



OUR LITTLE ANGEL



Carmel, NY



St. Joseph, MI



Salt Lake City, UT

Flat Rock, MI

THE CHRISTMAS BOX ANGEL



Angel of Hope

The Miraculous Story of The Christmas Box Angel

BY RICHARD PAUL EVANS

In the shadow of the snow-clad Wasatch range in Salt Lake City, a statue of a dove-winged angel stands watch over a cemetery. Though it rises above tombstones, it marks no burial. Though it claims no body, it itself is claimed by thousands. The angel's face is that of a child's, its arms raised as a child to be lifted. In its wings are HOPE.



It was only twelve days before Christmas. *The Christmas Box*, had risen to number one on the national bestseller lists and my book signings had become frenzied affairs-sometimes extending upwards of six hours. It was a harried Saturday afternoon close to the holiday and the crowds were enormous. Suddenly a woman outside the roped stanchions of the line approached my table. As I glanced up I noticed there was something peculiar about her eyes. They were full of pain.

"I don't have time to wait in your line. Mr. Evans," she said loudly. There was a strange desperate quality to her voice, The line quieted and those near the table turned to see this peculiar woman. I apprehensively returned her gaze.

"I just want you to know that my little girl was killed by a car last Thursday. I have read your book every day since then and it is the only thing that is keeping me going."

I walked around the table and embraced the woman as she buried her head into my shoulder and wept. A few minutes later I returned to the table. Those in line stood silent, stunned by the incident. After a moment a woman said somberly, "I read that this happens at your book signings."

"Almost every one," I replied.

I had never intended to publish *The Christmas Box*, it was simply a story I wrote for my daughters to express my love to them in a way that would be timeless. I could not have imagined that this tale for two little girls, would spread to millions throughout the world. While the media measures the success of *The Christmas Box* by weeks on bestsellers lists and booksellers profits, the most remarkable stories of the phenomenon have largely gone unnoticed-the incredible? stories, shared by readers, of the book's mystical power to heal-a book about a stone angel that has come to represent a parent's deepest grief and greatest love.

In loving memory of our babies. We love and miss you.
Please, angel, guard over our two loved ones.

NOTE LEFT AT THE ANGEL MONUMENT

The first of many unusual experiences I was to encounter occurred in December of 1993. I was at a book signing at a mall in Salt Lake City. *The Christmas Box* had been published only two weeks previous and I was hoping to sell ten copies in the course of two hours. Suddenly a woman walked up to me.

"What is your book about?" she asked.

Excited at the prospect of selling a book, I eagerly recited my sales pitch. "It is about a young family who moves in with an elderly widow and the Christmas they spend with her." she looked disappointed in my reply. Then, to my surprise, said, "I guess I need six copies. One for each child." Suddenly tears began to well up in her eyes as she corrected herself. "No, I'm sorry. I only need five... we just lost a child."

Then, in the cacophony of the crowded mall corridor, the woman began to cry. She was very embarrassed. When she had gained her composure she apologized, "I'm sorry. I don't know why I told you that. I don't even know why I'm standing here."

"I do," I replied. "I have been told that this book is healing for those who have lost children."

Her expression revealed her surprise. "Just a moment," she said. She went into the store and purchased her copies. As I signed them she suddenly interrupted me. "Can you tell me what's happening to me?"

I looked up quizzically. "What is happening to you?"

"I had finished shopping and as I was backing my car out of the mall's parking terrace I suddenly heard a voice. It said 'go back inside, there is a man there who has something for you.' When I came back inside I saw you sitting here and the voice said, 'That's him. What he has you need.'"

She blushed. "You probably think I'm crazy, standing here crying and telling you that I'm hearing voices."

"No Everything about this book is mystical."

Three weeks later I was in Scottsdale Arizona having one of the worst book signings of my young career. I had been in the bookstore for nearly forty-five minutes and the only attention I had received from a customer was when someone asked me to move so they could get to some books behind me. Suddenly a woman walked up to my table and said, "I'll take one of these."

Mercy buy, I thought.

Her husband, who had walked up behind her, glanced at the book then said disparagingly, "Man, you'll buy anything."

I wanted to go home. She bought the book and they left the store. About twenty minutes later they returned. The man approached me, holding my book above his head.

"I need ten more copies," he announced.

"You've changed your mind?" I asked facetiously, still reeling from his earlier insult.

He leaned forward, his eyebrows bent intensely. "There is something really weird about your book," he said in a hushed tone. "There is something mystical about it."

His wife came around the table. "Do you believe in spiritual things?" she asked. "Like voices?"

"Yes."

"We both heard a voice this evening that told us to come here and find you. It wasn't until my husband opened the book that he knew you were the one. I don't know what this little Christmas book of yours is about but we are suppose to share it."

