More Mouse Tails

#5 in the Chris Mouse series



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Chapter 1 - Rocktober Surprise

Mouse School is kind of boring today. For some reason, teachers are simply repeating things they discussed in detail last week. Carl is having trouble paying attention after the first repeat and by the end of the morning he has to keep pinching himself to stay awake.

After Mouse School is over for the day, he's walking with a couple of friends to Mouse Academy for afternoon class when Tanter brings up a subject that gets his immediate attention.

"Are you guys going to go to the rock concert Saturday night?" Tanter asks Billy and Carl. "You know they're going to have two bands and I already talked my parents into letting me go because I told them that your parents are letting you go."

"Way to put us on the spot," responds Carl. "One, you lied. I didn't know anything about a rock concert until now. And two, you put me on the spot by saying my parents said it was okay. I obviously never talked to my parents because, like I said, I didn't even know there was a rock concert on Saturday."

"Well, you have to go because I already put you on the hook," Tanter replies. "Get your sister to go and you both can convince your parents. You told me that Candy always gets her way, right?"

Carl nods silently. This is an issue that he has to think through.

"Billy, how about you?" Tanter pushes on his other friend. "Can you go?"

Billy looks at him and says, "Man, I don't know, Tanter. My parents are still kind of upset with me for going camping with you over the summer without permission. I can try, but I'm going to be a big 'Maybe.'"

The rest of the walk to Mouse Academy is tense as both Carl and Billy think about strategies for getting permission from their parents.

That night, Carl talks to Candy and describes the concert in glowing details. "There are two bands – 'Rags and Hayboys,' and 'Until Wednesday.' I know you listen to both of them on Spotify, right?"

Candy looks up from her book. "Sure, I like both of them. Are they really going to be live?"

"Yep, and I can get tickets from Tanter. He said he can get us bigtime seats right up front. Maybe you can invite some of your friends and we could all go together. It's gonna be next

to the shed in the Halton’s yard. There’s a big platform and power for the instruments and amps. It should be great.”

“Well, I’ll see. Do you have permission from mom and dad to go?”

“Uh, no. Maybe we can go ask together so we can both go.”

“Okay, I’d like to go. Let’s ask them at breakfast tomorrow.”

The next morning at breakfast, Carl keeps looking over at Candy and nodding, trying to give her a signal to ask their parents. After three times he waits until their parents are looking away and he throws a nut at her.

"Ow," is Candy's response as Carl frowns at her and nods his head toward their parents.

"Dad, there's a really cool concert Saturday night and I'd like to go with my friends. Would that be okay?" Candy says with a big innocent smile.

Chris looks at his daughter and then says, "Well, I think so. Who would you be going with?"

"Oh, you know, Shirley and Teaser. And, if you want, I can also take my stinky brother so you guys could have the evening alone."

"Hey," yells Carl. "That's not nice. I'm clean and I don't stink."

Chris glances at his wife, Christine, who is smiling. She is not giving any sign if she is for or against. She just wants to let Chris sweat a little with the decision.

"Okay, you can go. But you have to take Carl," says Chris finally.

"Oh, thanks, Daddy!" says Candy with a big smile. "You're the best!"

After breakfast, the two young mice are up in their rooms getting ready for Mouse School. Carl walks into Candy's room and says, "That worked like a charm, sis. Way to put on the old 'Daddy's girl' charm."

Christine just smiles and finishes getting her backpack ready for the walk to school.

At school, Carl finds Tanter and Billy and gives them the good news. "I got Candy to ask and my dad can't ever tell her 'no.' So, we're in. How'd you do, Billy?"

His friend wrinklea up his face as he says, "I didn't ask. They usually say 'no' so I decided to wait until you and Candy got permission. Now I can go tell dad and mom, 'Carl and Candy and Tanter get to go!' That might work."

And it does work. The next day Billy gives his friends the good news. He can go.

Meanwhile, Candy has been working on Teeny and Teaser to go with her. Neither friend is very confident that they'll be able to get permission, but both agreed to ask.

The miracle is, both get permission and now there are six young mice, all friends, that will be going to a really cool rock concert on Saturday night. It's pretty exciting.

The next several days go by way too slowly. All any of the friends can think about is Saturday's concert, and it seems like Saturday will never come.

Candy and Carl both have homework from Mouse School and Mouse Academy, so their evenings are pretty full. That helps to pass the time.

Friday night the Mouse family sits down to the tablet tv and watches a movie about a rat in France that cooks. It's animated and fun and they all laugh, especially when the rat is down in the sewers of Paris.

Saturday morning both young mice wake up early, excited for that evening's big event. It's the first rock concert for either one of them and their imaginations try to picture what it's going to be like.

Both have chores to do in the morning and early afternoon. They work in the garden for a little while, then have to clean their rooms and help clean the rest of the house. All of those activities make the time go faster, and soon it's time to get ready.

Candy packs a small pack with a few things, mostly girl stuff. Carl is also going to take a small pack that he got at the New Mouse Store. He's bringing some snacks and a pair of cool sunglasses that he plans to put on at the concert so he'll look cool.

When it's time to leave, both kids say goodbye to their parents and walk out the Home in the Wall front door while their parents wave.

Christine turns to Chris and says, "Oh, honey, I hope we made the right decision to let them go. Do you think they'll be alright?"

"Sure, Christine. They'll be fine. And I have a plan to make sure of it."

"What's your plan, Chris?"

"Don't worry, honey, It's a good plan and I don't want you to worry. Just trust me. It'll be fine. I promise."

Carl and Christine walk to the Thimble house first, where Tanter and Teaser are waiting for them. Then the four mice walk to the Fun family to get Billy and Shirley. Once there, the six set off for the concert.

"This is beginning to look like a party," says Billy as he high fives Tanter and Carl.
The walk to the Halter's yard is short and easy. No cats, no dogs, no people. Just perfect.

When they walk in the yard they stand in line to get in. Tickets in hand, everyone in line can see the stage and lots of other mice. It's not crowded yet, but it's early so who knows how many mice will be there.

The boys walk away from the girls and wander around together. They spot some classmates from School and Academy and do high-fours with their buddies. Each mouse has the same thought in his mind, "Wow! This is going to be great!"

The girls are doing the same. They see a few of their friends from classes and talk for a while, then wander when they spot more mice they know. Candy sees Crystal Fleer and talks to her for a minute, while Teaser and Shirley talk to other mice.

Then Candy spots Feline, the ice skater from the big competition of last year. "Hey Feline, what's up?" she says and then notices Torent standing nearby. "Hi Torent," she calls with a big smile.

Torent looks at Candy and recognizes her. He walks over and gives her a big hug. "How's my favorite girl skater?" he asks.

"Watch it buster. I thought you and Feline were together."

"No, we skate together but we're not, you know, together," replies Torent.

"Oh wall, in that case," Candy says, "I guess it's okay to talk to you" as she glances toward Feline who smiles and nods.

Candy and Torent spend the next 30 minutes talking and he even does a nose nuzzle with her. All of this while Candy's girlfriends are busy talking to other mice friends and glancing over at the two mice that seem to be in a world of their own.

Finally, Shirly and Teaser walk up to Candy and Torent. "Hey, break it up, you guys. The concert is about to start," Teaser says. Everyone goes to find their seats. As promised, the six mice have seats right up front.

The first act starts playing. It's "Until Wednesday" and they start with their hit song, "Nose Knows." It's got a nice beat and within a minute all six mice have left their seats and are

dancing at the front, right below the stage. They're surrounded by dozens of other young mice, all swaying to the music.

The rock concert is great. None of the mice have ever been to one before but they lose all sense of worrying about what to do, and they just sway to the music. As the second song gets close to ending everyone up front is swaying back and forth with their arms up in the air, waving back and forth.

"Until Wednesday" has a cute boy mouse playing guitar and the three girlfriends watch him intently. He doesn't seem to notice anyone, just plays, with a quiet smile on his face. It's pretty clear that his music comes first.

One of the boy mice nearby starts facing Teaser as he dances, and pretty soon she's facing him as they dance together to the music. Candy watches them while she dances and then she sees Torent dancing toward her through the crowd. Within a minute or two, he's right in front of her, dancing with her. The smile on Christine's face tells the whole story. She's having a blast!

Carl is trying to dance, but he's not connecting with anyone. Then he sees a girl from one of his classes and he moves closer to her while "Until Wednesday" leaves the stage and "Rags and Hayboys" pick up their instruments and start playing their hit song, "Hayboys on the Loose."

The girl that Carl moved close to starts to sway back and forth. Carl moves close to in front of her and starts to sway, then looks around to see that she's watching him. When he sees her, she smiles, so he turns around and faces her to dance. It's amazing. He is having so much fun and she looks like she is, too.

They finish dancing as that song ends and Carl says to her, "So, my name is Carl. What's yours?"

"Hi Carl, my name is Flirt," she replies with a big smile. "You probably know my mom, Mrs. Wand?"

Carl gulps, "Yeah, she's my teacher. I guess I better be nice to you or I might get a bad grade, right?"

"That's right," Flirt says with a wink, "You better treat me very good."

The next song starts up and Carl and Flirt begin to sway and dance again.

"Hey punk! What are you doing with my girl?" yells a loud voice very close to Carl.

It's Thunk, the biggest male mouse in the whole neighborhood.

Carl is surprised. Is he talking to me? he thinks. He’s confused. Flirt danced with him and clearly gave him a smile that said that was okay.

"Uh, hi Thunk. What's up?" Carl responds lamely.

"That's my girl there, Carl. Go away and stop bothering her."

"She didn't seem to mind, Thunk. I don't see why I should leave." replies Carl.

Thunk pushes Carl who falls down backwards. Meanwhile, the crowd moves away from the two mice because they can see that there is going to be trouble.

Candy and her friends are right at the edge watching as Carl gets back up and faces Thunk.

"I don't think Flirt is all that interested in you, Thunk," says Carl.

"Well, let's see if she thinks you're interesting after this," replied Thunk as he swings a paw and catches Carl in his right eye. Carl falls to the ground and the mice around the two are now starting to yell, "Fight. Fight. Fight"

Carl gets up and is looking at his bigger adversary, as Candy comes in from the side and glares at Thunk.

"You big bully, you leave my brother alone!" Candy yells.

Carl runs at Thunk who grabs him before he can do anything and throws him backwards. Carl's arms are flailing in the air as he tries to keep from falling again, and one paw catches Candy right in the face. In her left eye.

"Ow!!!" Candy yells. "That's enough. You two break it up. Carl, get over here. We're going this way," and she eyes Billy and Tanter who obey immediately.

Carl is slow to respond but he soon is following his friends and his sister to another part of the crowd. His eye hurts pretty bad and he looks at Candy to see that her eye is also swollen and turning black.

"Oh boy," he thinks, "I'm going to get in big trouble when we get home."

The rest of the concert, Carl and Candy and their friends dance quietly and stay away from Thunk and Flirt. Every now and then Carl glances over to where they had been standing and he sees Flirt. She sees him every time and winks one eye at him when Thunk is looking the other way.

Candy sees the two looking at each other and grabs her brother by the shirt. "Hey, get smart, brother. Her boyfriend is too big and she's pretty dumb to be playing around like that. She's going to be trouble for anyone but Thunk, and you don't want to be the one that gets the trouble."

Her words sink in to Carl's head and he avoids looking at Flirt for the rest of the concert.

As Rags and the Hayboys are getting close to the end of their playlist, the sound of thunder rattles the air, and a few minutes later it starts to sprinkle.

A little water never hurt anyone, the kids think, until it starts to really rain. The concert ends early because it’s now raining heavily, and everyone starts to move toward the entrance to the yard. It's crowded which makes it hard to move very fast, but they all inch their way to the sidewalk as the rain is now pouring down. By the time they get to the sidewalk, the mice are all soaking wet and trying to keep the rain out of their eyes.

After Carl and Candy say goodbye to their friends they start on the soggy walk back home. Walking in the driveway to the Dooty house they have to cross a small dirt patch, which Mr. Dooty is trying to make into a new planter strip. Tonight, it's a mud bog and the feet of both young mice sink into the soggy mud as they walk across.

"Yuck," says Candy. "This is a mess. We better get our paws cleaned off before we go in the house or mom and dad will be mad at us."

Carl nods. The two sit on the porch to the kitchen door and clean off their paws. There’s one good thing about the rain, they think, because the rain is helping to wash the mud off as they wipe their paws.

They walk through the cat door from the porch and then walk slowly and quietly to the closet door and into the Home in the Wall where their dad and mom are watching a video, facing away from them.

Candy calls out, "Hi mom and dad. We had a great time, but we're tired and wet. We're just going to go to our rooms and get cleaned up. Then we'll go right to bed. See you in the morning!" And both mice walk quietly up the stairs to their rooms.

Neither parent looks up from watching the show. They just call back, "Glad you had a fun time. See you in the morning."

Of course, there will be plenty of explaining to do in the morning because Carl and Candy have matching "shiners," black eyes that will be immediately spotted when they come down for breakfast.

Ah, but that's tomorrow. For now, the two kids are just tired and wet and want to go to bed.

Tomorrow's another day with its own share of fun and adventure.

Laying in bed, Carl is thinking over what happened at the concert. Sometimes you find yourself in a situation where you are the one that has to be the better one, he realizes. When someone else takes offense because they don't understand that you're innocent, the best way out is to simply walk away. No comments, no replies, no counters to confrontations, just leave the situation behind you and walk away. If he had done that, his eye wouldn’t hurt and neither would his sister’s. That’s a good lesson to remember.

Chapter 2 - Mouse Holiday

People have holidays so why not mice?

"Next Friday is Teabottom day," says Christine to her family at breakfast. "What would you guys like to do?"

Chris smiles and says, "I'm going to put on my Phineas costume, like usual. I think I look pretty close, right?"

Carl looks across the table. "Oh yeah, dad. You're close. The beard does look kind of weird on you but I'm sure Mr. Teabottom wouldn't mind. Besides, he's been dead for a long time."

"Now, let's be respectful, son," says Chris."Phineas was a great mouse and without the great gift he left us with we wouldn't have anything like the life we now have."

"I know, I know, dad," says Carl. "But he has been dead a long time. Hey, are there any of his family still around?"

Christine joins the conversation, "I went to school with one of his grandkids, but her family moved away, and I haven't heard of any Teabottoms since then. Have you, Chris?"

"Someone said they all moved to desert country," Chris answers. "That was the last I heard."

"Well, we'll follow our family tradition and put on our costumes to read his story tonight. Then there's the big picnic and parade where everyone wears costumes," says Christine. "It's the best way we can honor his memory and the legacy he gave us."

Of course every mouse knows the story of Phineas T. Teabottom. He was the first mouse to learn how to understand humans and also be able to speak to them so they understood him.

That night Chris, Christine, Carl and Candy pull their Teabottom costumes out of their closets and put them on for dinner, which is the start of the celebration

Chris and Carl dress up like Phineas, and Christine and Candy dress like Philissa Teabottom, the wife of Phineas.

As dinner ends, the family settles in the living room and Chris pulls out a big, leather-bound book.

He clears his throat and begins to read:

“I am Phineas T. Teabottom and this is my story. I am nearing the end of the road of my life so I am leaving you with this.

“I was a young mouse, just barely past being a pinkie. My father, Phat and my mother Dweezie, had come all the way across the country from New York. Father and mother hitched a ride on a train. Every day when the train stopped someplace new, they got off and looked around. Father would ask mother, "Do you think this is the place?" And every time she would say, "Not yet, Phineas." So, wthey would get on another train and travel for another day.

“They told us they saw some very nice country. They rode through a lot of places. The first couple of days of travel all they saw was fields and trees and some mountains. When they got off each day, they had seen some pretty countryside, but the rail yards were always in towns. Some of the towns were okay and some weren't. They liked the small towns of Pennsylvania and Ohio, but none of the towns were good enough for my mother.

“So, Father got them on a train going south. The weather changed a little; it was summer time and the air was hot everywhere. The farther south they went the more sticky the air got. Father said that their hairs almost stuck together from the moisture. They rode through Kentucky, Tennesee and Mississippi before the trains took them to Louisiana. They told us kids later that the smell of food in Louisiana almost made Mother decide to stay, but the air was so hot and thick that she just couldn't see raising any pinkies there.

