waves provide a sound backdrop that makes everyon feel like saying “aaahhhh!” This is the life.

For the next hour and a half, the adults talk and play games, most of which center around Mouse Pull or PawBall.

Chris, being a good husband, takes on the pleasant task of cleaning Christine’s whiskers, which are lightly coated and scented with the remnants of a great beach party lunch. She then does the same for Carl and Candy, while Chris uses his paws to clean himself. This is great family time.

Finally, the fun comes to an end and it’s time for everyone to get ready to head back home.

Chris gathers his wife and kids for instructions on their return trip. He reminds them of the travel lessons they discussed before leaving their yard this morning, and adds, “We’re full, we’re tired from playing, and it’s later in the day. This is when we must be extra careful because it’s easy to get too relaxed and let something bad happen. So, take deep breaths, get yourself all ready to go, and we’ll leave. But first, let’s say ‘Goodbye’ to our friends.”

Ending a party is fine when everyone has had a great time and are tired, which is exactly what has happened. Everyone hugs each other and says nice things to their friends. Finally, Christine and Chris slip on their empty packs for the return trip.

Leaving the beach is challenging. The sand makes it hard to walk fast and they all slog along until they get to the edge of the sand and the start of the pavement. Once again, Chris halts everyone behind him while he ventures forward to see what they can expect.

When there are no more people on skateboards, or running, or bicycling past, he signals to the family to join him at the pavement. Once together, they all scamper to the nearest bushes ahead.

In case you're wondering, here's how they do that. As Chris instructed his family before they left this morning, they will not run together as a group. Chris reminds them that will make it too easy for danger to spot them. Instead, Chris will go first, find a safe place to stop, and then signal for the others to join him, lifting one paw or two to indicate that one mouse at a time, or the whole family. Every mouse will run as fast as they can, zigging and zagging and with a little distance between them. That is much safer, and it confuses any potential enemy because it is more difficult to chase many targets.

They're off and running. Getting to the first bushes was easy. Everyone is energized after the meal, especially after allowing some time for the food to settle and they had some great play time. Everyone has strength and speed and those are two really good things to have when mice are traveling.

Going home means reversing the trip they took to get to the beach. Once again, Chris scurries ahead to sheltering foliage, signals to the family to either come one at a time or all at once, and they follow his direction to join him.

They mainly walk along the edge of sidewalks because those areas are flat, they can see ahead, and they're out of the middle part of the sidewalk so they're less visible. In some places where there is no protection along the sidewalk, Chris crosses into a yard and they travel for a little distance through grass and bushes. Of course, they have to be very careful doing this because many yards have other animals in them, and they don't want to have to deal with a large dog or cat.

It's going smoothly until two things interrupt their travel back home.

The first is a young boy who sees them from his yard and sneaks out to near where they're hiding. Chris doesn't spot him immediately, but the next thing he hears is the sound of a rock sailing through the bushes above their heads.

"Run!" Chris yells to his family, and they scramble to a large hedge in the next yard just as another rock comes flying past them. "Keep running!" he says loudly. They scramble under a fence to get back to the sidewalk where there is a long string of bushes that they can hide under. A large dog is waiting in the yard beside their hiding place. Fortunately, the dog doesn't see them, doesn't bark, and just sits in the sun licking one paw. Whew! The family is safe.

The second interruption comes from a group of kids on skateboards that rattle along the sidewalk towards the Mouse family. One of the kids spots them and yells, “Look, there’s some mice. Let’s get ‘em!” They immediately start rolling their skateboards straight to where Chris and family are hiding, forcing them to leave the sidewalk, crawl through some bushes, go into the yard and run from bush to bush. It’s not a big problem and fortunately, the skateboarders never really spot them again after the boy first saw them. So, they’re safe, again.

The rest of the way home is fairly uneventful until they get to the big street at the end of their block. It’s a major street and it's crazy busy with lots of cars and no break in the traffic.



Chris motions for everyone to stay calm and they decide to play a game that he makes up in order to pass the time while they wait. He calls the game, “Dark/Light.” Here are the rules he teaches them. Everyone looks up the street to see the oncoming traffic. Then they call out if the next car is dark or light. The first one that calls out the correct shade, dark or light, gets a point.

Candy is really good at Dark/Light. She quickly gets a lot of points and Carl ends up scratching his ear and looking at her. “She’s cheating, dad. I was going to say “Dark” at that car, but she always beats me to it.”

