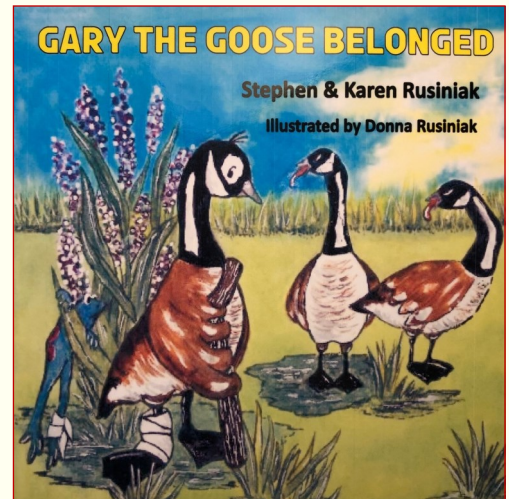


Gary the Goose Belonged

By Stephen & Karen Rusiniak

Illustrated by Donna Rusiniak



the backstory...

While every story has its own backstory, the circumstances surrounding the writing and especially the publication of ***Gary the Goose Belonged*** could quite possibly be a stand-alone story all by itself.

Let me explain.

Truth be told, there was a real goose whose walking was impaired by a badly damaged leg. And also true was that try as he would, he was rejected by the various flocks of geese that came and went daily on the pond behind our vacation home in West Ocean City, Maryland.

So, if you happen to be wondering how such a sad situation could be turned into a positive story with an optimistic message, let me share with you a couple of things that especially influenced the creation of our story—the first, of course, was one walking impaired and leg injured goose. The second involved four adults, fresh from the beach, relaxing and wondering why this goose that we were watching was being rejected by the various flocks around the pond.



“Gary”

and now the backstory:

Karen, me, and some friends from back home, Wayne and Jackie, had returned from the beach and were enjoying some iced libations while relaxing on our deck when we observed a lone goose struggling to



Afternoon libations

extricate himself from the water. And when he'd succeeded, we noticed he had an awful limp. We watched as he tried to mingle with one flock and then another—each time being chased away. We also saw that the only waterfowl that accepted him was a duck and her ducklings. I promptly named the goose, ***Gary***, and the duck, ***Doris***, and began making up stories about how ***Gary*** just wanted to fit in. We couldn't help but to note the similarities between his struggles and present-day discrimination issues where being different too often means being excluded. As we continued watching this goose, the writer in me suddenly saw a possible story developing. That night, I wrote a few notes, for future reference, just in case.



Wayne, Jackie, me, Karen

After Wayne and Jackie went home, I began writing a simple story about a goose who wanted to belong. I asked Karen—a former elementary school special education teacher for age-appropriate messaging suggestions. (I later sought the same from Jackie—a third-grade teacher.)

Within a few days, we had a very rough draft and a title too, but as so often happens and with no particular plan for its publication, I filed away what was written, after all, I remembered something important: I don't write stories for children.

Two years passed. We were in Cambridge, MD, and looking at the boats docked in the marina. While I was admiring an older yacht, its owner leaned over the rail and asked if we'd like to see "what it was like to live on a boat." For the next few hours, we chatted with Patty about her boat and so much more, particularly regarding her long and absolutely interesting life, (which is way too involved to even begin to address here).

I mentioned that her own story, while filled with so many highs and lows was utterly fascinating and that she should write a book based upon her life. She said that she was, in fact, doing just that and that as well had written a different kind of book and showed us a copy, (*The Tenth Life* by Rose Scott, a story about various animals crossing the rainbow bridge).

As you might have guessed, from this point forward, our conversation revolved around writing.

Before we left Cambridge Patty had invited us to come back and visit her any time. She put her contact information into my phone.

That night I sent her a message thanking her for her hospitality. And her response—she sent me the contact information for her publisher, Pen It!

A few days later I became curious concerning the publishing info Patty had sent me. I decided to check out the publisher and was astounded at the volumes of published products—especially the number of children's books in their catalog. Suddenly, an idea: why not retrieve our goose story from the files, tweak it into a publication-worthy piece and then send it off for consideration, all of which is just what Karen and I did.

Two weeks later we received a contract for our story about a goose who just wanted to belong.

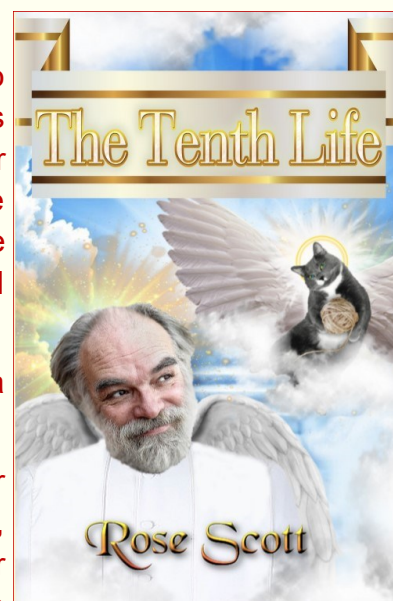
While the contract specifically stated that they prefer using their in-house illustrators, we declined, instead asking the best artist we knew, (my brother Paul's wife, Donna), if she'd be interested in illustrating our book. She said she would, and the end result was so much more than we could have hoped for! Donna's interpretation of our characters along with her many subtle additions (look closely at each page to see what I mean), simply added



Karen, Patty & me at Snappers, Cambridge, MD



Returning to Patty's boat



Patty's aka Rose Scott's

another incredible layer to our story and to the book.

and what happened to the real Gary:

We had wondered what had become of Gary. It had been a few years since he flew away, but as luck (or fate) would have it, and as we were working on the story, a flock of geese landed on the pond. And when they came ashore, there was no mistaking the goose with the damaged leg—Gary had returned, with the flock and now, with a mate!

We couldn't have asked for a better ending to our story, (and to Gary's)!



and lastly:

Our illustrator, Donna, and some of character illustrations she was creating for the book.