“They continued on west and stopped for two days in Texas. Father said that those two days was the hottest year he ever spent anywhere. It was kind of a joke. I guess he just didn't like it. In one railyard he spit and it hit one of the rails and just sizzled and was gone. Zzzztttt! Like that.

“So Father found a train going back up north and for the next several days they saw nothing but big farms stretching as far as you could see. The countryside looked nice, and the bugs were pretty tasty in that area, but as they were riding the clouds got real dark and then they saw one of the clouds start spinning and making a funnel down to the ground. It was right near the train. As they watched, that funnel touched the ground in a field and they saw a big old steer with horns and everything just carried right up into the air. They lost sight of it so it must have gone pretty high. Father told mother to just hold on to the box car and breathe a little prayer that they could make it out of there.

“Well, they did. They got to one really big rail yard - there had to be thousands of cars - and Father decided to find a train that was going west. They jumped on board a box car and rode that train right up into some mountains that they heard someone call the Rockies. Boy were they high. Father said he never saw mountains that high before this, and never saw

any to equal them afterwards. It was hot before they got to the mountains but a little cooler as the train climbed.

“After several hours they could see the peaks of some of the mountains, and they had snow on them. That was a pleasant surprise after the heat, moisture and swirling clouds they had seen.

“The train followed along valleys mostly, and they rode beside rivers for several days. Mother liked that a lot, but Father was concerned that the temperatures would get too cold when the seasons changed. He said, 'If there's snow way up there during warm weather, there'll sure be a lot of snow down in the river valleys when it gets cold.

“I expect he was right about that. I've heard that those places are so cold in the winter that you have to keep your whiskers under your coat or they'll freeze and fall off. I don't know about that, but I guess it could be true.

“Well, Mother and Father stayed on trains for two more weeks, made it all the way to the. Pacific ocean up by a place called Seattle. It was pretty and Father almost talked Father into staying there, but it was kind of cool and drizzly the day they were there and Father decided that they should head south.

“Which, they did. Got on a passenger train going south and traveled through beautiful, lush fields of berries, orchards of all kinds of fruit, and other crops. They jumped off of the train in Oregon at one point and just ate for three days. Father said it was a feast and I believe it must have been. That was when Mother started to get a little pudgy, which Father hadn’t really noticed. That is, until they got to California.

“They liked the first part of California up north, but Father had heard about the southern part of California and he felt they should at least see it before deciding where to settle.

“So, on they traveled, stopping at some big rail yards and some small ones. Their favorite places were when the train was traveling alongside the ocean. It was very beautiful. The water was blue, the sky had small white clouds, and the smells were fantastic. They were going to get off the train at one point, but the birds were everywhere and they were nervous that one or two birds might decide they would be lunch.

“The train stopped briefly in a place called Santa Barbara. Father said it looked like heaven on earth. Mother liked it, too, but she felt it might be a little small for them. They had been talking for weeks about finding a place that was big and full of opportunity, and while this place looked very nice, it didn't match the picture she had in her mind.

“So, on they came, headed south, eventually arriving in Los Angeles. It was big alright. Very big! There were people everywhere, as was the smell of food. There were so many people and so much food that there was leftover food actually laying on the ground. Both Father

and Mother knew right then that they had reached their destination. This is where they were going to get off and raise their family.

“Speaking of family, by this time Mother's tummy was a little larger. It had been growing for a few weeks. After they left the train, they found a few places that might work to build their home. There was an old building that had trucks coming and going, and stairs leading up to loading docks. It smelled like food, which looked very promising, but when Father went in the building to check it out, he found traps and poison in various places. That killed that deal.

“Now that they had found the area in which they wanted to live, they were in a hurry to find a place to make a home, because Mother was about to give birth to me and my sisters and brothers.

‘They walked during the day and hid at night. After three or four days they found the right place. It was a house with a big yard, a nice fence around it and it was surrounded by bushes. That made it pretty safe. In the middle of the yard behind the house was a huge. bush. Father said it was the biggest bush he had ever seen. Inside the bush were lots of open spaces, making it a perfect place to make a mouse home.

“Which is what they did. Three days later I was born along with six other pups.

“I liked my early days. It was a nice big yard, there were no animals that could threaten us, and there was also a great supply of food, both in the yard and outside. I was too young to go outside, but Father would do it and bring back all kinds of food. My favorite was potato chips. Our place was close to a park, and Father would find some amazing food in the trash or even on the ground under the tables. I also liked hamburgers and hot dogs. There were just pieces of them, but we're pretty small so it didn't take a big piece to fill us all up.

“The back yard by our bush had a small fountain with a water basin below it. That gave us plenty of water to drink.

“I would say those were some of the happiest days of my life. I could grow up with plenty of everything. It was a mouse's dream life!

“After three years of growing up I was ready to go out on my own. I didn't really know what that meant but Father had told me about his adventures and he also showed me how to find food and stay out of danger.

“i and two of my brothers decided to leave home to start our lives as grown up mice. Our parents gave us their blessing and we left after dark one night.

“We only got a block away when my two brothers were killed trying to cross a street. It was a sad, but very important lesson for me. They were acting like they were safe in our yard

when they just darted out in front of a car. They didn't make it. I don't know why I didn't follow them when they jumped into the street, but something made me wait just long enough that I saw the tragedy but wasn't part of it.

“I turned right around and went back home. Of course, my mother and father cried when they heard about my two brothers. It was very sad in our home for a week or two until the pain started to get less. We never forgot my brothers, but we all had to move on from that terrible day.

“My other brother and my three sisters were trying to decide what they were going to do. Two of my sisters met mice in the neighborhood and decided to start a life with them. That left just three of us young mice.

“I finally got up enough courage to attempt another departure from home. I looked around the neighborhood and found a house not far from our current home that seemed pretty good. The yard was neat and clean, the house was not too large, and it had a crack in one side that I could barely squeeze through. One day I decided to go inside and take a look around.

“Wow! It was big. I had never been in a house before and this was a MONSTER. The rooms were so big and the ceilings were so high. I guess they weren't that big or high to humans, but to a mouse like me, they were gigantic.

“I looked around. There weren't any people home at the time so I could go anywhere and look at anything without danger. One room that I thought was pretty interesting had two big, stuffed chairs with little tables next to them. On the tables were paper that I later learned were called magazines. They had pictures and some other things that I didn't understand, but the pictures were great. I turned pages and was fascinated by all that I saw.

“I knew right then that this was going to be my home.

“I went back to our home in the bush and told my famly that I had found my new place and would be leaving tomorrow.

“That's just what I did.

“I didn't really have anything to take when I left. I promised Mother and Father that I would be just houses away so I would come and visit them when I could, and they could come and visit me. My last sister cried. My brother just said, ‘I'm next. If Phineas can do it, I can. I'll be gone in a few days.’

“In the next month, my last brother moved and my sister got hooked up with a traveling mouse and left for parts unknown. That left Mother and Father alone, but they were still

young and happy. Turns out they had two more litters after ours and had lots of little pinkies to take care of for the next couple of years.

“Well, anyway, I was set up in my new house. i made a nest in an old closet that was used for storage. The humans that lived in the house were messy and left lots of leftover food laying around. I often thought, ‘they must know I'm here and they're being nice to feed me.’

“I don't know if that was really the case, but it continued, and I was actually getting fat. That's not good for a mouse. It makes us run slow and not be able to squeeze into small places. But I was sure happy.

“One day, Mr. Turner was home. I found out that’s what his name was. He and his wife owned the house I lived in. Anyway, he was sitting in the main room and talking to his wife.

“I strained to hear what they were saying but I couldn't understand anything. Still, I kept listening and sometimes he would point to things and say something. Now, I'm a pretty smart mouse, if I do say so, and I do. Anyway, I heard him say a few things several times and I had an idea of what some of them meant but I wasn't sure.

“Over the next month or so I spent more time under the furniture listening to the Turners talk. Sometimes they would have other humans in their house and I would listen to all of them. When they said the same things that I had heard before I paid attention and more and more I started to get a little understanding of what they were talking about.

“It wasn't perfect. I didn't get everything. But, I understood enough that I had a good idea of what was being said. Finally, I tried to talk to my new wife, Phylissa, using people language. She didn't get it, but I was patient and I taught her a little every other day or so.

“After almost a year, we were able to not only understand, but also talk to each other in people language. It became our chosen way of communicating.

“As you know, mice don't really have a language. We communicate in other ways. We watch each other and understand by observation. But we don't talk with words or even with pictures. We just sort of understand each other.

“But this human thing. It was a breakthrough for me. I could hear them, know most of what they were saying, and even repeat to my wife what I heard and she would understand.

“That was the beginning of mice using the human language and, as far as I know, we were the only ones that could do it.

“I began to teach other mice. Soon they were teaching other mice and so on and so on. Pretty soon, mice all around us were talking like humans, although with squeeky small voices, mind you, but it was amazing.

“I was teaching so many mice and they were learning and teaching and many were traveling and teaching, that I heard that the mouse world changed. Now, mice everywhere were finally able to talk and communicate like humans.

“I am proud to say that I was fortunate enough to be the one mouse that changed the whole mouse world.

“That's my story. I'm sure I'm long gone by the time you're reading this story, but remember, my story isn't mine, it's now yours. So, teach other mice and pass on this wonderful gift so that every mouse in the world can talk to every other mouse. That makes a big world smaller and that's a wonderful thing or my name isn't Phineas T. Teabottom.”

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When Chris had finished reading the story from the big book, he set it down and the family talked about all that he had read.

"That story never gets old, dad," said Carl. "He was a true trailblazer, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was, son. We owe a lot to him, which is why we celebrate his life every year."

Christine said, "We need to get started on the banners, right kids? Don't forget, we need to get paper from Mrs. Dooty and make big signs, 'Yay for Phineas.' I talked to her the other day and she said she will help us make a big banner that goes up over our part of the garden. That's pretty cool."

The next couple of days are filled with preparations. Carl and Candy wear their Phineas and Phylissa costumes to Mouse School and one class puts on a play for the entire school. Carl wanted to play Phineas in the play but another kid got the role. He still looked pretty good in his costume, though, so that helped him get over his disappointment.

The actual holiday, Phineas T. Teabottom day, is always fun. There's a mouse parade in which, this year, Chris rode his motorcycle and Christine drove the MouseWagon. Carl and Candy rode their bikes, all decorated with colored paper and streamers. It was a long parade, but a lot of fun and everyone enjoyed it. The parade and festivities ended at Chris and Christina's place this year. Franklin and Donna Dooty had big signs in the yard and garden and they put out a nice spread with all kinds of favorite mouse foods and apple juice in small cups. Needless to say, it was a fun and tiring day, all at the same time.

Even more fun this year, Franklin used his phone to take photos and videos of the parade and the after-party. Danny put the video on YouTube and posted the photos on Facebook. That made it easy for the Mouse family to relive the day on their tablet tv.

Honoring Phineas T. Teabottom (and of course his wife Phyllisa) is a terrific way to help celebrate mouse life. The traditions of this celebration extend back for over a decade and while no mouse alive today was around when Phineas was alive, Grandpa and Grandma Mouse knew people who had met them and told stories about them.

As far as mouse traditions and holidays go, this is one of the biggest, for obvious reasons. Without the language breakthrough that Phineas accomplished, no mouse today would be able to talk to or understand humans.

Fortunately, Phineas changed everything and for that, every mouse in the world is grateful.

In countries outside the U.S., mice learned human language from other mice that stowed away on ships that sailed around the world. Jumping off in port helped spread the ability to speak and understand human speak.

What happens today, is that mice in countries where languages other than English is spoken, learn through the Phineas method. Listen, think about, and try to imitate. So, mice in China can speak Chinese, mice in Mexico can speak Spanish, and mice in Denmark can speak Danish.

The lesson that Phineas taught us all is that by carefully listening and trying to understand, you can do things you never thought were possible.

Like speaking to mice.

Chapter 3 - Mouse Party

What happens when mice throw a party? Well, you're about to find out.

Every Friday on the Dootys' bowling night, all the other residents in the household have a party. Sadly, no humans are invited. However, Franklin and Donna have asked several times for a party to be thrown when they're home, so they can enjoy and be part of the celebration. That hasn't happened yet.

Finally, one Saturday Donna approaches Chris to ask for a favor.

"What's the favor, Mrs. Dooty?" Chris asks.

"Well, it's Franklin's birthday next Tuesday and he's always wanted to be part of one of your parties but they're always on our bowling night. Would you be willing to throw a party for the other members of the household on Tuesday, so we could just come and watch? I know that would mean a lot to Franklin."

"Sure, Mrs. Dooty. You know we would do anything for you guys. You always treat us so well, and you're such nice people. We'll put together a birthday bash that'll make Franklin's heart go pitty pat."

"Thank you, Chris. I really appreciate it, and I know Franklin is going to be very happy on Tuesday night. Oh, by the way, he doesn't know I was going to ask you, so let's keep this as our secret and surprise him Tuesday, okay?"

"Oh, I like that. That makes it even more fun. I can't wait to see his face when he figures it out."

The planning starts on the next day after Chris and the Mouse family return from Mouse Church.

During lunch, Chris explains the assignment for Tuesday night to his family. "It's going to be a party like this house has never seen," Chris says. "We'll do many of the same things that we do on Friday nights, but we'll include even more activities. And, it's all to honor our host, Mr. Dooty."

"That sounds great," says Candy. "Can we come? Usually, you make us stay in our rooms and do our homework while the rest of the house parties. I've always wanted to see the big bash you guys do."

"Sure, Candy, you and Carl can both come. But you have to promise to help out with the party planning and organization. It's going to take a lot of work and we only have two days to get it all figured out."

For the rest of the afternoon, all four family members work on Tuesday night's fete. Chris sends a message to Danny and Danny agrees to come and record the entire evening so that Franklin can watch it again later.

The plans are pretty simple. First, they make a guest list. Obviously, every one that lives in the house is invited. That even includes bugs of all types as well as mice. Plus, Danny and the Dootys.

Then they talk about the activities. This is a long conversation because the Mouse kids have never seen one of the Friday parties, so Chris and Christine have to take time and explain what they do and how they do it.

"Trust me, kids, these are going to be the most fun activities we've ever done. And we have help. Two spiders and Benny Beetle have agreed to help organize some of the races. I also talked to Rev. Souris at church today. He's going to arrange for the Four Blind Mice to entertain. All we have to do now is organize some of the other games. Mrs. Dooty said she will handle the food, and I already gave her a list of things that different critters like to eat. I think we're all set with that part."

"Are there going to be prizes for the games, Dad?" asks Carl.

"What would you suggest, Carl? Do you have any ideas?"

"Well, some recognition would be great. We all live in the same house, but the humans never really pay attention to most of us. Our family is the only exception. So, if we could give out some awards it would make everyone feel like they were honored for serving the people who actually provide the housing for all of us."

"Great idea, son. I'll work that out," as Chris writes a note on his list.

Monday is a typical day. Carl and Candy go to Mouse School in the morning and Mouse Academy classes in the afternoon. Chris and Christine talk to the other house occupants about the party.

Chris meets with Benny and the spiders about races. Benny has a great idea. "Let's do vertical races. You know, we sometimes do a little bit of that during our Friday night bash, but what if we do a complete loop? You know, everyone starts at the floor, runs straight up the wall, across the ceiling upside down and then down the far wall and back to the starting point."

Suzie Spider has a frown on her face. "Well, that's good for some of us because we can walk upside down. I don't think mice can do that, and probably not some of the others. That doesn't seem fair."

Sam Spider responds, "That race is only for those of us that can do it. We can have other games that everyone can do. A vertical race would be a real game of skill and ability. My eight daughters would really like that. And, if a fly buzzes us while we're racing, we get a meal, too."

"Okay, Sam, let's not talk about eating each other," says Chris. "This is going to be fun, and not dangerous to any species."

The race planning continues until finally everyone is happy with the plan, especially the races. These are always a fun and important part of any party.