Candy responds, “Am not,” which Carl quickly answers, “Are, too.” Back and forth, “Am not,” Are, too” “Am not” “Are, too,” until Chris holds up one paw signaling silence! That ends the game and the argument.

Just then there’s a long break in the street traffic. Chris holds up one paw to wait, and then runs across the street, waits in the bushes on the corner, and then holds up both paws for the family to follow.

After they're all together on the other side, it’s just walking past four houses to get home, which they do pretty easily and without challenges.

As they pass through the cat door into the kitchen, Franklin is standing by the sink. He sees them and says, “Howdy, Mouse family!” To which they answer, “Howdy, Franklin.”

Franklin is happy to see them all safe and sound, back home from their foray to the beach. He wants to hear all about their trip, the beach party, and the return home. Chris offers plenty of details, frequently interrupted as Christine or the kids add other specifics.

"Donna and I really like the beach," says Franklin, "and we feel very fortunate to live reasonably close, close enough that we can walk to it from time-to-time. But, hearing about it from the perspective of a mouse, that’s a whole new way of experiencing it."

Chris describes one or two events that Franklin thought should have been scary, but he just dismisses each as though, hey, that’s probably normal in the life of a mouse.

Franklin figures the Mouse family was somewhat tired from the trip to-and-from and the fun at the beach, so he goes to the cupboard, spoons out some peanut butter from the jar, and puts it into four tiny paper cups which he hands to Chris.

”Welcome, home!” he says, and watches as they carry their tasty snacks back to the Home in the Wall with tired but happy looks on their faces.

That night Donna and Franklin are just about to fall asleep when Franklin realizes he hasn’t shared what the Mouse family described. So, he takes a few minutes and tells her as much as he can remember.

After he finishes, the two people smile at each other and Donna says, “Oh, Franklin, we should have a beach party with friends. That sounds so lovely.”

"I totally agree, dear. You're right, we should do it, and it does sound like fun," Franklin replies.

Before falling asleep the two share a goodnight kiss and whisper to each other, “It’s so nice to have mice in our house.”

For several days Franklin thinks about Chris and family, and their trip to the beach for a party. If they can make it past lots of danger and hazards to have fun at the beach, then what is stopping him and Donna from doing something that they might feel is risky?

Three weeks later, Mr. Dooty buys tickets to the Bahamas for the two of them. He reasons, there are beaches there, it's a bit outside of their comfort zone, but if they're smart and practical, they'll have a great time. Besides, he imagines, maybe they can find a way to take the Mouse family with them.

Which they do.

Chapter 8 - Treasure of the Caribbean

I was cramped and a little bit cold when I woke up… the first time… today. How do you get cold when you have hair covering your entire body except for a tail that also has a little hair? Easy. You just do.

But the feeling is momentary. The minute I get up it feels warmer.

The smell of ripe pineapple hits my nose and is instantly picked up and transmitted straight into my brain. I can almost taste it and my mouth is watering like a faucet.

I remember where we were last week. We were home, dreaming of the islands, almost smelling the fragrance of the fruit and produce growing there. Today, we're here. And it's all thanks to the Dootys. They have been kind to us ever since we first met at Christmas time. That meeting was cool because it forced all of us to rethink our previous thoughts and attitudes about each other.

I don't know why they did it, but the Dootys smuggled us on board a plane and carried us to Nassau, the Bahamas. It wasn't too hard of a trip. Christine and the kids slept for the entire flight. I was a little nervous, so I kept alert and occasionally peaked out of Mrs. Dooty's big handbag where she had stuffed us after going through airport security. The X-ray machine was the scariest, but she had put some food in the bag around us and I guess we didn't show up on the screen as four mice in a bag, because we got through okay.

Now, we're actually on an island.

Yesterday, after we checked into our room, we all walked out to the beach, the Dootys laid down on towels and my family laid out on washcloths, and then we all drifted off to sleep. The wind was warm, the sun was warm, the clouds drifted above us, and the sound of waves and seagulls made it the most restful I have ever been. Franklin was kind enough to put a little expanding plastic cage around our family so we could lie there and not worry about a seagull or other critter trying to grab a quick bite of mouse.

"This is the life," I thought at the time.

T



Then we went exploring with Donna and Franklin. It was really fun. The Dootys rented two mopeds and we all rode around the island. The wind was soft and warm as we rode down roads lined with palm trees.

As we came back into town, the Dootys parked the mopeds and we walked down the city streets in the heart of Nassau, while we peeked out of their pockets.