That afternoon, Christine meets with the flies and mosquitoes. "Now you guys know that we'll have our human hosts at the party. In fact, Franklin is the guest of honor. So, don't bug him. Oh, sorry for the choice of words, but you know what I mean. Don't buzz him or Donna and whatever you do, mosquitoes, don't bite either one of them. Okay?"

The flying insects agree. After that they suggest a high-flying demonstration of skill. They would like the spiders to weave some webs that hang down from the ceiling. They'll fly through the webs in formation, dodging the sticky lines in and out, and then reforming in formation. It'll be very impressive, they say.

"I like that a lot," says Christine. "But you guys have to promise there will be no accidents. You know, if one of you gets caught in a spider's web the spider will have no choice but to have that insect for dinner, right?"

Francis Fly answers almost immediately, "We're experts at flying, Christine. The only time we get caught is when we are distracted and make a mistake. For this demonstration, we'll have our best fliers, right mosquitoes?"

The mosquitoes buzz their agreement and the "high weave flying demonstration" is included in the list.

The flying plan continues with more ideas. One idea was offered by a moth that happened to fly past during the plan. "Hey, I can get some of my friends and we could flap our wings together at the same time to cool everyone off after the strenuous games. Would that be cool?"

The others laugh at the joke. "Yes, that would be very cool," says Christine. "Can you do it in formation so it makes a good show, Manny?"

Manny flashes a big moth smile. "Of course, Christine. Nothing but the best for Franklin's party!"

On Tuesday morning Danny comes over and meets with Chris and Christine.

"I'll set up a small stage for music with sound and lights. I already talked to my aunt and she said we can use the living room. She and I will move the furniture so we have a big space for entertainment."

"That sounds great, Danny," Chris says. "So, we'll party in two rooms - the living room and the kitchen. We can have the races and games in the kitchen, and the entertainment in the living room. This is shaping up to be a fabulous party!"

Danny adds, "I met with Rev. Souris yesterday about the Four Blind Mice performing. He said they'll do three songs. After that, would you guys be willing to do a "Here We Go" number or two?"

Sure, Danny," Chris replies. "I'll talk to Carl and Candy when they get home from Mouse Academy, but we have some numbers we've been practicing that will work. We'll do a special version of 'Happy Birthday' for him.

Christine and Donna get together to discuss the decorations that Donna has already bought. And they go over some of the party details, like "please don't take down the spider webs until after the party is over."

Everything is coming together well and the house is literally buzzing with excitement for the night's great party.

At almost exactly 6:30, all the residents of the house gather in the living room and hide. Mrs. Dooty has taken Franklin to the store for groceries, in order to get him out of the house while everything is put in place.

The kitchen door lock clicks and Franklin and Donna Dooty walk into the house. Donna leads her husband into the living room where all is quiet and dark. She turns on the overhead light, and that lights up all the decorations. All the other residents of the house then shout "Surprise!" "Happy Birthday!"

Of course, some of them, like spiders and other insects, can't yell very loud, but you get the point.

Franklin has a surprised look on his face as he sees all the critters, many of whom are friends.

The party is ready to get started!

First up, "Here We Go" stands on the stage and leads the entire room in singing "Happy Birthday" to Franklin, who has a big grin on his face and claps at the end.

"Here We Go" then sings and moves to their latest number, called "Chant." The chorus is "Chant, chant, chant, chant" and they have everyone sing the chorus along with them while they do some fancy dance steps. It's a great start to the party.

Donna goes in the kitchen and brings out a beautiful cake with lighted candles, which scares the moths because they don't like fire. The other insects are a little nervous, too, until Franklin makes a wish and blows out the candles while everyone yells "Yay!"

Donna cuts up small pieces for Danny and the mice and other bigger creatures. Then she crumbles up more cake and lays it on paper plates for the other critters. Everyone is soon munching on the delicious cake. Franklin has frosting all around his mouth and he seems to be really enjoying the festivities.

Next is the famous Friday night Conga Line, which is in full force. All the creatures line up and dance the conga, with Donna and Franklin at the end being careful not to step on any of their house residents. "Bumpa bumpa bump-ahhh. Bumpa bumpa bump-ahhh" comes from the speakers as Danny plays the conga song for everyone to step to. At the end of the song, everyone raises their hands, paws, antlers, antenna and cheers, "Yayyy!"

Then, the famous antler dances start. Those that have antennae, scissors or antlers on their head march around on top of a table, clicking their appendages in rhythm. It's very impressive to see them all doing everything with perfect timing.

After that are the vertical races suggested by the spiders. These are really fun, even though only a few species can play. Racers start at the floor and at a signal they run straight up a wall, cross the ceiling upside down, then go down the far wall to the floor, and back to the starting point. It’s a thrilling race and the cheers can be heard echoing through the house, especially at the finish line when a Daddy Long Legs just beats a fast little black spider by a leg. Daddy stands up on his hind legs and crosses his front legs in a victory salute to the applause of the entire crowd.

One more vertical race is held with the smaller critters. Ants, small beetles and earwigs line up and at Danny's signal (he yells "bang") they race up the wall, across the ceiling, down the far wall and finally run along the floor to the finish line. Two beetles fall from the ceiling because they don't have very good grips, but they turn over and shake their heads and then run off to the side to watch the rest of the race.

It's another exciting finish. Two ants and an earwig are very close to each other as they get close to the finish line. One of the ants stretches out a leg and trips the other ant, which falls into the earwig. Both critters roll on the floor as the tripper runs across the finish line

with his two front legs raised in the victory sign. There is no race judge to disqualify him for his unsportsmanlike conduct, so he wins!

Races and games complete, everyone gathers back in the living room for the evening's final entertainment.

The Four Blind Mice are standing on the stage with bright lights shining down on them. The room is quiet. Then one of their hit songs starts. “I Heard It On The Grapevine” is so bluesy that the whole room sways to the rhythm. The song ends with wild applause as the lights dim and then get brighter as the group starts into “Can’t Reach My Shelf," another rhythm and blues favorite. Everyone is in a great mood. The Four Blind Mice finish off their set with another signature song, “The Fluff I Lost” and, as the lights go out, everyone cheers.

Danny is on a microphone saying, "Let's hear it for the Four Blind Mice" and everyone cheers again as the lights go up and shine on the four singers. After the applause the lights dim to black.

Danny's voice comes on the speakers over the darkened stage. "You've seen them many times. They are the stars of YouTube and TikTok. They're your very own. HERE AGAIN IS 'HERE WE GO'" and the room erupts in shouts and applause once again.

Franklin and Donna have been sitting on the couch during the music and Franklin is leaning forward so can see everything.

The lights go up and "Here We Go" begins their rhythmic steps, but with no music. It's impressive to see them all move together as Chris taps a beat on the side of his guitar. Then as they continue to move, Chris starts playing the first notes of their newest song, "Franklin is a Friend of Mine," which was written before the party was ever planned. The dance steps are perfect, and Candy has a solo part that has everyone holding their breath. At the end of the song, the room again erupts in cheers and applause as everyone in the room turns and smiles at Franklin, the guest of honor.

Again, the stage lights go dim and then brighten to light up Chris, standing in the middle of the stage.

"We celebrate the birthday of our friend and home host, Mr. Franklin Dooty. He is kind and generous. He is very considerate and treats us all with respect. Without him and his lovely wife Donna, we would have a very uncertain life. But, because of his generosity we live in peace, comfort and harmony. Happy birthday, Franklin! May there be many more to come!"

The crowd cheers as Franklin stands up and bows to everyone.

"Thank you, my friends. It is truly an honor to have so many great friends gathered to help me celebrate another year of life. When Mrs. Dooty and I first discovered that we had

house guests like each of you, we were delighted. Then our nephew Danny got involved with Chris and after that came Here We Go, and lots of adventures, some of which many of you have been part of. We can't imagine life without this fun house full of great friends - creatures, big and small. So, thank you for the wonderful birthday party and good wishes. May we continue to enjoy good life, good friends, and good times!"

Rev. and Mrs. Souris had come in during the "Here We Go" song, but they stood in a corner of the room watching and listening.

After Franklin finished talking the room quieted down and then Rev. Souris raised a glass and shouted “Hoo Rah” with no apparent reason to shout that particular phrase than that his exuberance overcame his usual sensible demeanor.

It was a perfect ending to a great celebration. One that the entire house would not soon forget.

And so it is with life. Celebrations are an important part of being a happy person, and they don't require anything but the desire to celebrate. When you need a celebration to lift your spirits, you can just say "I'm going to celebrate today!" and pour a glass of juice, find a cracker and have your own party. And if you smile while you do this, you'll have had a great celebration and you'll feel better for it.

Chapter 4 - Kid Clique

Both Carl and Candy have good friends in the mouse community. Their friends are other young mice that are in their Mouse School or Mouse Academy classes, or that live close to them.

It's typical.

What's not typical, and largely unfortunate, are the other young mice that don't live close to any other mice, or that are new to the community.

One such family is the Grinkle family. One Sunday they show up at Mouse Church, the very week that they moved into a vacant lot two streets from the Dootys' house.

As mice enter Mouse Church, Chris spots the new couple and their three kids. Being a friendly kind of mouse, he walks over to them and puts out his right front paw to the father.

"Hi there, I'm Chris Mouse. I don't remember seeing you or your family before, but I'm sure glad to meet you."

Garb Grinkle reaches out his front paw to touch Chris' paw and says, "Well, thank you for saying hello. I'm Garb Grinkle and this is my wife Rannie. Our three little ones here are Gargle, Ribley and Olanda. This is our first time here."

"That's great. My family is right over there. Let me bring them over to say 'Hi.'" And Chris waves to Christine and their kids to come over.

"This is my wife Christine, our son Carl and our daughter Candy. We just live two blocks over. Say hello to Gargle, Ribley and Olanda, kids."

Carl and Candy extend their paws to touch the Grinkle kids paws and smile. They're met with shy smiles back from the other three mice that are about their same age.

Gargle is the first kid to talk, but slowly. He seems shy. "Hi, I'm the one called Gargle. I'm the oldest," he says proudly to which one of his two sisters says, "Yeah, older by about 5 minutes. We weren't as quick to get out of mommy, but that's because we're smarter than him. I'm Olanda."

Carl looks at Gargle and says, "I see you have the same problem I have. A sister that talks trash about you."

Gargle just rolls his eyes. "Yeah, you can see what I have to put up with."

Church is about to start and the two families separate and walk in to sit down. After the church service the two families wave at each other, but don't talk again.

The next day at Mouse School, the three Grinkle kids are brought to their classes by Mr. Peepers, the school principal.

Carl is in the same class as Gargle, and Candy is in the same class as Olanda. Ribley is in a different class than the others.

Class is long and there's a lot to study and even more homework to do. After class, all the boys hang out together and all the girls do the same.

Except for the Grinkle kids. They only met Carl and Candy at church and don't really know them very well. Carl and Candy are busy talking to their friends and don't notice the Grinkle kids.

At Mouse Academy, the three Grinkle kids aren't present. Carl and Candy are busy with class and friends like every other day.

During that week Carl hangs out with his buddies Billy, Tanter and Bobby, Candy does a few things with Teeny, Shirley and Teaser. Each kid is part of a four-mouse group of friends that have known each other for a long time and that have had lots of adventures together.

No one notices Gargle, Ribley or Olanda because they're too busy with their friends. When class time is over they look for each other and then gather together to catch up with their friends.

The three Grinkle kids walk to school together and walk home together. Then they do their chores and schoolwork and eat with their parents before reading and going to bed.

Each Grinkle kid tells themselves that this is okay. They have their family and each other and that's what they have left after the fire.

Two weeks later Candy notices that Olanda is in her Mouse School class but she's never seen her at Mouse Academy. So, after class one day she spots Olanda and walks over to her.

"Hi, remember me? I'm Candy Mouse. I'm in your class at Mouse School."

"Oh, hi," says Olanda quietly.

"I've never seen you at Mouse Academy. Are you in a different class than me there?"

"I didn't know about Mouse Academy. We're new here and it's been hard to get anyone to talk to us. We kind of feel like outsiders, like maybe we don't belong," she finishes, looking down at the ground while she talks.

Candy gets a funny look on her face and wrinkles her nose. "Oh, I've been talking to my friends so much, we've been friends for a lot of years, I just wasn't paying attention. I'm really sorry."

The words start spilling out of Olanda. "Oh, it's okay, I guess. My sister Ribley cries at night because she doesn't know anyone and doesn't have any friends. My brother Gargle got mad last night and said some not very nice things to our parents. He got in trouble and had to go to his room. Then he got really mad and stomped around. I think we made a mistake in moving here. Maybe we just don't belong."

Candy doesn't say anything. She's thinking what it would feel like if her family moved into a new community and they didn't know anyone. Her mom and dad would make friends, but it's a lot harder if you're a kid.

"What kinds of things do you like to do?" Candy asks, not knowing any other thing to say after Olanda wiped a tear from her eye.

"I like to make clothes and go shopping and play games," Olanda says. "But I don't know anyone to do those things with, and my sister and brother are both sad and angry, so we don't do anything together, either.

"Where we used to live before here, we had lots of friends, and we grew up with everyone at school. When the fires started, we smelled smoke, and our father got us together and we ran for our lives with what we could carry. The fires burned our entire community, every house, every yard, every street for as far as you could see. We were lucky. Some mice didn't get out in time. But we had to leave almost everything behind to save ourselves. Now, my sister and brother and I wish we had just died in the fire."

The last statement hurt Candy as though someone had just put a sharp stick right into her belly. She couldn't think about what this girl was saying, because it was too raw and imagining it was too painful.

"Oh my gosh, Olanda, that must have been terrible. I can't even imagine how bad that must hurt," Candy finally said after another silence.

"It's been pretty bad. And now we're feeling like the fire was just the start. No friends, no one we know, and our old home is gone. We're all trying to be positive, but it's no use. We can't. It's like a dark tunnel that we can't see out of."

Candy replied, "Can you and Ribley come over to my house after dinner tonight? It will be light for a few hours and we can play in my room. I have some extra mouse dolls that I'll share with you guys. And I'll talk to Carl because I'm sure he'd like to get to know Gargle."

Olanda smiled a little, but looked down and said quietly, "Oh, you don't have to do that. I know you have your friends and we're new here.

"C'mon, don't be silly. I want to get to know you and Ribley. Let's be friends, okay?"

"Really, you mean it? Or are you just trying to make me feel better?"

"No, we don't know each other very well, but I'd like to get to know you guys better. Let's just try tonight and see what we think."

"Ok, I'll ask my parents if it's okay, and I'll grab Ribley and Gargle to come over. Where do you live?"

"I'll meet you at Mouse Academy and then we can walk over to my house together afterward. Go home and tell your parents that the three of you are going to Mouse Academy. It meets at Mouse Church in the afternoons and that's where we all go to church so I'm sure you remember how to get there."

"Okay," says Olanda. "I'll go home and do that. We'll meet you at Mouse Academy before the afternoon class starts. Can you help us to get into classes there?"

"Oh sure, It's easy. Besides, my mom is the one that started Mouse Academy and she runs it. She'll get you started this afternoon."

Olanda now has a smile on her face and she starts laughing. It looks like she's laughing until Candy notices a tear forming in Olanda's eye and slowly dripping down her cheek. She reaches out and puts a front paw around Olanda and pulls her close for a hug.

"It's okay, everyone is new to things sometimes. I'll be your friend and you and your brother and sister will meet more new friends. You'll see. It's going to be okay."

"That's why I'm crying, Candy. I didn't think we would have any friends and we'd always be outsiders here. I was so sad."

"Well, you're an insider now, girl," Candy says. "Today is the start of your new life with new friends."

The two girls split up and Olanda walks home to talk to her parents and get her brother and sister to come with her to the Mouse home.

A half hour later, the three Grinkle kids show up at Mouse Academy, where Candy and Carl are waiting outside.

"Hey, new friends," Candy calls out cheerfully. "Welcome to Mouse Academy. You're going to like it here and you're going to make lots of new friends."

Carl reaches out his paw to Gargle and says, "Hey, buddy, let me show you around and introduce you to my friends."

Gargle smiles as do Ribley and Olanda. All three are thinking and hoping, "this might be the start of my new life."

Candy had talked to her mom about the new kids and Christine has been watching as her kids welcome the new kids. She walks over to the five kids.

"Hi, you guys. Welcome to Mouse Academy. This is where you'll learn about how to be a happy and successful mouse in today's world. We don't teach the core classes that you learn in Mouse School. We teach life skills, the things that will help you to grow up, have families of your own, and have good lives. Follow me and I'll introduce you to your instructors."

All five mice follow Christine as she goes to three different classes.

"The first class teaches survival skills. How to avoid danger, and what to do when you face it. You'll learn about animals, humans, cars and other ways you can get hurt."

"The next class is for physical and building skills. You'll learn how to move things and put them together to make important places to live in, and how to fix things. Those are very useful skills, right?"

All five young mice nod their heads.

"The last class teaches how to make and repair things that you will use regularly. Things like clothes, food, clean water and grooming.

"Every kid goes to every class because every mouse needs to know these things. You'll start with one class and then go through the others one at a time. It's fun and you'll end up with wisdom, some of which your parents may not know.

"Are you ready to get started?"

All three Grinkle kids nod and smile. "This sounds like fun," they each think, "and this school teaches us how to be grownups."

Christine takes all three to the same class that Carl and Candy are in. She stands in front of the class and introduces them to the instructor and to the class.

"Class, these are your new friends, Gargle, Ribley and Olanda. They're really smart and they're really fun. You're going to like them right away, so try to get to know them after class today. They have just moved into our community, and we're going to show them quickly how we welcome them into our lives and hearts."

The instructor to the class walks up to the three new kids and hugs each one in turn. Then she smiles and turns the kids around to face the class as she talks to the current students.

"Meet your new friends, kids. These will be your friends for the rest of your lives. Be the first to be their new best friend before everyone else beats you to it."

And, that's the start of the Grinkle kids becoming well known and well-liked by the other kids.

As they make friends and have fun with them, their parents Garb and Rannie relax because their family is being accepted. Going to Mouse Church is good for them, too. They're soon invited over to dinner and visiting with the parents of their kids' friends and others they meet at Mouse Church.

After three weeks, Rannie and Garb are talking in their bedroom one night. Rannie says, "I was worried when we had to run for our lives and find a new place to live. All I hoped for was that we would find a place. Now I can see that we've found a community. I'm so happy."

Garb holds her hand and says, "I am too, honey. Our life has started over and is filling up again."

This chapter is especially important for each of us. To welcome a new individual to a group that you belong to, is to treat the other person the way you would like to be treated. Everyone wants to be liked and befriended. You can be the one that makes someone new or different to feel like they are accepted. It's a nice thing to do and what you do for others almost always comes back to you as a blessing in your life.

Chapter 5 - Chris Crash

"I'm going to the New Mouse Store, Christine. I should be back in a couple of hours," says Chris on a Saturday afternoon.

"Ok, gotcha. Bring back some strong tape, will ya?" Christine calls back.

"AOK, babe."

Chris plans to take the MouseWagon the several blocks to the store. He likes driving it, and most of the time it just sits on the charger waiting to get to run a little.

But first, just like every other trip, Chris has to check with the kids, find the household Mouse Store credits, get the key to the MouseWagon, put on his jacket and do about 15 other things. It's never easy or quick to go to the store.

The weather has been very nice for several days, but it's pretty hot today. As Chris grabs the door handle to the MouseWagon and opens the door he pulls his paw back quickly. "Ow," he yells. The door handle is really hot and his paw is now a little tender to the touch.

He says a very polite little word of irritation, "Shoot!" and climbs in the car.

The MouseWagon gets a regular run every week to Mouse Church, but other than that there is really no reason to take it anywhere. The benefit of having a car to go to the store is it can carry your purchases. That's a real advantage when what Chris needs to buy is more than he can carry.

As Chris inserts the key into the car he thinks about what he needs to do on the drive and at the store. He has a list, which now includes strong tape. Check! He has the Mouse store credits. Check! That's it. He's ready.

Chris turns the key to "on" and slowly backs out of the driveway, being careful to watch both ways as the car reaches the end of the driveway and drops down to the street level with a slight bump.

He backs the car up to face the direction of the Mouse Store and pushes down slightly on the accelerator. The MouseWagon begins to roll slowly and then picks up a little speed as Chris gets comfortable with the street.

The windows are down and the air coming in to his face feels so nice. Aww! He sighs as the warmth of the day and the cool of the breeze make a perfect combination. This is the life!

The first block is easy. No cars, no bikes, no people on the sidewalk. Just Chris and his car and a wide-open street ahead.

He brakes at the first intersection and waits while he looks in both directions to see if there is any traffic to deal with. No traffic from either side. Great. He drives across the intersection to the next block.

This is actually a very easy trip, one that he has made a few times before. Being cautious at intersections, looking well ahead to spot potential problems before he reaches them, and then being extra cautious at any sign of impending trouble. That makes the drive safe and also relaxing.

As he pulls into the driveway to the New Mouse Store he breathes a sigh of relief. “That was a nice drive,” he thinks. "What a really beautiful day."

Chris pulls up into the yard and parks the MouseWagon just outside the New Mouse Store. From the outside it just looks like a shed or garage. Once inside it takes on a whole new look. Hairy and Ophelia have done wonders with the store. It has lots of aisles to walk, lots of shelves of things to buy, and good signage to show where to find anything you’re looking for.

That’s perfect for Chris’ purposes. He needs to find the strong tape for Christine, but his list also includes other items that he needs. Like string for their portion of the garden. Like some tools for home repairs. Like a bicycle sprocket for Carl’s bike. (He knew that Carl would be hard on the bike, but the sprocket was a surprise.)

After a few minutes of gathering the other items, he talks to Hairy about the bike sprocket. Hairy is a great business mouse. He knows that Chris will buy the item if he can locate it. He also knows that Chris will allow him to make a profit from the sale. So, the only issue is if he can actually find a bike sprocket to fit Carl’s bike.

Hairy is very industrious. That means that he will find a way to get the part that Chris needs. It just may not be today.

So, Chris gathers up the items that he's purchasing today, pays with the New Mouse Store credit, gets a receipt for the sale that shows the amount of credit that is left.

Chris goes back to the MouseWagon with his arms full, loads his purchases into his car, and starts the car toward home.

The first block is easy. No traffic on the street, no one on the side of the road, and no pedestrians on the sidewalk. It’s easy-peasy. The MouseWagon seems happy to be running toward home and the first block suggests that it’s going to be a pleasant drive.

In the second block Chris spots some kids on bikes that are riding in the street alongside the curb. The key to avoiding problems is to look far ahead to see what you will soon be up against, he thinks. He slows down until they're out of sight and then continues on.

In the next block a large garbage truck is picking up garbage cans with long mechanical arms, dumping the contents of each garbage can into the opening in the top of the truck bed, and then setting the cans back down on the street before moving on to the next ones.

"Not a good direction to go," Chris says to himself. He turns the MouseWagon at the next intersection to take the long way around the block.

It's a pleasant street. Lots of trees with birds twittering, the sun is shining, a gentle breeze is blowing. It's so relaxing.

Bang!

Chris had been distracted looking around at the beautiful day and ran right into a garbage can set out for pickup.

The MouseWagon was stopped. He tried to start it again. Nothing!

He gets out and looks at the exterior of the car. A little wrinkle in the front and a nasty scratch to the paint, but other than that the car looks okay. Whew! That was lucky.

He walks to the curb and jumps up to look at the car from a different angle. He can't see any other damage. So, he jumps back down and looks under the car. It is shaded and a little hard to see, but it looks like there is a wire hanging down from the front.

Hmm, he thinks. I wonder if that wire is the reason the car won't start.

He lays down on the ground and crawls as far as he can under the car. It is pretty low and he is a little plump, so he can only get partway under.

He reaches out with one paw to touch the wire. ZAP! It bites him when he touches it and he pullshis paw back quickly.

"Hmm, this is going to take more than I thought."

Thinking for a minute, he decides to run back home and get help.

It is a scurry. Chris knows the garbage trucks are picking up garbage cans around the neighborhood, and his MouseWagon is sitting by a garbage can. That could be a problem!

He jumps up on the curb and runs quickly to the end of the block, looks both ways and runs across the street to the next block. "This is a race against time," he thinks. "I have to hurry."

Two more blocks and he can see his block, the block that his Home in the Wall is on.

He runs the last distance and up the kitchen porch stairs, in through the cat door, and right into the foot of Mr. Dooty.

"Oof!" That is the only sound he could make. He is out of breath and has just ran his nose right into a shoe.

Franklin looks down and recognizes his friend. "Hey Chris. Why the big hurry? Are you okay?"

"I had an accident with the MouseWagon, Franklin. It's in the street a few blocks away and I'm afraid it will get picked up by the garbage trucks. Can you help me get it," explains Chris.

"Well sure, Chris. I'll get my keys and we can drive there to check it out. Let's go."

Franklin scoops Chris up and puts him in his pocket, grabs his car keys and the two are soon in the car and driving down the street with Chris pointing the way.

Just one more block and they'll be there.

Oh oh. There's a big garbage truck picking up the cans right before the one that the MouseWagon ran into. It's getting ready to move to the next cans and it might pick up the MouseWagon or set the empty can back down on it after it empties it in the truck.

Franklin flashes his headlights at the oncoming garbage truck, and honks the horn to get the driver's attention as the truck heads straight for the scene of Chris' accident.

Franklin swerves to the curb and parks right in front of the MouseWagon, gets out of the car, runs to the small, damaged car, picks it up and, waving to the garbage truck driver, he walks back to his car. Chris is trying to see what is happening but can't get high enough to look out of the windows. He canonly wait nervously and keep his paws crossed that Mr. Dooty will save his car in time.

"Scrunk" the car door opens and Mr. Dooty gets inside, placing the MouseWagon on the floor of the front seat.

"Whew! Got there just in time," he says. "Another minute and your car might have been scrunched or even gone. But we got it! You can relax now, Chris. Your quick action coming back home probably saved your car."

Chris just sits in the seat, a little dazed by what has happened.

The ride back to the Dooty house is quick but it still feels like it's taking forever. Chris keeps thinking about what has happened and imagining the worst, then sighing when he remembers that they rescued the car just in time.

Now back at the house, Chris and Franklin get out of the car. Chris stands on the porch to watch as Franklin carries the MouseWagon into the house and sits it on the kitchen table.

Turning it over, Mr. Dooty sees the problem. The wire that was hanging down is the electrical wire from the battery to the motor. Somehow it got pulled out, in the collision, causing the car to not be able to run.

It is a pretty quick fix. Mr. Dooty inserts the wire back in the motor, puts some epoxy glue on it to hold it in place and sets it up to dry.

"Let's try it this afternoon, Chris. Okay?"

"Sure, whatever you think is best, Mr. Dooty. I'm going to go tell my family that I'm okay. Thank you very much for rescuing the car and helping me out. You are the best!"

"You're welcome, Chris. You'll have to see about fixing the front end and patching the paint, but I can help you with that."

Chris sighs and runs back to the bedroom, under the closet door and into the Home in the Wall where Christine is standing in the kitchen.

"Hi Chris. Well, did you get what you wanted at the New Mouse Store?"

"Not exactly, honey. I ran into a little trouble on the way home and almost turned our car into garbage, but everything turned out okay. Here's your strong tape," he says as he hands the roll of tape to his wife.

"Oh, thank you. What kind of trouble did you run into?"

Chris tells Christine the long story about the car, the drive, the beautiful day and his distraction that almost caused their car to be garbage.

"It was a little scary when I realized that our car could be picked up by a garbage truck and taken away. Fortunately, Mr. Dooty came to the rescue and we were able to get there just in time. He got everything working on the car after we got home, and other than a few scratches and some minor dents it's okay."

"Did you get hurt? Are you okay? Let me look at you!" Christine said as she checks Chris's arms, paws, head and side. "You look okay. How do you feel?"

"Well, like I barely missed becoming garbage myself," Chris admits. "But, I'm getting over it. Maybe I'll take the MouseWagon for a little drive this afternoon to see if everything works well."

"Oh no, Mr. Mouse!" Christine exclaimed. "I think you've had enough adventure for the day. Just relax for a while. I'm so glad you didn't get hurt."

"Me, too. Just my pride."

Two days later Chris remembers that Byll Pillpot, who he met at Mouse Church, does some mechanical work.

That Sunday, Chris finds Byll and explains what happened to the MouseWagon.

"It sounds pretty minor, Chris," says Byll. "We can probably fix it so it'll almost be good as new. Can Mr. Dooty get you a can of spray paint to match the car?"

"I think so, I'll check, but he's always good about things like that."

"Good, and we'll need some strong mice to help pound out the dent in the front, as well as some tools. Do those builders you know seem like they could help?"

"Frizz and Frak? I bet they could," says Chris. "They're pretty handy with tools, and they're pretty strong guys. I'll ask them to help. When can we do this?"

"Let me know when you get the paint and when the builders can come over. I'll come over and supervise the repairs."

"That's really great, Byll," said Chris. "I appreciate it very much."

A few days later, after Chris and Mr. Dooty go to the auto parts store and get a can of spray paint, Frizz and Frak, and Byll Pillpot come to the Dooty home.

Frizz has a small hammer and a few other tools. Frak is good at pounding and before long they have the front of the car looking good.

Mr. Dooty handles the painting with Byll Pillpot's direction. First, Franklin tapes paper around the car over areas that don't need paint, then Frak uses sandpaper to sand down the scratched area. Finally, Franklin points and shoots, gently spraying the color on the damaged area. Voila! It looks perfect. Now to let it dry and the MouseWagon will be good as new.

The whole episode is a great reminder to Chris that he has to pay careful attention to everything when he's traveling in MouseWagon. It's the same reminder that Chris gave to Carl and Candy when they were learning to ride their bicycles - "look ahead to see what may be a problem that you'll soon be upon. Don't let anything distract you while you're moving because moving brings potential danger to you faster than when you're still. Always be ready to avoid a hazard, especially when you don't see any. Surprises can not only be unfortunate, but they can cause damage and injury."

Chapter 6 - Grandpa Mouse is Missing!

Long-distance communication is a little more difficult for mice than it is for people.

People have phones and email and text and Facebook messaging and so forth and so on. But most mice, especially older ones, don't have those handy ways to get a message across. Instead, they use Mouse Mail.

Because mice travel sometimes pretty good distances, they tell their neighbors in their local community when and where they will be going when they travel. Then, if one of their neighbors wants to communicate with a mouse at that destination, they give the message to the traveler to deliver to the mouse they want to receive it. It works.

This particular Tuesday is just an ordinary day. Chris and Christine are working in their part of the garden when they hear a voice, "Chris? Chris Mouse?"

They both turn and see a grey mouse at the front gate with his hands to the side of his face, yelling.

"I'm Chris Mouse," yells Chris back, at which point the other mouse throws his front paws in the air and runs to Chris.

"I have a message for you from your mother. She says that your father is missing. He's been gone for three days and she's worried."

"Oh, my goodness," says Christine. "When are you going back. Please tell them we'll come right away. Now, let's get you some food."

It's customary for someone receiving a message to reward the messenger with some food for their trouble. Christine runs in the house and comes back with some nice seeds in a little tray.

"Oh, thank you," says the visiting mouse to Christine. "That's very kind. I'm Grayson. I'm a neighbor of your father and mother."

"Oh, they're not my parents. Chris, come over here!"

Chris walks over and hears the disturbing news, then thanks the traveler.

Chris turns to Christine and says, "We have to go. Or at least I have to go. It's not like my father to go missing. Something must have happened to him and I need to go find him."

Christine responds, "Well, you're not going alone. If you have to go look for your father then I need to go be with your mother. She's probably worried sick."

"Okay, we'll need to pack and get the kids ready for this. Do you think they can be trusted to be home alone while we're gone?" Chris asks with a wrinkled forehead.

"I'll ask Bill and Sandy Fun if the kids can stay with Billy and Shirley for a few days while we're gone. The kids are all friends so I'm pretty sure it'll be okay."

"That sounds like a good idea," says Chris as he's walking toward the house. "I'm not sure how long we'll need to be gone. It will depend on how quickly I can find Dad."

Christine is right beside him, walking just as fast. "Has your dad ever gone off on his own without telling your mom?" she asks.