The food was great. We loved it all, but we only got small amounts because we were saving room for dinner. We also loved fish. And the garbage, oh boy, the garbage here is amazing! Much better than the garbage at home in California. There is always parts of fish and trimmings of different kinds of plants, plus other great smelling garbage.

We had picnics with Donna and Franklin. Of course, we love beach parties as maybe you know, and our kids love to play on the beach. Franklin and Donna watched out for us while the kids played and we relaxed.

Today we all just laid low. I mean, we are kinda not feeling tiptop, if you know what I mean. After the fun yesterday, things caught up to us. The time zone change, the time in travel, it all

made us feel like, aww, we'll just lay on towels under the bed in our room while the Dootys snooze. It was good and after we get enough, we'll be ready to go again.

Well, we fell asleep. Now, we are doing a bit of exploration as a family. There is a grove of palm trees near the hotel. It is empty and isolated and the coconut palm trees grow close to the water's edge. Feeling better after our nap, we explore this grove twice.

Getting our mouse legs under us again, finally we fall into a rhythm. During the afternoon we relax on beach chairs, or in Christine's and my case, in towels in scoops in the sand. Franklin set up a beach umbrella which shelters everyone from the sun and also keeps us hidden from hungry birds. It's perfect.

Franklin and Donna have small cups of water and fruit juice near Christine and I so that when we feel a little thirsty we can just sip out of the paper cups. It's grand.

Two afternoons go by this way and it feels like we have died and gone to heaven. Without the heavenly choirs, of course.

Finally, Franklin decides that we should all explore the island. He finds another small shop that rents motor scooters, and the next thing we know we're bundled up in towels, riding in the basket of Mrs. Dooty's scooter as we zip around the island roads. Two descriptions for you – the roads are narrow, and they're a bit bumpy. But around the island we go.

We come to the end of the road where a long sandy beach dotted with palm trees with a maybe 100 feet wide of grass stretches between the two shores on either side of this narrow end of the island. I peek out of the towels and notice that the wind is blowing pretty good, making the palm fronds above us wave like hair on human women's heads when they swing their heads around. The waves on the right side don't look very threatening, just average height, and the sun is shining down on them.

The waves on the left side are a bit more chaotic. The wind is blowing the tops of them, spraying the water through the air, and the water color is gray and more threatening.

We swing onto the beach on the right and look out over the water. It is so pretty and great to look at. We sit there for a few minutes while the kids peek out and see how pretty it all is.

"Ooh," says Candy. "This looks like how I thought it would look after Mr. Dooty showed us the pictures in the brochure. It's like a paradise, isn't it?"

"Yes, honey," my wife answers. "It's as pretty as those pictures. I've never actually seen anything as beautiful and tropical as this."

Mrs. Dooty chimes in, "Doesn't this make you just want to spend several days here, just soaking it in? I breathe in that fresh, salty air and I feel like I'm younger all of a sudden."

I have to agree. I am feeling fairly energized myself. The only thing I didn't expect was what happens next.

"Splat," a large bird egg hits the scooter basket and splatters all over our towels.

"What was that," I shout, not sure if I should jump or fight.

Christine answers in a calm voice, "It looks like a bird egg that was way too large for the bird that tried to steal it for lunch. I guess he lost his grip."

"Yuck," I respond. "That is really gooey."

At which point Mrs. Dooty starts wiping up the goo with another towel she is carrying. Within a few minutes we are mostly cleaned up except for some residual stickiness.

Everyone gets off of the scooters, with Franklin unloading me and Christine and the kids in our towel. It's a nice short lift because he's very gentle with us.

We set up on the beach with towels and an umbrella, and Mrs. Dooty brings out a lunch bag with food for everyone.

We have some old bologna, our favorite meat, and some nuts. Franklin and Mrs. Dooty eat something in plastic wrappers, I think they called them "Sam witches." Maybe Sam made them?

Then we all sit back and just take it easy, listening to the wind blowing through the palm trees, feeling the breeze, watching the waves and even spotting some fish that are feeding on the surface near the shore.

"Let's go swimming," I shout to the Dootys and grab Christine's hand to run to the water. Carl and Candy are surprised but quickly run to our side as we all scamper to the water's edge. The waves crash offshore and then smaller waves slowly slide onto the shore for several yards before stopping and then retreating. It is perfect. If we just stay where the small waves roll slowly in, we can get wet and play in the water with no danger.