"Not that I ever heard of. But he's getting older so maybe that has something to do with it. I've heard of older mice wandering a bit."

"Scary! Well, let's get ready," Christine says as they reach the Home in the Wall. "I'll go talk to Sandy and see if they'll watch the kids."

Christine leaves and walks the two blocks to Bill and Sandy Fun's home at the Lim's house. As she walks into the front yard she sees Sandy outside, sitting in the grass on a small cloth.

"Hi Sandy. Hey, Chris and I have to go help find his dad and we'll be gone for up to a week. Is there any chance that you and Bill could let our kids stay with your kids while we're gone?"

Sandy smiles at Christine, "Of course. The kids are all friends. I'm sure it will be fun for them, and it's no problem for us, etiher. Where did Chris' dad go?"

"That's just it," says Christine. "We don't know. All we know is what came by Mouse Mail - he's gone and Chris' mother doesn't know where he has gone to. He's been gone for a few days."

"Ooh, that doesn't sound good. I hope he's okay. Do you need help gettng your kids shifted over to our house?"

"That would be really helpful. They're at Mouse Academy now, but I'll leave a note for them. If they don't come over pretty soon after your kids get home, could you go to our place and track them down?"

"No problem. I have a nose like a, well, like a mouse. I'll find them."

"Whew," thinks Christine. "That takes a load off of me. I know that Sandy will make sure to find them and get them over to her house."

When Christine gets back to the Home in the Wall, she tells Chris that the Fun's will take the kids while they're gone. Chris shows her all the stuff he has piled in the front room to take on their trip to Grandma and Grandpa's house.

They have a quick snack and then Chris begins to move stuff to the MouseWagon.

The Dootys have left their closet door open which makes it easy to move their packed stuff to the kitchen porch. Chris moves the MouseWagon out of the garage with the charging cord inside and then starts packing their travel stuff. Once that's done, he looks around and sees Christine, standing on the porch waiting patiently.

With a wave from Chris for her to come, she's soon in the car and Chris turns the key to get going.

They travel down the driveway to the street. Chris plans to take the same way they took for the last visit, but he hopes there is no construction or detours this time. He still has the Mouse Map from the last trip, which makes it even easier.

The trip is actually pretty easy. At this time of day there aren't as many cars or trucks on the streets, and the few bicycles and pedestrians they see are not a problem.

Christine expresses her concern about the kids, but Chris reminds her that their good friends are very responsible and will make sure that Candy and Carl are safe and well taken care of.

After an hour or two, they see a sign to the park where they rested the last trip. "Oh Chris, can we stop for just a little while? It's cramped in the car and I need to stretch a little."

"Sure, honey," as Chris follows the signs and then pulls off the street and into the park.

"We found this park because of the road construction last time, remember? But all the roads look great now. I'm so glad we don't have to deal with that this time." Chris remembers.

"Oh yes," Christine adds. "The kids played in the grass. It was a nice break in the trip," as she looks up through the trees at the blue sky and takes a deep breath. "This is so restful."

There are some soft white clouds floating through the sky and both mice are feeling tired from the anxiety and then the travel. As the clouds drift by so do the mice. They drift off to sleep and wake up to the sounds of kids nearby.

"Chris, wake up. How long have we been sleeping?" Christine asks.

"I'm not sure, but we better get going. We still have a couple of hours to go to get to dad and mom's house."

Both mice climb back into the MouseWagon, Chris checks the Mouse Map to see how they can get back on their route, and they leave the park, rested but still a little drowsy.

The rest of the trip to Grandpa and Grandma's house is easy. They just follow the Mouse Map and in two hours they're pulling into the driveway at their destination.

Chris and Christine walk up to the house, slip through the opening to the concrete first floor and knock on the door to the box house that Chris's parents live in.

His mom comes to the door and sees them, then has a surprised look on her face.

"Oh, my goodness. You two came here. I didn't know that you even got my message yet."

"Yes, mom," Chris replies. "We got the message and loaded up the car and came right here. Have you heard anything from dad?"

"No, son. I asked around the neighbors and no one has seen him since the day he didn't come home. I'm worried sick. I've been inside praying every day that he will come home safely."

"Well, we're here now, mom, and we'll find him. Just don't worry. It's going to be okay."

"I'm an old mouse now, son, and these kinds of things aren't so easy to handle as when we were your age. But thank you for coming. I'm hoping this all ends well," mom finishes.

Chris and Christine carry in their stuff from the car and settle in while mom serves some seeds and nuts.

"When was the last time you saw, dad, mom?" Chris asks.

"It was four days ago, son," mom answers. "He said he had to take care of something and he would be back as soon as he could. Then he never came back. I'm pretty worried, I am."

Chris makes a list of names of people that knew his dad in the neighborhood, and where they live. He tells Christine and his mom that he is going to get started in the search, and he leaves.

It is later in the afternoon, with only about an hour of sunlight left when he leaves the house.

His first stop is right next door. It's the widow Francine. He knocks on the bush where she lives.

"Hello, is anyone home?"

"What? What do you want? Go away. I don't want whatever you are here for" a cranky voice comes out of the bush.

"I'm Crass and Curline's son. My father has been missing for four days and I'm trying to find him."

"Well, why didn't you say so, young man!" snapped the voice. "I'll let you in, but don't try any funny stuff."

An older female mouse parts the bushes to allow entrance and Chris steps into her home. It's small and smells kind of funny, but it looks comfortable enough.

He stands in front of her while she has her front paws on her hips. "Well, what have you got to say, boy?"

"When was the last time you saw my father, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Let me think. It wasn't yesterday. Maybe it was three days ago. No, that wasn't it. Hmm. I was outside and it was kind of windy and some of the leaves blew past me. Umm. Okay, maybe it was about four days ago. I think."

"Do you remember what you saw my father doing?" Chris continues.

"Boy, you sure have a lot of questions. He came to my door to see if I had any, what was it?, uh, oh, I don't remember. But he left in a hurry and said he had to get something real quick. That's all I remember."

"Okay," says Chris. "Well, thanks for your help. Have a nice day."

"It'll be better once you're gone, young mouse," is her only reply.

Chris walks to the next place on the list. It's a family that lives two lots away. The names his mother wrote down are Inny and Oopah Fahmood and they live inside a big house with five kids.

Chris walks to their lot and looks around the yard. There are four mouse kids playing in the side yard so he walks up to them.

"Hi kids, are your mom and dad home?"

"Yes, sir," says the tallest one. "I'll go get them." And he runs toward the house. Soon after he's towing his mom and dad with him.

"Hello," says the dad. "How can we help you?"

"I'm the son of Crass and Curline. They live a few houses away. My father is missing and I've been trying to find him. Do you have any idea where he might be?"

"Well, not for sure, but he did come by several days ago. He said he was trying to find his daughter. I didn't know he even had a daughter. He never talked much about his family to us. We told him we didn't know anything about her or her whereabouts and he left."

"Do you remember what day that was?" Chris persisted.

"I think it was about four or five days ago, wasn't it Oopah?"

"That sounds right, I guess."

"Okay, thanks," says Chris. "Do you have any idea where he might have gone after that?"

"He said something about having to take the Mouse Bus, since no one had seen her in this neighborhood."

With a wave, Chris leaves and returns back to his parents' place.

"Mom, have you heard from Angelique lately?" Chris says as he walks in their place.

"Yes, son. She said she needed some help and she was going to come to our place, but she never showed up. She's never been here before and so I don't know how she would have found us. Your dad tried to get a hold of her to tell her where we live, but he couldn't reach her.

"Say, do you think she has anything to do with your dad's disappearance?"

"I don't know, mom, but I'm going to find out. It's dark out now, so let's eat and get some sleep. I'll keep looking in the morning."

The night is quiet as the three mice sleep soundly. Chris has a dream about his dad and his sister. In his dream his sister is in trouble and calls for help. His dad rushes to her and stands between her and a big mouse. The big mouse charges, knocking his dad over and, grabbing Angelique, he runs away. Chris tosses and turns as the dream continues. He tries to see through the darkness around him, trying to spot the mouse or his sister, but it's pitch

black and he can't see anything. It's such a disturbing dream that when he wakes up the next morning he remembers it perfectly.

"Hmm," he thinks. "I wonder if that dream has anything to do with my dad's disappearance.'

Chris tells Christine and his mother that he's off to continue the search after they eat. After a quick bite, he's out the door with the list of neighbors, the first two that he crossed off yesterday.

The next stop is a mouse store, three blocks away. It's small and just a family operation with two mice in it.

"Hello," Chris calls as he walks into the store. "Is anyone here?"

"Hold on, I'm coming. How can I help you?" says a tall thin mouse with glasses.

"I'm looking for my dad, Crass Mouse. He left his home five days ago and he hasn't been home since," says Chris.

"Well, well. I saw him about that time. He was trying to find someone, I think it was his daughter. He looked pretty tired. The last time I saw him, I was going home after work and saw him asleep in a human shoebox out by the street. Looked pretty bushed, he did."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Nope, and the next morning that box was gone. I don't know what happened to him or the box."

"Okay, thanks. Any ideas on where I might look next?"

"Well, if you could find that box you could at least mark that possible location off of your list."

Chris leaves the store and stops for a moment by the street to look. There's no shoebox or anything else anywhere in sight.

Feeling like he's hitting a dead end, Chris goes to the next place on the list. It's the pastor of the local Mouse Church, a Rev. Chotney. The reverend lives just two doors from the small mouse store so it's a quick walk.

Chris shouts to the shed where the church is located, "Hello!"

A minute later, an older mouse peeks his nose out between some boards in the wall and says "Hello back."

Chris introduces himelf and asks if the Reverend Chotney is available.

The other mouse steps out between the boards and Chris can see he's dressed like a parson.

"That would be me, son. How can I help you?" responded Rev. Chotney.

Chris repeats his story about his dad's disappearance and his travel from home to try to find him.

The reverend is silent for a minute and then he starts talking.

"Your dad came to me several days ago. He was very upset. Something about some trouble that his daughter was in. I tried to calm him down, but I'm afraid I wasn't very good at it. He said he needed to find her to help her get out of trouble, but he didn't say what kind of trouble she was in. I prayed with him, and he left in a hurry. I sure hope he's okay."

"I do, too, reverend," said Chris. "It's not like him to disappear. Any idea where I might look next?"

"No, he said he was going to the Mouse Store next and that's the last I saw him."

Chris thinks about this. His dad was at the Mouse Store and he was last seen sleeping in a shoebox by the street. He went to see the pastor and then he went to the Mouse Store. Something is missing here. He must have gone to see the pastor first, then went to the Mouse Store, then went to sleep in the shoebox.

Chris walks back out to the street, looking toward the side of the street where the shoebox was. Nothing. Just like when he looked that way earlier. Then he turns the other way to look up the street. Wait! What's that? It looks like a mouse walking this way.

He starts walking in the direction of the mouse and as he gets closer it looks like his dad. Within a dozen steps he can clearly see, it is his dad!

"Dad," Chris shouts and the older mouse down the street looks up, and then shouts, "Chris?"

Chris starts running and gets to his dad quickly.

"Dad, where have you been? We've been worried about you. You've been gone for five days!"

"I know, son. I was trying to help your sister Angelique, when I fell asleep in a box by the curb. The next thing I know I'm in the back of a car and two young human boys in the front seat laughing about how they found this box and maybe it has money or something in it. I crawled out of the box and hid under the front seat of the car.

"After a while they stopped at a gas station and I snuck out of an open window. Hurt myself a little when I jumped to the ground, but I'm okay now. I've been walking for several days trying to get back home.

"On the way, I stopped by Angelique's place and she told me she was alright. A big male mouse had been bothering her, but she wasn't interested. He kept bothering her and finally she talked a friendly dog in their neighborhood into helping her out. One visit from the dog to the big mouse solved the problem. She's okay now. So, then I had to keep walking to get back here.

"I was afraid that your mother was worried about my being gone so long. I hope she's okay."

"She's okay, dad," Chris said. "She was worried, and we came as quick as we could. I've been looking for you since yesterday when we got here. I'm so glad you're okay."

"Oh yeah, it takes more than a couple of young humans to get your dad down, son!"

The two mice walk back to the house where Chris' mom and dad live. As they walk into the house and get close to the box where his mom and dad live, Chris calls out "Look at what I found! A wandering mouse!"

Christine and Curline come running out of the box. Curline runs up to Crass and wraps her front paws around him. "Oh Crass, you had me scared to death. I'm so glad you're safe!"

After the two male mice tell their stories about the search, the journey that Crass took, and the return, the four mice celebrate with a nice lunch and a visit.

Chris and Christine decide to stay the night and leave early the next morning to return home.

The MouseWagon has been plugged in since they arrived, so it will be fully charged for their long drive home.

During the drive, Christine and Chris talk about this adventure.

"I don't ever want to worry about you, Chris. Don't ever do what your father did. Your mother was worried half to death, and I don't blame her. Just don't do that!"

"No problem, Christine. What happened to dad could have happened to anyone, but I'm very careful and I promise I won't ever relax in a situation so much that something like this can happen.

"It's a lesson to be learned, isn't it? We worry about our family members because they're dear to us and we don't want to ever have anything happen to them.

"So, we are extra careful about not being too relaxed and putting ourselves in danger, or making our families fear for our safety. By telling them what we're doing and where we're going they won't worry, and best of all, they'll be happier. That's worth it, isn't it, honey?"

"It sure is, Chris. And thanks for being a good son and going to your parent's home to try to find your dad. That gave me an opportunity to be with your mom and help her cope with your dad's disappearance. And it also demonstrated that you're a good son and a great mouse."

Chapter 7 - Sour Candy

Thursday mornings are always hard for Candy. They're not the weekend, and they aren't a start of the week. They should probably be called the weak.

But even still, usually Candy and Carl race each other to see who can get out the door first. As if there's a prize...

However, the first of this week is hard for Candy. The first day dawns early and then quickly fades. Candy can't quite put her finger on it, but something doesn't feel right.

She goes through the usual motions. Puts on clothes, fixes her hair, cleans her whiskers, brushes her teeth, washes her paws and her face, especially her nose. It's a long process but one that Candy likes because she feels good and also looks good.

Carl is usually the fastest at this morning process. Get up, throw on something to wear, put a cap on his head, run downstairs to eat. Most mornings, Christine just looks at him and sighs. What can you do, she thinks. Some kids are just like that.

This morning, like every weekday morning, breakfast is set out on the table so the kids can eat before going to Mouse School. Carl is wolfing down his breakfast and is almost done when Candy finally comes down the stairs from her bedroom. He doesn't look up.

Christine greets her daughter with a sunny, "Good morning, Candy. How are you today?" In response, Candy just looks at her mom, wrinkles her nose, and puts her front paws in the air in a shrug. "Eh," is all she says.

"Well, that's not exactly a warm greeting, Candy," says her mom. "What's going on?"

"I don't know, mom. I just feel icky."

"What does 'icky' mean, Candy?" persists her mom.

"My stomach doesn't feel right," replies Candy. "I have a headache. It feels like my head is full of water or something, and even my legs and paws don't feel good. Kind of achy."

Chris looks up from his food and says, "Maybe you should go to the Mouse Doc and get checked out."

"Naah, I think I just have the blahs. If I still feel bad at Mouse School I'll go to the school nurse and see if they have anything to make me feel better."

That ends the short conversation. Candy eats her breakfast, grabs her school work, and heads out the door after giving her mom a peck on the cheek.

The walk to Mouse School is usually pleasant. It's a nice temperature in the morning, Candy usually sees several friends on the way and they walk together, and usually one of her friends has something funny or interesting to share.

This morning is different. She sees her friends Teaser and Shirley but instead of smiling and talking to them, she hangs her head down and keeps walking.

"Hey Candy," Shirley calls to her.

Candy just lifts a paw to wave and continues walking.

When she gets to Mouse School, Candy goes to her class and sits down. She's the second student there, and as her classmates come in, they're talking and laughing. She just keeps her head down and stares at her table.

As the teacher moves to the front of the class and starts talking, Candy suddenly leans over and throws up her breakfast, spitting out pieces all over the floor.

"Ohhhhh," Candy says and starts crying.

Her teacher walks over to Candy and puts a paw on her shoulder, "What's the matter, honey? I want you to go to the school nurse and have them check you out."

And then noticing that Candy is staring at the floor, her teacher adds, "Don't worry about the mess. I'll clean it up. You just go find out why you're not feeling well."

Her classmates are silent, watching as Candy stands up and walks toward the classroom door, holding her hand in front of her mouth to prevent any further food eruptions.

She walks down the hallway to the school nurse's office and walks in the door. She's greeted by Ms. Lee as she walks in the door.

"Can I help you?"

"I don't feel well, Ms. Lee. I threw up in my classroom and my teacher sent me to see you," Candy replies.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Let's check you out and find out why you're not feeling well, okay?"

Candy nods silently.

"So, let me ask you a few questions. Did you eat this morning?"

Candy nods.

"Did you feel sick before you ate?"

Candy nods.

"When did you notice that you didn't feel well?"

Candy responds, "Last night. I didn't have much of an appetite, but I ate dinner. I felt kind of dizzy and I didn't feel like doing anything. I just went to bed early."

"Good, did you sleep well last night?"

"I think so. I didn't wake up in the middle of the night or anything," Candy says. "But my nose was pretty stuffy and I had to breathe through my mouth."

Ms. Lee puts a finger to her mouth, like she's thinking. Then she walks over to some books and flips through one of them before stopping and reading.

"Well, Candy," says Ms. Lee as she slips on a mask over her face. "It looks like you caught a virus. That's pretty common among us mice, you know. It should go away in a day or two, but until then I want you to go home and get some bedrest. Can you do that for me?"

"Okay, but what about my classes?"

"Don't worry, I'll give you a note for when you feel better enough to come back to school. I'll tell your brother to get your homework so you don't get backed up on that.

Candy wrinkles her nose. "Carl isn't very dependable, Ms. Lee. If he stops to play with other kids, my homework will probably end up in someone's yard."

"I'll make sure your brother knows that he's responsible for making sure you get your homework," says Ms. Lee.

As she leads Candy to the door, the school nurse gives her one last bit of instruction.

"Now, here's an important thing for you to do. Don't come close to other mice until you feel better. Especially, don't breathe on them or touch them. You don't want to give anyone else what you have. It will only take a few days for you to be better. After you feel good for a whole day, the next day you can come back to school and be sociable again."

Candy goes back to her class, gathers her things and tells her teacher that she's being sent home and not to get too close to anyone.

The walk home is lonely and Candy doesn't feel well at all. She is bummed because she had to leave school and skip Mouse Academy. Her class at Mouse Academy is very interesting and she feels sad about missing it, but she knows she has to follow the school nurse's instructions.

Candy walks in the front door of the Home in the Wall. Her mom is standing in the living room.

"Hey Candy, what are you doing home so early?" she asks.

Candy replies, "I was sick at school, mom. The nurse says I have a virus, so I have to stay away from everyone and just rest. She says I'll be better in a few days.:

"Oh, I'm sorry, honey. You go rest up and I'll make you some dandelion tea. That should help calm your tummy and also help you sleep."

Candy just nods and goes up to her room, gets ready for bed and then crawls into her nest.

Her mom comes up with a cup of tea, which Candy sips while her mother sits at the end of the bed.

Candy is crying softly. "Mom, I don't like to miss school, but I didn't feel good. Today was just awful."

"I know, honey. Just rest up and get better. Everything will be okay when you're back on your feet.

Candy nods quietly and then says, "That virus! Why did I have to get that? No one else has it, as far as I know."

"Sometimes we never know, Candy," says her mom. "You could have got it from someone that didn't show any sign of being sick yet. But don't worry, it's a pretty mild problem and you'll feel better soon."

Candy sleeps most of the day, and at night she has some pretty active dreams. She tosses and turns in her nest, and when she wakes up in the middle of the night she notices that her face is wet.

"Ugg," Candy thinks. "This isn't fun at all!"

The next morning, Candy comes downstairs late. Carl has already gone to school but left her homework from yesterday on the table. Her dad is outside, working in the garden, but her mom is standing in the kitchen.

"And how's my little mouse today?" her mom calls cheerily.

"A little better, I think, mom," replies Candy. "I slept okay last night but I had a bunch of dreams. I don't remember any of them, but I think I had to do a bunch of stuff and I couldn't do any of it."

"You must have known in your dream that you were sick. Well, sit down and I'll make you some more of that dandelion tea. Do you think you could eat some seeds or maybe a few nuts?"

Candy just nods. She's better, but she still feels tired. It's going to be another day at home, and she will probably be sleeping for much of the day. If she felt better, this would be a really dull day. But, with the way she feels, she just has to not do much, and just get good rest.

After Candy goes back up to her room, her father comes in from working on the garden.

"Well, I got those latest weeds taken out. Here are some more dandelions for tea and some of these other weeds look pretty tasty so I brought those, too," says Chris.

"Thank you, honey," replies Christine. "I've been making dandelion tea for our daughter. She seems to be a little better today."

"Good," says Chris. "It's not often that these kids get sick. I hope Carl doesn't get what Candy has."

"It's just a virus. As long as she keeps a distance from us, we all should be okay."

The next morning, Candy comes down the stairs for breakfast and her mom can see that she's feeling better. She has a smile on her face and she's walking fast. Those are good signs.

"Good morning, Candy. You're looking better. How are you feeling today?"

"Pretty good, mom. I even did my homework last night. And, I didn't wake up from dreams with my face wet. I think I'm pretty much over that virus. Do you think I can go to school today?"

Christine puts a paw on Candy's forehead and says, "Feels pretty normal to me. No cough or stuffy nose last night?

"No, mom. I slept good and I didn't feel bad all night. Today, I feel really good."

Christine smiles. "Good. Then yes, you can go to school today. Don't forget the homework you did."

Candy looks at her mom, "Oh, mom. You don't have to remind me about things like that. I'm not a little kid anymore, you know."

Christine thinks to herself. "That's my daughter. She's back to her old self, alright."

Candy walks to school, goes right to the school nurse's office and talks to Ms. Lee.

"I feel better. I ate breakfast this morning with no problems, and I slept like a log for the last two nights. I think I'm ready to go back to class, Ms. Lee."

The school nurse puts her paw on Candy's forehead and a minute later says, "You feel normal, Candy. You're cleared to return to your class."

Candy almost skips back to her classroom. She loves school and it has been hard for her to miss two whole days. But now, she's back and she will catch up with whatever she missed.

Life goes back to normal.

And that's what we learned from this chapter. When we don't feel good, we have to tell others, and then do whatever is necessary to feel better. Sometimes it's just a matter of getting some medicine to help us get better quickly. And sometimes we might need even more treatments. Our health is the important thing, and we have to be responsible for trying to stay healthy.

Chapter 8 - Weather or Not

"Have you been watching the news, honey?" Chris says to his wife.

"It's not looking very good for our area for the next week or so," he adds.

Christine answers, "I've been too busy with the expansion of Mouse Academy to pay any attention. What's going on?"

"The weather is supposed to get really bad starting tomorrow, and then get worse after that. Looks like we'll be staying in the house for several days," her husband replies.

Weather is usually not a problem in this part of the world. Living near the beach in Southern California is like living in the best tropics. The sun is usually shining, the weather can get warm, but rarely hot. And, when it does get hot it doesn't last very long.

It's usually not a problem. But, this is different.

According to the weather report that Chris is watching on the tablet tv, the area is going to get hit pretty hard with the remainder of a large Pacific hurricane that is bringing high winds and rain.

Both kids come down, eat breakfast in a hurry, and head off to school. It's a short walk and it's always pleasant to walk and see their friends in the neighborhood as they also walk to class.

As everyone enters Mouse School Mr. Peepers greets the students with a stern look and gathers everyone in the entry way.

"Students, you may have heard about some bad weather that is headed our way. We don't know how strong this storm will be when it hits tomorrow, but if it is as strong as some suggest, we will be sending you home early. So, tell your parents today that you may be coming home a bit earlier than usual tomorrow."

All the kids nod and then walk to their classrooms.

Mrs. Wand stands by the door as students walk into her classroom. She has a quiet look on her face.

"Class," she says, "we'll have class as usual this morning, unless we hear from Mr. Peepers that the storm is coming earlier. But tomorrow, I have been asked to inform you that school will be closed. So, don't come to school tomorrow. Everyone got it?"

All the students nod their heads. This is very unusual. Nothing like this has happened before at their school.

Class is pretty normal, but none of the kids can keep from thinking about what's going to happen tomorrow. This all sounds very serious.

After Mouse School lets out, students go to Mouse Academy where Mrs. Trackle is waiting for them. She gathers them in the main room of Mouse Church.

"Students, I know you've heard about the big storm that's coming. It's not supposed to hit us until tomorrow, but we'll be watching the weather reports all afternoon and if there's any sign that we will get bad weather early, like this afternoon, we'll be sending you home early. In the meantime, at class this morning we have a local weathermouse, Mr. Finewhisker, who is going to teach us all how to prepare for the storm, and what to do during the worst of it.

"We're meeting all together today, so just find a seat.

"Now, help me welcome Mr. Finewhisker with a round of applause."

The students clap their hands softly. They don't know this person and so they're not very enthusiastic with their welcome.

"Good morning, students of Mouse Academy. I'm Stormy Finewhisker and I'm what you might call a weathermouse. I have studied weather for many years, and I have also learned how to protect yourself when bad weather happens. Today, I'm going to give you a quick lesson so that when the storm hits tomorrow, you and your family can be safe and get through it easily.

"Now, first off, the reports of this storm suggest that it will bring very strong winds. Does anyone know what a hurricane is?"

Several students raise their hands. Mr. Finewhisker points to one young girl and says, "What is a hurricane, please?"

"It's a real powerful storm, sir," Penny Venter says. "It has very strong winds, I think, and it also has a lot of water, so it rains really hard."

"Very good, young lady," says Mr. Finewhisker. "The winds will be very strong, sometimes over 100 miles an hour, which is pretty doggone strong. It's hard for anyone to stand up in those kinds of winds, but the most dangerous part is because things get picked up by the wind and fly through the air. So, what should we do when a hurricane arrives?"

Hands go up, and this time Mr. Finewhisker calls on Billy Fun.

Billy stands up and says, "Stay inside and stay away from windows. Keep the doors closed and don't go outside until the wind isn't very strong. If you have to go outside, be very careful to watch for things flying around."

"Good job, young man. What he told us is to stay inside and don't be close to windows. Why should we keep away from windows?"

Billy is still standing and he says, "Because something could fly through the air and crash through the window. We could get hit by broken glass."

"Right again! There's one other thing that we have to be aware of during a hurricane. Usually these big storms carry a lot of water. That means two things. There can be a lot of rain that comes down in a very short amount of time. And, there can be thunder and lightning. Anyone know what to do if there's a thunderstorm or big rainfall?"

Carl stands up. "Yes, sir. Stay inside. Mr Dooty's nephew Danny says that it can rain so much that the streets can be flooded and sometimes worse. Sometimes whole blocks can get flooded. And lightning is really dangerous because it doesn't have to hit you to kill you. If it hits near you and especially if there's rain water soaking the ground, the electricity can travel through the ground and hurt you or kill you."

"Good job, students," says Finewhisker. "Just remember these three things if the storm is bad, meaning the winds are strong, it's raining heavily or there's thunder or lightning. 1. Stay indoors. 2. Keep away from windows. 3. Don't go outside until the storm has passed. Any questions?"

One boy mouse raises his hand, "What if we have to go outside, like if there's someone out there and we can see that they're in trouble?"

"Good question, young mouse. First, don't try to solve the problem yourself. Find an adult and tell them what you see. Let them decide the best thing to do. Next, if there are no adults around and you have to try to help the person outside, try to find a rope, tie it to the porch rail or some other strong part of the house near a door. Then go to the person outside, while you hold the loose end of the rope in one hand. That way you can pull yourself back to safety if the winds are too strong. But remember, the best answer is to find an adult mouse, or if possible, find an adult human in your house and ask them to help. Trying to help by yourself is only if there is no other choice. Got it?"

The students nod in agreement.

The class has several other questions, mostly repeating the earlier questions. Mr. Finewhisker is very good about answering every question, even those that he has already answered.

This is another example of how Mouse Academy teaches great preparation for life.

After class, the students make their way home. The sky has dark clouds, but there's no rain and no wind. Yet.

The clouds are very interesting. They have very few lighter spots and mostly, very dark areas. The dark areas have little dark bubbles where it looks like baby clouds are trying to break out of the bunch and expand.

When Carl and Candy get home, their parents are waiting for them.

"How was school and academy, kids?" Chris asks.

Candy responds right away, "They were both very good, dad. We got good information about what to do tomorrow if the storm is as bad as they say. Now we can help because we know what to do."

"Excellent. Well tell us what you learned."

Carl jumps in and explains what Mr. Peepers, Mrs. Wand and Mr. Finewhisker told them.

"That's great information, son," as Chris looks and winks to Christine. "It sounds like your mom's academy gave you very good instructions."

Both kids nod and go upstairs to do their homework.

Chris goes out of the Home in the Wall to find Mr. and Mrs. Dooty and talk about the coming storm.

The two humans are sitting in the front room watching tv when Chris comes up to them. Franklin sees Chris and pauses the tv as his mouse friend gets closer.

Chris says, "Our family is all ready for the big storm. Our kids got really good information at school and Mouse Academy on how to prepare for the bad weather. I think we'll be okay. We're just going to stay in our Home in the Wall and ride it out.

"How about you, Mr. and Mrs. Dooty? Are you guys okay and ready for the storm?"

Donna turns to Chris, "We'll be fine, Chris. This isn't our first storm, although this is probably the worst we have seen. We know what to do. Franklin has already closed the shutters on the windows and pulled the car into the garage. There's nothing we can do about the garden except wait until the storm is over and then try to fix whatever gets damaged."

After dinner, the Mouse family gathers at the tablet tv and watches the weather report. The storm is now expected to hit just before dawn tomorrow morning. The weather man advises everyone watching to stay indoors, only go out if absolutely necessary, and stay safe.

After they watch a short movie, everyone heads to their bedrooms.

Chris and Christine talk as they get ready for sleep.

"This sounds really bad, Chris," says Christine. "I don't ever remember this kind of concern about weather. Fortunately, our Home in the Wall is way inside the walls of the house so that makes me feel safer."

"Me, too, honey," says Chris. "I'm going to talk to our neighbors that have homes in bushes or otherwise outside. I'll invite them to be with us, because we'll be a lot safer than they will."

The next morning, Chris gets up early. There are big storm clouds in the sky, but the actual storm hasn't hit yet. Chris goes around to all of their mouse neighbors that don't live in a building or shelter, and invites them over to stay with his family.

Two families accept, but the rest are going to Mouse Church, which has also opened its doors for families. The New Mouse Store has all kinds of storm gear available, and also has offered for mice to shelter in place there, as has Mouse School.

Chris gets back home just as the winds are starting to pick up. Within an hour, the winds are dramatically worse, and the Mouse family listens as the house walls begin to creak from the blasts of air.

For the next 8 hours, the Mouse family and the two families that joined them, sit and listen and wonder. Chris has the tablet tv on for a while, but after 5 hours of wind, the power goes out and everyone sits in the darkness.

Chris goes out of the Home in the Wall and walks through the bedroom. Franklin and Donna are sitting in the living room on the couch. The room is dark because Franklin has the shutters locked over the windows.

Chris yells over the howling wind, "Hey, friends. Are you guys doing okay?"

Franklin shouts back, "We're doing fine, Chris. This is one heck of a storm, isn't it? I hope all of your friends are safe."

"Me, too," replies Chris. "Two families are staying with us and we hope that everyone else is safe and dry."

"Hey, do you want to see what it's doing outside," Franklin asks Chris. "I left one window unshuttered facing the garage. The winds are hitting the other side, so this side should be safe to look out."

Chris says, "Yes," and Franklin picks him up and carries him into the kitchen where they stare through the small window over the sink.