Carl and Candy are soon splashing in the shallow water, trying to toss each other under the water but only succeeding in getting totally wet. They're yelling at each other and rolling and making such a ruckus that I soon spot a seagull circling overhead that is paying a little too close attention to them.

"Okay, kids!" I shout. "That's enough and make it quick. That seagull is looking at you like you would make a nice lunch."

The kids scramble out of the water just in time, causing the gull to just dip a wing and fly in another direction.

It is a fun afternoon and except for that moment of a little concern, everything is perfect. Franklin loads back us up on the scooter in our towel and we're off again.

The ride home is easier. We don't stop at many places, just make our way back to the hotel. Once we're back in our room, Franklin and Mrs. Dooty take the scooters back while we chill out.

When the Dootys come back they find us all snoozing – me and Christine and the kids in a towel on the bed. Carl is snoring. I can't believe my ears. He's just a kid, I think. Oh boy, is he going to be trouble to sleep near when he gets older.

For the next several days we stay close to our rooms.

We decide to go back to the grove for a second time, just to see what we missed the first time. The ride is easy because we are used to riding with Mr. and Mrs. Dooty on their scooters.

After parking the scooters, the Dootys, Christine and our kids lay down on towels on the sand while I decide to do a little exploring on my own.

I'm walking down the beach where the waves were hitting when we were there before, but of the corner of my eye I spot something just beyond the waves, and I decide to investigate further.

It is a small, shiny bit of metal that is sticking up out of the sand, looking like wind and time has exposed it. When I get up to it, I use my paws to uncover more of it so I can see what it is. The more that I uncover, the more I can see it that it's a lot bigger than I thought.

After several minutes of clawing and digging, I can see that it's a small wooden box with metal straps over it and a hasp with an old, rusted lock. I can't really see any more, but I decide to cover the box again with sand and leaves and small rocks, and I walk back to the others.



I'm a little bit perplexed. Who would leave a box like that in the sand, and why on this island? Franklin had said when we were here the first time that this is not a popular beach, it's not even marked on the tourist map, so why would a human put a box there buried in the sand? None of this makes sense to me.

Later that day I get Franklin to go back to the grove with me. When I show him where it is he turned in a circle to see what is visible from there. The answer is, not much. There are trees on one side, the beach reaches in on the other side. The entire area is just trees extending toward the narrow end of the island.

We walk to the beaches on either side, me riding in the pocket of the Hawaiian shirt he is wearing. The beach on one side is just sand up through the first trees, almost to where I discovered the box.

Franklin stands there as we look at the entire area. There isn't really much of anything to see. It is just beach with waves offshore, coming in to maybe 10 feet or so from the first trees of the grove. Franklin explains that the water comes in closer twice a day and then goes back out each time. Franklin says it is something called "Tides," which are apparently nature's rhythms of water movement. I know that Franklin and Donna have a couple of clocks to keep time in their

house. Now I can see that the natural world has a way of showing time, too, except with other things than clocks.

We walk back to where the partial box is sitting, invisible because a slight mound of sand, leaves and rocks is still hiding it.

Franklin looks down at what I had first seen and then he bends over and starts digging sand out from around the box with his bare hands. He is really much better at it than I was. I had tried for several minutes before but only uncovered a little that I could see.

Within ten minutes he is able to uncover the top of the box. It looks like wood, but I can't really tell. The leather straps across the lid are practically gone, aged and falling apart. They end on a metal piece that has something sticking out from the box, with another large metal piece from the lid that fits over it and a lock that holds both together.

The box is in bad shape. The wood is badly cracked, and the leather straps are barely intact. The lock is rusted as are the metal pieces that it holds together.

Franklin reaches down and rattles the lock back and forth. It isn't budging. He pulls on it but still it stays locked. By this time, I am really curious about what is inside.

The box is too heavy for Franklin to lift, because most of it is still buried in the ground, but we keep thinking and eventually he comes up with the winning idea.

He picks up a strong stick from the ground nearby and begins to use it to poke at the lock. After six or seven strong pokes the lock suddenly releases. Franklin takes the lock out of the hasp, sets it nearby and then grabs the edge of the lid and pulls it open.

We're both looking down at the box which is now giving off a dank, musty smell that suggests that a couple hundred years have passed since it was last opened. We both peer over the edge and see what looks like thousands of age-tarnished coins.

"Wow," we both exhale with me adding, "that looks like a lot of coins in there, Franklin."

"It sure does, Chris," he replies. "And look at this one. It looks like it has the face of a king on it. I've seen pictures of these before. I think they're called doubloons."

"Is this worth something, Franklin?" I ask.

"Probably worth a fortune, my little friend. You seemed to have found a hidden treasure that was probably buried hundreds of years ago but has been uncovered a little by time and wind and tide and surf. We need to report this to the local authorities."

Which is exactly what we do next.

Franklin leads a crew from the Bahamian government to the location and the box is soon removed by a team of local men with shovels and a wheelbarrow.

Franklin follows them into town on his moped and comes back later to our room with news.

“You found a treasure chest that was never reported in any old documents. If it was in the water we might have had a right to some or all of it, but since it was all on land it belongs to the government of the Bahamas. The captain of the local police said that we might be entitled to a finder’s fee of some sort, and he hopes he can find out how much before we leave.”

Well, that is some pretty exciting news on top of the exciting adventure of finding the box in the first place.

We spend the next four days enjoying more relaxing beach time, the kids splash in the waves a few more times, and we eat lots of great food. I’ll tell you, the garbage cans in the Bahamas near the beach are the best restaurants in the world. We eat like royalty, and Franklin and Mrs. Dooty also share some of their food with us. Our whole family gets totally stuffed from all of the food!

Finally, the day comes to pack and go to the airport. We are in the middle of it when there is a knock on the door. Mrs. Dooty opens it to see a uniformed police officer and a man in a suit, standing in the doorway. “Yes, may I help you?” she asks.



“Well, ma’am,” the suited man says. “I’m here to deliver a check to you from the government of the Bahamas. It is the finder’s fee for the treasure that you found nearby.” He is smiling, so I think it might be for a nice amount.

I may be right.

Mrs. Dooty tells both men, “Thank you very much. We have really enjoyed our stay. You have a very lovely island. We hope we can come back someday.”

With that, the two men leave us with Franklin and Mrs. Dooty standing near the door as Mrs. Dooty holds the check like it is a precious and delicate prize.

“Oh, my goodness,” Mrs. Dooty says as she stares at the check. “Franklin, Chris, look at this!”

And with that, she holds up the check for all of us to see. It is made out to Franklin Dooty, in the amount of $25,000!

I pass out and fall like a lump on the floor. Christine runs to me and waves a small leaf in front of my face to give me some air. She tells me later that Franklin and Mrs. Dooty sat down very quickly as though they needed to sit so they wouldn’t pass out, too.

I wake up to see our kids jumping up and down, the Dootys smiling and crying, and Christine waving a big leaf over my head with the biggest grin on her face.

After a minute or two, when everyone is assured that I am okay, Franklin yells, “Yahoo! Chris, you paid for our vacation with your discovery, and we have enough money left over to do a wonderful remodel on your Home in the Wall.”

Our trip home is filled with laughter, smiles and celebration. Once we are home and unpacked, the Dootys sit down with Christine and I and ask us what we would like done in the remodel.

Christine, of course, has some great ideas, and the Dootys have a catalog of doll house furniture, so our whole family has a lot of fun picking out furniture and furnishings. Carl and Candy each select furniture for their rooms and can hardly contain their excitement. Everyone is so excited because we are getting actual doll beds with fluff on them instead of the nests made of rolled up papers and bits of fabric that we have slept on all of our lives. It seems like we'll be living like royalty!

The most popular part of the conversation? Mr. Dooty is buying a small tablet video screen and wiring it into our house. It will use the Dootys' house wi-fi to get internet and the Dootys will pay for entertainment channels so our family can watch movies, sports and other shows on our own "big screen" tv.

But, that's not all. Franklin saves the biggest surprise for last. He points to another catalog, this one is full of beautiful dollhouses. We look at them and ooh and aah over all of the amazing rooms and great architecture of each. There's one particular house that our whole family loves immediately. It's called a Grand Mouse Manor Dollhouse, which sounds like it was designed just for us. Mr. Dooty explains that he will cut a hole in the wall of the closet and pay for all of the materials as well as compensation for Frizz and Frak to build a replica of our favorite doll



house right into the wall. The front half of the house and porch will extend out from the back wall of the closet, and the back half will be inside the wall. We'll be able to run from the house out of the front door into the interior of the closet, or out of side doors into the walls, which is what mice love to do. Mrs Dooty adds that she will get whatever paint in any colors we want our builders to use in each room, which puts a big smile on my wife's face.