The wind is carrying all kinds of things through the air. As they watch, a big sheet of cardboard goes flying by, hits the garage and then stays stuck against it fluttering like a leaf. Wind-blown rain is streaking by in sheets. As they look at the driveway they can see the blasts of rain as they hit the concrete and fly quickly to the other side.

Both males recognize that this is not weather for anyone to be out in. Fortunately, the house was built strong, but the house that they can see in the lot on the other side of the driveway is losing its roof, piece by piece. As each piece catches the wind it folds back and then flies off. There's nothing anyone can do about this but just watch.

Rain continues in a deluge, washing everything in the sheets of water. The ground around the driveway is now all wet and looks like the top of a pond. Soon, the water is over the driveway, and the entire side yard is now one big span of water.

"I hope the water doesn't get any higher," says Franklin. "Another couple of inches and the garage is going to have water inside. Good thing the power went off because we have lots of things plugged in, like the MouseWagon and your motorcycle. That would cause a problem."

Chris goes back to the Home in the Wall to fill in his family and the other two couples on what is happening outside. The two families staying with them are shivering as they realize that their homes are either gone, damaged or under water.

Franklin comes into the bedroom and knocks on the closet door. "Chris, come quick. We need your help."

Chris runs out to the bedroom where Franklin is standing.

Franklin explains, "I was just looking out the kitchen window again. There are three mice in the water. Two of them are on top of a piece of wood that's stuck up against the garage door. They're trying to reach out to the other one who is in the water. We have to go see if we can save them. Can you help me?"

"You got it, Franklin. Let's do this," answers Chris as he runs back into his Home to grab a coat. "I'm ready now."

The two go out the kitchen door. Franklin is wearing a rain slicker, a light jacket that has a rubber coating to keep the rain off. He also has on a pair of high rubber boots. He puts Chris in his pocket and runs off the porch, splashing through the ankle deep water to get to the garage door.

The two mice on the board have been able to grab the paw of the one in the water and they're keeping him from being swept away. But, their position is scary, because the wind is still blowing strong, whipping waves onto their board. The board is also affected by the wind and it's rocking back and forth.

Franklin and Chris reach the garage door. Franklin has been straining to stand in the wind and also walk in the water. Franklin pulls Chris out of his pocket and Chris yells to the shivering mice.

"Hey." They don't even turn toward their rescuers.

"HEY!" Both Franklin and Chris yell together and the three mice look up to see them.

Chris waves his arms and shows them that they should reach up with their paws so Franklin can get them.

Just as they finally understand and they reach up, a giant gust of wind hits the water and the board and the board overturns throwing all the mice into the water.

"Help," yells one mouse as he is getting blown away by the wind. The others are also floating and being blown away, with the first one moving away faster.

Franklin sloshes past the second two mice and reaches the first one, extending his arm down and reaching out with an open palm. The first mouse is able to grip one finger and pull himself up on to Franklin's hand. Franklin puts him gently into his pocket next to Chris, who quickly checks him out to make sure he's okay, while Franklin tries to get to the other two.

After two failed attempts, with the wind now blowing the other two mice farther away, Franklin says, "Harummphh!" and with un-humanlike strength he wades quickly toward the drifting pair, stops, reaches down and within a few seconds both are in the palm of his hand.

Once they're safely deposited in Franklin's coat pocket he turns and starts back to the house. The water is now very deep in places and it's hard for Franklin to walk through it. He slogs one step in front of the other. He can see the kitchen porch through the blinding wind and rain, but it seems so far away. All he can do is take one step at a time.

That's the strategy that works. 25 steps and they have reached the kitchen porch. Three steps up and they're at the door. A twist of the door handle and... the door won't open. It's stuck.

Franklin bangs on the door. Nothing. He bangs on the door again. Finally, the door opens and a frightened Donna Dooty is standing on the other side.

As they clunk and slosh into the kitchen, Donna says, "Oh, I'm so sorry. After you left the porch the wind blew the door open and I had to lock it to keep it shut. I didn't hear you over the noise. Are you okay?"

"We're all okay, Donna. Thanks for locking the door. That was the right thing to do. We're safe now. That's the important thing."

The power has come back on, and lights are now blazing in the house. Franklin reaches into his pocket and lifts each mouse out and sits them on the floor, starting with Chris.

As the other three mice join him on the floor, Chris explains, "This is the house that my family lives in. We're fortunate to live with Mr. and Mrs. Dooty. They are very kind people. Franklin Dooty, here, is the man that saved you."

The three mice are now shouting, "Thank you." "You saved us." We would have drowned." "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Franklin is quiet and then says, "It was my honor to come for you. I'm so glad that we were able to get to you in time. My friend Chris here, is a great mouse and his family lives right here in my house. You are welcome to stay until it's safe for you to go back to your homes."

Chris says, "There are a bunch of mice already in my house. Come on in and we'll make a party of it. You may know some of the others that are here."

The three mice follow Chris to the bedroom, under the closet door, and into the Home in the Wall.

Christine greets the newcomers at the door. "We didn't know what was happening after Chris left. Welcome to our home. It's safe here. We're just watching the storm on our tablet tv. Take a seat, I'll get you some warm dandelion tea and towels. Dry yourselves off and warm up."

Chris turns to Christine and explains quietly what happened. He tells her that it was scary and touch-and-go at times but Franklin was steady on his feet. That's what saved these three mice.

Christine shakes a little just thinking about the danger that her husband was in. It's warm and safe now, but she shivers when she thinks what might have happened if both Franklin and Chris had not returned.

The other families are standing around the three newcomers and exchanging stories. The three rescued mice knew about the home of one of the other families. "It's totally gone, unfortunately. A tree blew over and crushed your bush and everything in it. You're very lucky that you weren't there."

Then the three tell their story about why they were outside in the horrible weather. One of them had gone to find his neighbors, who had left early that morning and not come back. He saw the other two mice on the street as they were also looking for friends or neighbors. The three decided to team up for safety, but as the water got deep they jumped on a floating board. One of them was blown off the board just before it lodged up against the garage door, which is when Franklin spotted them.

As the day wears on the lights go out two more times, and then come back on each time within a couple hours of going out. When the lights went out, the tablet tv went off, and the mice in the house sat in the dark telling stories about their lives, the way people in disasters do to try to be together in the worst of times.

When the lights come on the last time, they watch a little of the news on the tablet tv and then Christine and Candy help each mouse find a spot to lay down and sleep. Christine hands out some cloth that will work as blankets. Carl and Candy take the youngest mice up to their rooms to cuddle with them in their nests. It is comforting for the little ones and Carl and Candy got a little taste of what it will be like when they were grown and have pinkies of their own.

The next morning, everyone has sleepy eyes, not having slept well because of the storm. The sleep of the visitors was poor because they weren't in their own homes, and they were worried that they might not have a home to go back to.

Chris waits until everyone is awake and then he goes out to the main house to check in on Franklin and Donna.

The wind is still whistling outside, but not as loud as last night. Franklin has opened the shutters on a window in the living room, and they can see much of the yard. It is totally under water. As they scan the yard, it looks like one pond, covering every inch of the property. As the wind gusts it throws ripples across the surface of the water, but not as bad as yesterday.

Chris stands at the window for a long time, looking out over the sea that now covers the yard. He can see the garden out of the side of the window. Everything is flat. Not a single

plant is standing up anymore. The wind has mowed the garden down as though someone came through with a big shovel and beat it flat.

"Well," Chris says to Franklin who is standing beside him. "It looks like we'll have plenty to do after this storm goes away. What a mess!"

"That's for sure, Chris. Oh, look at that!" and Franklin points out the window as they see a small flat-bottomed wooden boat float past on the street, with two people in it. The people are looking around apparently looking to see if anyone needs help. They float out of sight, and next comes a big truck with giant tires and flashing lights on top, plowing through the water, with two men looking out both front windows.

"It looks like there is some help out there, Chris," says Franklin. "It doesn't look like you and I will have to go rescue anyone else."

"That's a good thing, Franklin," Chris replies. "I don't think I have it in me to do another emergency rescue like we did yesterday."

"Oh sure you do," answers Franklin. "You're just like I am. You see someone that needs help, you're the first one to reach out to help."

Chris just nods. He and Franklin are a lot alike, it's true.

Fortunately, everyone in the community is safe. Franklin and some other men, take tarps over to put on the house on the other side of the street. The roof is mostly bare after losing much of it in the winds. They stretch the tarps out and tie them down.

The neighborhood of people and mice come together to help each other. Many mice families have lost their homes because of wind or flying objects. Many of the people have damaged homes. For two weeks, Franklin and Chris are out helping others. Carl and Candy help, and Christine makes food to serve to everyone. Donna also makes human food which Franklin takes to several families.

Disasters are not disastrous when everyone comes together to help each other. When people and mice extend a hand to others that are less fortunate, they demonstrate that community isn't a word, it's a big family. And family members help each other.

Chapter 9 - Hawaii? I'm Fine, Thank You

This is Chris Mouse. I want to share a little secret with you. I have decided to move to Hawaii. I'm going to put on a grass skirt like men wear there, eat pineapple and learn how to dance the hula.

Well, on second thought, that may not be the best idea I've ever had. But keep reading and you can read the story of our trip to the Aloha state.

- -

When Franklin Dooty gets an idea, it's hard to get it out of his head. He and Donna are watching a streaming show about Hawaii when he hit's "pause" and turns to Donna. "We should go to Hawaii, Donna. We've never been there, and it looks like paradise. Would you like to go?"

"Oh honey, I've always wanted to go. You really want to go? Can you call our travel agent and get a trip planned for us?"

"I'm so glad you're up for it. I'll call Sharlotte Bingham and see how we can get it arranged. We should also invite Danny, don't you think?"

Donna nods and gives Franklin a wide smile. That gets the ball rolling.

The next day, Franklin calls A Whole Big World of Travel. "Hello, Sharlotte, this is Franklin Dooty calling. We're thinking about taking a trip to Hawaii and I'm calling for your help again. What do you recommend, and can you put together an itinerary for us?"

The conversation is short. Sharlotte will put together recommendations for a great trip and will email it to Franklin so he can discuss it with Donna.

Two days later, the email arrives. Franklin and Donna sit down to read it and talk things over.

In the itinerary Sharlotte is suggesting that they go to "the garden isle," the island of Kauai. Her recommendation says that it's like Hawaii used to be before it became popular, got built up and lots of tourists flocked to other islands. Maui was her second choice, if the Dootys decided not to go to Kauai.

The itinerary Sharlotte put together looks fun, interesting, restful and exciting. As the two Dootys read it they both imagine the smell of plumeria, the soft fragrance of the salt air as waves slowly roll onto the shore, and the sound of ukelele's playing soft Hawaiian songs.

As they read all the details in Sharlotte's email it is pretty much a done deal for both of them. All that is left is to approve the itinerary and put a deposit down on the tickets.

"We should take the Mouse family, too, Franklin," Donna says.

"Of course we should. We've traveled together to the Caribbean and to South America. We really can't go without them, can we? I'll call Danny and you talk to Chris and Christine."

That settles it. They just have to talk to the others to get everything moving.

The next day, Chris is walking through the house when Donna sees him and says, "Hey, Chris. Got a minute?"

"Sure, Mrs. Dooty, for you I've got two minutes" he says with a big grin and a wink.

"Franklin and I are going to take a little vacation trip next month and we'd like you and your family, and Franklin's nephew Danny to go with us. We just can't imagine going anywhere without you guys."

"Aww, that's really nice, Donna. We feel the same way about you all, except we couldn't take you guys because you couldn't fit in our MouseWagon."

"That's funny, Chris. You're right, I don't think we could fit.

"So here's the itinerary. We'll fly into the island of Kauai, one of the Hawaiian islands. After we land, we'll have a rental car for the week we're staying there. We have a condo reserved in Kapa'a and it includes a buffet dinner each night. We'll take the car to explore the island, so we can see all the sights.

"What do you think? Do you think your family would like to go?"

"I'll have to check with Christine and the kids. You know we're pretty busy in the garden."

He winks and then hurriedly adds, "Of course, we'll go. We're never too busy to go on vacation with our friends, the Dootys!

"I'll talk to Christine and the kids tonight but I'll make the executive decision. We're in!"

"That's great, Chris. I printed out the map that Sharlotte sent with her email. Please show that to your family. It details a lot of the great things to see on the island. We'll see as many of them as we can."

Donna hands the small map to Chris, it's folded into a small size to make it easy for their mouse friends to carry it.

That night after dinner Chris unfolds the map and places it on the table. "I have a problem, family. I'm trying to figure out where we should go on this map. Can you guys help me?"

Christine and the kids look at the map and Candy says, "Where is this, dad? Is that an island?"

Carl yells, "It's an island. Yippee! Are we going to another island, dad?"

Christine just sits there quietly. She knows that Chris is toying with their kids, and whatever secret he has will soon come out. It's just a game he likes to play.

"Well, we could be going to an island, kids, but only if you want to go there. What do you think?"

"What island is it?" "Where is it?" "How long will it take to get there?" "How long can we stay?" "Where will we stay?" "Do they have any mouse stores there?" The last question is from Candy who would really like to get some cool island sunglasses.

"It's the island of Kauai, one of the islands in the state of Hawaii. It's known as 'The Garden Isle.' Think you can guess why it's called that?"

"I bet it's really lush and tropical, like the Bahamas, right dad?" says Candy.

"Exactly. Donna showed me some pictures and it's very beautiful. Let's get YouTube on our tablet TV and watch a couple of videos."

The family leaves the dinner table and sits down in the living room while Carl dials in YouTube and finds a nice video on Kauai.

As they watch the video, the kids make comments, "Wow, that's beautiful." "Oh my goodness, look at those plants." "That river canoe trip looks great." "Dad, can I try surfing?"

After watching the video and talking about it, the trip is settled. They're going. The kids will get out of school and the academy for a week, and the Mouse family will go with their friends to Hawaii!

Franklin calls Danny and describes the trip and the timing of it. Danny makes the decision during the phone call that he can go. He'll talk to the owner of the electronics store where he works, and get the time off.

Over the next several weeks, Franklin and Donna go over the Kauai map and decide on sights they want to see. Then at one of their weekly dinners with the Mouse family they ask

what the mice would like to see. Danny joins them for this dinner so they can all discuss options for the trip.

The list of things they all want to see is almost identical. Both families want to go to Hanalei, down to Poipu, up to Waimea. Candy wants to go to Lihue for shopping, and also to a coffee plantation. Carl wants to go on a river cruise on the Wailua River. Danny wants to see Hanalei and the big cave.

Everyone gets their bags packed and ready. The Mouse family's bags are small and barely take up any room inside Franklin and Donna's bags. Danny has a small carry-on bag that his few thiings fit easily in.

The night before the flight, Carl and Candy can't sleep. They've traveled before, to South America and the Bahamas, but never to the South Pacific. In Carl's dreams he can smell pineapple. Candy dreams of hula dancers. Chris and Christine are exhausted from the preparation and they sleep deeply.

Franklin is up and moving around the house early. Christine hears him opening the closet doors and moving suitcases, as she wakes up. Going downstairs, she sees Chris sitting at the table in the kitchen looking at the map.

"I'm ready, honey," he says and folds up the map. "This is going to be a fun trip!"

Danny is waiting in the house kitchen with his bag.

Loading the car and riding to the airport is easy. Franklin parks in the long-term lot and the Mouse family rides in Donna and Franklin's pockets as the lead their roller bags into the airport terminal.

Waiting for the flight seems to take forever, but then they're on the plane in their seats as the announcements come over the airplane speakers.

Within a short while they're first in line for takeoff and then they're roaring into the skies.

Chris holds Christine's hand and says, "We're on our way, honey. This is going to be special."

Carl and Candy are both curled up sleeping, thanks to their sleepless night. Danny uses his phone to take a video of the two young mice, thinking it will be a great backdrop for an upcoming PawdCast.

The flight is smooth, and passes quickly. Everyone is excited. Franklin reads a magazine while Donna naps. He turns on the movie in the seat back monitor in front of them and the two adult mice watch the show. It's a thriller with lots of car chases, fights and shooting.

Christine is really glad the two young mice are asleep because she never lets them watch movies like this.

Danny is seated across the aisle. He's also watching a movie, and from what Franklin can see it's the same movie as the one playing in front of them. That makes sense because Danny is into action stuff.