And that's how our family happens to go from going on a dream vacation to having our Home in the Wall turned into a dream home mansion.

The adventure was made even better by discovering something of value but our family's greatest treasure was spending time together, doing things that give us great memories. I'm

sure we may never do anything again as exciting as going to the Bahamas, but as we discussed after we got home, whether we're with friends or with family, the best memories are the things we do with others.

Chapter 9 - MouseKeTok

I'm Franklin Dooty, the patriarch of the Dooty family, and I want to share a story about my friend Chris Mouse and my nephew, as well as the rather astounding discovery that not only showed off Chris's talents but made a lot of money.

My nephew Danny is a big fan of TikTok. He watches those short videos all the time almost like it's his sole source of entertainment. When I ask him what he gets out of TikTok, he looks at me like I'm not all there, and says dramatically, "Everything."

That makes me a little bit nervous because I'm not 16 years old like he is, and I have never looked at TikTok videos, so I was somewhat skeptical. But Danny is insistent that it is a wonderful learning platform, so I decided to check it out.

Danny likes to come to our house frequently because Donna and I are pretty relaxed. We have house rules, of course, but they're not that stringent for visitors, especially if the visitors are relatives. My brother and sister-in-law are okay with him spending time with us, I think because they're sure we won't influence him with strange behaviors or lifestyles.

He's been spending a weekend every month or two with Uncle Franklin and Aunt Donna - that's what he calls us. We really like his visits. We have an old upright piano which Donna and I plink around on occasionally. Danny takes piano lessons and can play some pretty good music, but what he really likes when he comes over is to play music that he likes, instead of the classical music his piano teacher requires. We don't care. If he plays the piano, we're fine with whatever music he wants to play.



One Saturday morning when Danny is visiting, he sits down on the piano bench and begins to play a song that he heard on YouTube. It's a nice song, and he doesn't quite have all the chords and melody perfect, but he is playing it anyway and it sounds okay. At least, what he is playing sounds like a song which is more than I can say about the tunes I try to play.

I walk into the piano room to quietly watch him play, being careful not to disturb him. Over against the far wall I spot my friend, Chris Mouse, who is swaying slightly to the beat of the song. It's pretty cool. Chris definitely has rhythm and he is moving perfectly with the song, which has a nice beat to it so I continue to watch.

It is so good that I grab my phone, push camera and then video mode, and enlarge the scene so that Chris fills about 3/4 of the screen. Then I push "record."

When Danny finish playing the song and Chris has dropped back down on all fours, I push "stop" and then watch the video. It's pretty good. The music is loud enough, Chris is really clear in the screen, and the combination is really entertaining.

Danny hears the music coming from my phone and says, "What are you doing, Uncle Franklin?"

"Just caught Chris grooving to your song, Danny," I say.

"Wait, let me see," he replies quickly.

"Me, too," says Chris.

I pick up Chris and set him on the piano bench next to Danny while I replay the video.

"Way cool, Uncle," says Danny excitedly. "Can I get a copy of that?"

Well, I don’t have any problem with that, but I certainly couldn’t have anticipated what that was going to start.

Chris watches as I send the video to Danny’s phone and then he runs back to his Home in the Wall. Donna yells that that lunch is ready, so Danny and I go into the kitchen, sit down and eat soup and sandwiches. Pretty good stuff, I'll tell you.

The morning of the next day, Danny plays another song, just before his mom and dad pick him up to bring him home. I watche him play and I half hoped that Chris would show up again and maybe bust a few moves, but he doesn’t.

A week or two goes by and suddenly I get a text from Danny: “Unk, ur not going to BLEVE this. NGL, ur mouse is a huge ☆. G2G”

I have no idea what that meant, but I call Danny and he explains his text. He posted the video on a social media platform and now Chris is all the chatter in the TikTok world. The comment line was burning up with posts about “MouseKeTok,” the name Danny has given Chris in the video that he posted to TikTok.

The next Friday afternoon, Danny is at our house again to stay for the weekend. This time he brings some lights and when I ask him why, he says that he wants to record another video of Chris, but this time it will be with better lighting.

The next morning, I get up early. Danny and Chris are already talking in the kitchen.

I overhear Danny asking, “Hey, do you know any other dance moves, Chris?”

“Not really, Danny,” Chris answers. “But if you show me some, I could give it a try.”

I reach in the fridge to get out the bottle of milk but can’t help but watch the next scene unfold.

Danny holds his phone down near Chris and shows him videos of three different types of popular dance moves. They're fast, with great music, and most were recorded outside.

I like almost all of the music I can hear, and I can‘t help but move my feet to some of it. It is totally dance music, I think. And the dancers in the videos? They are so exciting to watch because they are not only really good dancers, but they are having so much fun. In the best videos I can see people moving to the music with impressive body movements and in some cases even semi-acrobatic stuff. It''s addicting. The driving beat is great, but watching the dancers just caps it. I stand there amazed that I have not ever seen anything like that before and impressed that humans can actually move like that.

Danny and Chris watch a dozen different videos and finally, Danny says, “Okay, let’s just pick one style to try. Which one did you like the best, Chris?”

Chris pulls on his whiskers thoughtfully and says, “I really like that Shuffle Dance, but I’m not sure I can do that. Can we watch a couple more of those?”

For the next 20 minutes they watch at least ten videos of dancers before Chris holds up a paw and asks, “Danny, do you have any of that music?” Danny answers, “Sure, it’s on YouTube. I’ll just play one of those songs and you can dance to it while I record you on video. Then when I get back home, I’ll edit the video and make it a more professional dance video. I think it will be fun. What do you say? Do you want to give it a try?”

“Uh, okay. I’ll see what I can do,” answers Chris, and in a couple of minutes, Danny starts playing a dance tune with a pretty fast beat.

“Okay, this is how it starts,” Danny says and then stops the music. “Tell me when you’re ready and I’ll start the music and start recording.”

Danny turns on the two small lights, shows Chris where to stand, and backs away holding the phone pointed at Chris.

I can see Chris take a big gulp and get himself ready, standing on his hind feet with his two front paws in the air.



The music starts and almost immediately Chris starts moving. His hind legs move to the rhythm, his body starts undulating, and his front paws stretch out and move in waves. He is moving in perfect time to the beat. Every move he makes seems to work pretty well with the song.

I can’t take my eyes off of Chris. He is dancing perfectly. In fact, he is terrific. My feet start tapping to the beat and I am totally caught up in the dance.

When the music stops, Chris drops back down to all fours, looks up at Danny and says, “How was that? Was that okay?”

Danny can’t talk for a minute. He just stands there staring at his phone as though he can’t believe what he just recorded.

Then he taps the captured video and, without saying a word, puts it where both Chris and I can see it. All three of us are stunned at how good it is. I mean, it is beyond professional. It is quite simply stupendous!

You can hear the music on the video, although admittedly it isn’t the best quality. Danny says he will take everything home, separate the audio track from the video track, edit the video, and lay the music down separately in sync with the video so it will look and sound really good. What he says sounds like a foreign language to me, but Danny looks confident, so I don't ask him for an explanation.

The next morning, Danny and Chris do one more “take,” recording Chris’s dance moves to the music with Danny moving the camera around to different angles. He says it is so he will have more camera angles to edit into various places in the final video.

That afternoon my sister-in-law comes over and picks Danny up to go home.

She surprises me by asking Danny how the recording went. I didn’t know she even knew anything about Danny’s plans, because neither she nor my brother have ever mentioned anything about Danny making videos.

Danny doesn’t answer his mom's question. He just grabs his stuff, gets in the car, and they leave after a few hugs between uncle and nephew.

I am busy for the next several days planning our next big family trip after the trip to the Bahamas. We will be leaving in six months, and I have a lot of preparation to do. I also am pretty organized, so I like to get everything planned well ahead of time.

While I am working on the list of things to take on the trip, I get a text message from Danny with a link. It takes me to TikTok, which Danny has set up on my phone over the weekend.

I watch the clip of Chris dancing to a great soundtrack and can’t believe my eyes. Danny has used some filters to make it very colorful. The lighting really highlights everything, the music is great, and Chris has the moves of a professional dancer. It is all very fun, moving and wildly entertaining. I can see how people can get hooked on this stuff. It's short, though, and I want to see the rest of the dance.

That evening, Danny sends another text with a second link, this time to YouTube. I click on it and the screen shows that the video is 2 minutes and 56 seconds long. Great. It's the whole dance.

I yell to Donna, “Hey honey, come take a look at this,” and after she joins me I play the YouTube video for her. I glance at her as we both watch the video and I get a big smile seeing her toes tapping to the music and her body starting to move to the beat.

We're both stunned at how much we like what we're watching. We walk to our bedroom closet and knock on the door to the Mouse family’s Home in the Wall. Carl answers the door in a minute or so, and behind him I can see Candy, Christine and Chris looking over him at us.