Sooner than expected the plane starts its descent and then the wheels screech as they kiss the runway. The plane slows and then rolls to the terminal in Lihue, Hawaii.

Deplaning is always tedious, but eventually everyone gets off, Franklin gets the car at the rental counter, and they head to their condo with luggage safely in the back of the car.

When they arrive at the condo, there is a small sign at the front desk welcoming Franklin and Donna Dooty. It's a nice touch and that makes it feel more personal.

The Dootys roll the bags to their room, Danny takes his carryon to his room, and then everyone sits in the main room, which is very spacious with a big sliding glass door to a lanai looking out at lush gardens with volcanic rock and the ocean beyond. The ocean waves are crashing on the rocks with sunlight behind them. The view is both beautiful and restful.

"How about we all take a nap and then we can do a little exploring," Franklin suggests.

That suits everyone fine. The Dootys go to their room, Danny heads to his, and the Mouse family has the huge sofa for their bed. All fall quickly asleep with the sound of waves crashing ashore coming through the open glass door to the lanai.

Two hours later, everyone is awake, and Franklin is anxious to do some exploring.

"Let's jump in the car, folks. We're going to Kapa'a."

"But I thought that's where we are," says Donna.

"We are, but we have only seen the condo complex. Let's go explore the town. And I changed my mind - instead of driving, we can walk there from here."

It's a short walk along the shoreline and then into the main part of town. The shops are all open, which is like a flashing beacon to Donna, Christine and Candy. They have to go into each shop, wander around, buy nothing and then come out to rejoin Franklin, Danny, Chris and Carl who are standing around people watching. Carl actually spots a cute girl mouse across the street, but there are too many cars on the street, and he doesn't want to chance getting flattened on vacation.

After wandering the streets, they decide to stop in a small, older shopping center for a bite of lunch. Carl wants some pineapple, but everyone else wants a kalua pork sandwich. Franklin orders one sandwich for the Mouse family, and cuts it into four pieces which the family munches down easily.

They all look at the menu on the wall, and Carl asks, "Mr. Dooty, what's spam and what's loco moco?"

Franklin answers, "Spam is processed meat that comes in a tin. In the mainland it is often considered terrible food, but here in Hawaii it's almost the state dish. Everyone loves it and it's served with all kinds of other things. Loco Moco is very popular as a breakfast dish. It has rice, brown gravy, a hamburger patty, and a fried egg on top. If you want, they serve it in the restaurant at our condos and you can try it tomorrow."

"Sounds interesting," says Carl. "I'm up for trying both of those. You don't fly to Hawaii and not try the local food, right?"

"I'm with you, Carl," says Danny. "I'm up for trying everything that I've never tried before."

After lunch, they all head back to the condos, drop the packages with the female's purchases, and decide to walk along the shoreline.

It's a beautiful day and an easy walk between rocks along the jagged shore.

They walk for about a mile, which is enough to work off some of the rich food they ate for lunch. The mice are good for a short distance of walking, and then they ride the rest of the way inside Franklin's and Danny's pockets.

After a quick nap back at the condo, they go to the "welcome dinner" at the restaurant. There's soft Hawaiian music playing and they see a guy in a Hawaiian shirt playing the guitar and singing from the corner of the room. There's a small fountain in lava rock in the middle of the dining room. It's a very peaceful setting.

The dinner ends with a short show. Two dancers come out and the music changes to a hula beat. The female dancers have beautiful floral cloth wrapped around them and tied on one side. Both have colorful plumeria leis on their necks.

The hula dancers sway and dance and use their arms to make lovely, fluid gestures almost as though their arms are waves washing on the shore. Their bare feet have green leaf anklets tied above them and they move to the music so gracefully, it almost can't be real. Chris looks over at Christine and sees that she's standing on the table and swaying to the music, moving her arms gracefully, like the dancers.

After dinner they go back to the condo, open the sliding glass door and sit on the lanai, listening to the waves wash onto the shore. The moon shines bright in the dark sky with just a few clouds that cross in front of it, lighting up with the moonshine. It's a beautiful and restful scene, a perfect ending to a really nice day.

Danny stands there for several minutes, shooting more videos on his phone.

That night is perfect for sleeping. The gentle sound of the waves, a light breeze blowing in from the lanai, and the smell of tropical flowers all combine for great sleep and lovely dreams. Chris dreams about swimming in the ocean. Christine dreams of being a hula dancer. Carl dreams of the girl mouse he saw across the street earlier. Candy dreams of more shopping. Everyone gets a perfect dream for their first night on the island.

Sometime in the night, everyone wakes up to the sound of a crash coming from the other side of one of the walls in the bedroom. It's just one sound and then it's quiet. Sleep returns.

The next morning, Chris wakes up early, sits up and stretches with his arms overhead, looks around. "Oh right, we're in Hawaii" he realizes. Getting up and moving to the sliding glass door, he looks out at the manicured lawn and foliage with the waves on the other side. What a beautiful place, he thinks.

Today is going to be more fun. Franklin plans to take everyone on a drive up to Princeville and Hanalei, at the top of the island.

After a light breakfast in the room, everyone is ready to go. Carl rubs his eyes several times trying to erase the sleep from them. Candy is wearing a soft flower dress and her favorite sunglasses. She looks like a mouse movie star.

Franklin calls out, "Let's go, folks!" and starts walking to the door with Donna and Danny following close behind. The Mouse family scrambles to get to the door quickly. Franklin and Danny reach down and scoops them up one at a time and put them in their pockets.

The car starts quickly and the drive is on. Looking out the window, they see houses and lots of palms and tropical plants along the road. Occasionally, the road bridges ribbons of water that are flowing to the sea. Birds fly in the air and sit in the trees making delightful, twittering sounds. After a half hour of driving, looking at scenery out the windows, Franklin turns into the Princeville resort area.

The first stop is the botanical gardens, a lush paradise of tropical plants and trees. It's a walking place, so Franklin parks the car, everyone gets out and, mice in pockets, the three humans stroll through the fascinating landscape. Franklin points out the honeycreepers, a bird species that feeds on small bugs and nectar on the plants. It's like nothing any of them have seen before.

After that they go to the Hanalei Valley Lookout, where they gaze at the lush valley below, with farms and water and mountains behind. Candy asks, "What are those fields that look like they're underwater?"

Danny looks in the guide book and says, "Those are taro fields, Candy. Taro is a root crop that is very popular in Hawaii. The locals mash it and make a food called poi from it. I bet we can try some of that tonight, if you want."

After that, everyone gets back in the rental car and Franklin drives them to Hanalei. It's a very interesting little town set on a big bay with a beautiful park, pier and shoreline. As they walk around the park they can see surfers riding sleek surfboards into shore. It's a perfect Hawaiian picture, which Franklin and Danny capture on their phones.

Danny sees a memorial to a famous local surfer and stands reading it for several minutes. Then everyone gets back together.

Candy and Donna want to go shopping, so they walk through town popping in and out of shops. Candy gets a floppy hat, sized for a doll but just the right size for her. Donna gets a pretty cloth bag with tropical flowers painted on the side. Franklin and Danny buy shaved ice, and also get one to share with the Mouse family. It's cool, it's fruity tasty, and it's liquid. The perfect way to satisfy thirst and taste buds.

After Hanalei, everyone gets back in the car and Franklin drives to the end of the road, which has a park with a cave called Mananiholo Dry Cave. They get out and walk under a massive overhang into the cave which is quite light, lit only by the bright sun outside.

"Wow," says Candy. "This is awesome. I've never seen anything like this before."
Everyone agrees. This is very much a unique place. You can walk way back into the cave and look out to see the sunlight shining through what looks like a horizontal slit. Then when you walk toward the light you see that it's actually coming through a large opening into the cave.

Danny yells out, "Helloooo" to see if there's an echo. No echo, just the sounds of people talking and of the waves crashing on the shore across from the cave opening.

Walking outside you can see the beach and waves. What a great view, they all think.

After the cave, it's time to head back to Kapa'a. They had bought some munchies in Princeville and got a quick bite to eat in Hanalei. Now, everyone is satisfied and enjoying the pleasant car ride.

Back at the hotel, it's nap time again. "A little 30-minute cat nap will be great for everyone," Donna says, not realizing that her choice of words caused the Mouse family to pick up their ears. Cats are not a mouse's best friend.

After their nap, it's time for another stroll around the condo grounds and a walk along the shoreline. It's a nice path to walk on, with scenery at every turn, and some interesting little swimming grottos in the volcanic lava shore. The walk with such scenery, fresh air and flowery fragrances helps everyone wake up.

Danny spots a perfect spot to record his planned PawdCast. He thinks to himself, "This is going to be great."

Dinner is relaxing. They eat at a restaurant in the condo complex next to theirs, and they all try an interesting combination of tropical fruit, fish and pork.

The waiter brings a sampling of poi for everyone to taste. "Hmm," says Chris, "I like it. I can't tell what it tastes like, maybe mashed potatoes but different. A little bit sweet, I guess."

The others try it also, along with Kalua pork that is on a side dish. The two foods go very well together. Danny keeps eating the Kalua pork until there's none left, then looks up sheepishly and says, "Did anyone want any more of that?" It's too late because it's all gone, but at least Danny attempted to act like he would share.

The entertainment this evening is outside the restaurant. It's a small area of a dozen shops along a wood decking that extends for over 100 feet in every direction. It's pleasant for walking, and in the middle, they see people standing around watching dancers with men beating a rhythm on tall drums.

The women dancers move quickly and gracefully and then two men dressed in native Hawaiian garb come out in front and begin to throw big knives back and forth, twirling them, swinging them, tossing them to each other, all in time to the beat of the drums. It's exciting to watch and honestly, it looks a little dangerous. The big blades on the knives look sharp. To demonstrate that, one of the men holds up a piece of paper with one hand, lets it drop from his hand, and swings the knife blade slicing right through it in mid-air. Carl sucks in his breath at the sight, and then looks around to see if anyone noticed that he was startled.

Danny captures the entire experience on video. More background footage for PawdCasts and YouTube videos.

After the entertainment ends, they all walk back to the room and sit on the lanai to watch the ocean gradually turn dark as the sun sets. It's been another wonderful day on Kauai, and everyone sitting on the lanai is just trying to soak this all in. These are memories to treasure and remember in the future.

The next morning at breakfast, Franklin tells everyone that this is a free day. There's nothing planned and since there are other activities planned for the next several days, it's a good day to relax and enjoy the surroundings.

There's a bit of wind today and the tops of the palm trees are bending. Waves crash on the shore. Birds are flying with the wind. Out on the ocean a large sailboat moves slowly across the horizon.

Through the day, Chris and Christine go for walks, Carl explores the condo grounds and the shoreline, and Candy starts thinking about what she wants to buy when they go shopping again. It's a good "down day" to just relax and settle in.

Danny looks at the stills and video he has recorded so far, and selects several for editing into the next PawdCast.

Lunch at the condo restaurant is a buffet, again with all kinds of fruit, vegetables and Hawaiian meats. Every mouse realizes that it would be easy to stuff themselves with all of this great food, but it would probably not feel comfortable later. Everyone samples a delicious drink called POG, made from passionfruit, orange and guava. After they taste it they can't stop drinking it.

Franklin grabs some of the fruit from the buffet table to take back to the room for snacks later.

The afternoon is open again, with everyone doing their own thing. Carl meets a cute girl mouse in the condo complex and they are going to walk the entire beach from one end, where a small river cuts through the land, to the other end, where a similar waterway interrupts the pathway.

Candy and Christine want to walk through the nearby shops again. Donna decides to join them.

Chris, Danny and Franklin decide to go into town and see what they might want to take everybody to see later in the trip.

It's a fun, free afternoon ending with dinner in the condo restaurant again. This time, the entertainment is Polynesian fire dancers. As they twirl and throw burning fire knives the audience gasps and watches, holding their breath at times. The beat of the tall drums sets a tantalizing rhythm for the movements of the dancers.

The show is great and a fitting end to a relaxing day. Once again, Danny has captured it all on video.

The next morning, Franklin gathers everyone together to describe the day's events.

We're going to drive to a coffee plantation, which is down a long road with huge trees on either side. We'll see how coffee is grown and maybe even sample some of it. They also have a nice gift shop where Donna and I want to buy some coffee beans to take home.

The last comment about "gift shop" gets Candy's attention. She can't wait to get in more shopping, even if she doesn't buy anything.

The drive is very pleasant. They almost miss the turn to the plantation, but Franklin figures it out thanks to the maps app on his phone. After they park, everyone gets out and they walk to the main building. There's a tour every fifteen minutes or so, which sounds like fun.During the tour they walk around the plantation looking at coffee trees in various stages of growth, and the roasting plant where the beans are slowly converted into delicious grounds for making fresh brewed hot coffee. The gift store has lots of Hawaiian and coffee-related clothes and other things like cooking utensils, plus coffee, of course. It's all very interesting and fun.

After they have seen the coffee plantation, everyone jumps back in the car and Franklin drives toward the breathtaking Waimea Canyon area.

They stop at several places to see the canyon and waterfalls. The last stop is the Kalalau Lookout where they get out and look down at the stunning views of the Waimea coastline.

Before they left the condo this morning Franklin suggested that they take a helicopter tour to see the rugged coast from the air, but no one wants to go so instead it was a driving and walking trip. The views were amazing, and everyone takes lots of pictures.

Danny selects the view from the lookout as the backdrop for a PawdCast with Chris. In the video, Danny and Chris discuss what they've seen and experienced so far, and Chris talks about how this experience is going to help him in the future. It's a very insightful PawdCast and later, this episode proves to be one of the most viewed PawdCasts ever.

After the long ride and walks to see the sights, the rental car takes them back to the condo complex.

It's late in the afternoon. Just time for a quick dinner at the restaurant, a little tv and a good night's sleep.

The next morning during breakfast Franklin tells everyone the plan for the day. They'll drive into Lihue for shopping. There are a lot of outlet stores there plus the usual big stores in major cities. It's a good time to get their last shopping done before their trip home the following day.

There's some road construction with men waving stop signs and barriers across parts of the road, but other than that, the drive to Lihue is easy.

Franklin parks the car in a large shopping center with lots of stores, and the females go one way while the males go the other. Franklin, Chris, Carl and Danny head for the sporting goods store, where they look at surfer clothes, surf boards, and other typical sporting-related Hawaiian goods. Carl really wants to try surfing so Danny walks over to the pharmacy and buys some tongue depressers. He's confident he can make a cool surfboard out of those.

The guys and gals meet up for lunch at 12:30, walk into a small cafe and get ready to enjoy some good Hawaiian food. Carl wants to try loco moco, which Franklin and Danny order to

divide up among everyone. It's way different than anything any of them have eaten before. And everyone likes it.

At the end, Carl burps and says, "I think I could get used to this. Could we move here, dad?"

Chris looks at his son and says, "Well, you could, son but I want to stay married to your mom, so I won't be able to move here."

"Oh dad, don't you think mom would like it here?"

"I'm sure she might, but I also think she might get island fever."

"What's island fever?"

"It's when you realize that the place you live in is smaller than the place you came from, and it feels a little bit cramped."

"Okay, well I think I'll move here when I get older. I can see myself surfing every day, eating all this good food, and settling down with a sweet Hawaiian girl mouse in a grass skirt."

"You have a year or two to go before then, son, but I'll help you come back if that's what you decide when you're older."

Carl smiles and imagines himself in Hawaiian swim trunks, surfboard on one side, and a cute Hawaiian girl mouse wearing a muumuu dress on his other side. Directly in front of him is a big bowl of poke. Oh yeah!!!

As the entourage boards the airplane for the flight home each of them thinks back over this trip, giving themselves a quick review to remember in the future. The PawdCast is also great because it captures much of the scenery and the fun things they experienced.

Chris later is remembering and thinking that this trip is a great reminder that life is meant to be experienced. Visiting different places has given him and his family a broader understanding of the diversity of life and nature on this ball called "earth." Every experience in every different place is like different colors of thread that get woven together to make a wonderful tapestry.

The others on this trip to Hawaii think similar things, but one thought is common to everyone - this is a magical place that they will remember for the rest of their lives.

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