“Hey, Mr. D, Mrs. D” Carl says. “What’s up?”

His dad taps him gently on the front haunches and says, “Carl, that’s no way to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Dooty. Be more respectful, please, son.”

I don’t react to Chris’s admonishment but instead answer Carl. “You guys stand right there. You have to see this. I’m going to hold my phone up to your door. Get comfortable and get ready to see something amazing.” And with that, I hold my phone where they can all see it and I tap it to start the video.

The music starts and while Donna and I can’t see the screen because it's pointed toward the Mouse family, we are still affected by it. The beat is really terrific. And, then we watch as Chris and Christine, Carl and Candy all start moving to the music as they watch the video. They aren’t making big dance moves, just moving in time to the beat while staring intently at the screen. Chris has the biggest smile on his face. He is so animated.

Christine reacts first, “Oh, Chris. You are so good. How come you never dance like that at home?” she asks.

Carl and Candy both start talking at once. “Dad, you’re a natural.” ”Wow, dad, you can do that thing.” “You got some moves, pop!” and on and on, interrupted only a few times by Christine who adds her own excited comments to the conversation.

Chris’s face begins to darken at his neck and then his face starts to turn a bright color. He's embarrassed. It seems that he has never danced publicly before and he's a little shy about it in front of his family.

Carl asks me, "Mr. Dooty, can you help us get that on the tablet video you put in our house? We'd like to watch it again tonight."

I tell him how he can get it on YouTube, which iss actually pretty easy to access on the tablet. I can just imagine the whole family watching this fun dance video and talking about it for a few hours.

Donna and I leave the Mouse family there, as they talk a million miles an hour in their front door, and we walk back into the kitchen.

“My goodness, Franklin,” Donna says. “Did you know about this?”

I have to admit that I played a very small role in the whole effort, explaining what had gone on a few weeks before and then just last weekend. Then it's quiet for like 15 minutes as we are both lost in our own thoughts.

We talked about it for an hour or so last night, still surprised over how good it was. I texted Danny a few times as we came up with thoughts about what we had seen and he texted back each time. He told us that the latest MouseKeTok video now had 4 million views and people were lighting up social media around the world by tagging it and sending it to their friends.



“Holy no kidding, Danny,” I exclaim. “This is really good. You did a great job on that video. Aunt Donna and I can’t stop watching it. What happens next?”

We talked for a few more minutes as Danny mused that he would probably record another video in a couple weeks. He wants to do the next one outside and have some people dancing behind Chris, with just their feet showing while the camera locks in on Chris.

After I hang up with Danny, I just sit in silence for a few more minutes thinking about all that has happened. Later that evening, Donna and I have the Mouse family up to dinner and we all talk more about it.

“Chris, did you like doing that ending scene?” I venture.

“Oh sure, it was fun and I felt like I was getting good exercise, too. I’d like to do more of that, especially since people can watch it all over the world. That’s pretty exciting for a mouse in California.”

“Well, just remember, Chris,” I continue. “You’re not just any mouse. You can talk so people can understand you, you have great talents, and you’re very smart. I think the world needs to see a mouse like you because you put a smile on their faces, and you make them feel good while they're being entertained.”

Chris just smiles, wiggles his whiskers and returns to his dinner. End of conversation.

Two weeks later, Danny is back at our house with more lights and some new gadgets that I don’t recognize. When I ask him about all the new things he explains that he got his first checks from TikTok and YouTube. He's able to buy some exciting new tools with the money to help produce better videos, plus he has a present for Chris.

When Chris and Danny got together a little later, Danny shows him a shiny new suit just Chris’s size. It's all glittery, with little shiny pieces all over it making it look like it has a thousand tiny mirrors on it, all with a slight reddish color to them. It's glitzy, I tell you. When Chris tries it on, and Danny turns on the lights, that mouse looks like he s on a movie soundstage or is a principal dancer in a major Las Vegas stage production. That is, if Vegas dancers were mice.

As for Chris, he is humble and never gets a big head over how many people are turning on to his videos.

I wondered to myself, I hope the world is ready for this because talented mice could be the next big thing!

The other thing I wonder is how many people have talents that they never knew they had. I hope that everyone will try something new, something that they always wanted to do, something that makes their heart beat a little faster. They might not ever be a popular star, but it could just be the one thing that gives their life a little more meaning and a lot more joy.

© 2025 Ron Wilbur. All rights reserved.