I have had these types of peculiar experiences from coast to coast. Sometimes it's as subtle as the woman in Oregon who, mistaking my signing table for an information desk, stopped to ask directions to a store because she needed to find something for an acquaintance who had just lost a child. Or it might be more overt, like the woman who, after hearing me speak, came up and, wiping tears from her

eyes, said, "I had never heard of you or your book, but when I saw in the paper that you would be here I suddenly had an overwhelming feeling that I needed to hear you. And that I should wear this..." She displayed a silver brooch framing the picture of her infant daughter. "My baby died last June."

The very genesis of *The Christmas Box* was shrouded in like spirituality. As I began to write, the story began to write itself-pouring into my mind in torrents of inspiration. It would come to me in the middle of the night or early in the morning. Just as peculiar, the story came to me like a jigsaw puzzle with pieces here and there-chapters out of sequence. For four weeks I wasn't sure what the story was about.

Until one extraordinary morning.

At four a.m. the story woke me. Having already grown accustomed to my inspiration's poor sense of timing, I went out to the kitchen table and began to write. Just a few sentences in. I was suddenly overcome with emotion. I understood, for the first time, what this story was about-the pain my mother felt over losing a child. At that moment something beautiful happened. Something I had never before, or since, experienced. I could feel the spiritual presence of someone with me in the room. I believe it was my little sister, Sue, who had died when I was only two years old. Though I had never met her, there was something familiar about her presence. I said out loud, "Sue, you gave me this story for mom." Instantly it came to my mind, in the same way the story had come to my mind, "Dedicate this book to me."

I still had no intention of publishing *The Christmas Box* but I knew that I needed to share it with my mother and family. I went to a local copy shop and had twenty copies made. Two days later, on Christmas eve, I presented the books to my family. My mother wept as I shared my experience-that I now knew of her pain.

I learned that in the four weeks since Christmas Eve, the twenty copies were passed on again and again, read more than one hundred and sixty times. A few weeks later bookstores began calling with orders for the unpublished book I sent the book out to local publishers, who wasted little time in returning it, claiming "it would never sell" We were still receiving steady orders for all 19,000 copies. It was only the beginning. By Christmas of 1995 *The Christmas Box* had made publishing history on two accounts: as only the second self-published book to make it to number one on the New York Times bestseller list, and as the first book to simultaneously hit number one on the hardcover and paperback fiction bestsellers lists.

Just as surprising, was the number of calls we were receiving from grateful readers, sharing remarkable stories of grief and healing. In some instances, booksignings were dominated by people who had lost a loved one and had heard of the book's power to heal-something just as surprising to me as the book's amazing success. My wife Ken and I felt very grateful to be a part of something that was bringing peace to so many.



I miss you so much. I think of you every day. I know you are happy and free
and it won't be long until we meet again. Until then, stay with me.

I need the strength of your beautiful spirit. I love you more than I could
ever express in words. I'm doing my best at life but it's hard sometimes.

I know you will be waiting for me. I love you - forever, Mom.

NOTE LEFT AT THE ANGEL MONUMENT

There are several parts of *The Christmas Box* that are not fiction. The angel monument at the heart of the tale actually did exist. I learned of the angel from a neighbor who I often visited, an elderly widow named Leah Perry. As a child, Leah lived next to the Salt Lake City cemetery and would often play behind its walls. One wintry day, while walking through the cemetery, she heard a horrible wailing. She looked up to see a woman kneeling at the base of a sandstone angel statue, clawing at the frozen ground as if it held her from something she wanted desperately—more than anything. After the woman left, Leah approached the statue. Etched in its stone base were three words: *Our little angel*.

It would be another two years before I thought of recreating the angel. The idea came to me while at a book signing. As I sat alone, hoping for a sale, I noticed a woman across the hallway staring at me. Her eyes expressed her silent melancholy. After a few moments she approached. I asked if she would like a book signed. She shook her head. "I have already read your book." She took a deep breath and sighed. "You're not old enough."

"To be a writer?" I asked.

"No. To have experienced this. The story isn't true."

"No, ma'am. It's mostly fiction."

She turned away sorrowfully. "I wanted it to be true. I wanted a place to go. I wanted to lay a flower at the angel."

I called Leah and asked if she would take me to see the angel. We drove up to the west end of the cemetery and began combing the area she had walked nearly eighty years before. The search was not easy for the widow, as she walked with a cane. We couldn't find the angel. After searching for nearly an hour Leah raised her hands in frustration then, hitting a granite headstone with her wooden cane, exclaimed, "It was right here by Mr. Bean!"

Leah called me the next day. "I phoned the Sexton," she said triumphantly. "He said there was flooding in that part of the cemetery and many of the headstones were spoiled. Especially the older ones."

The angel was gone. As I thought of the grieving parents wandering the cemetery I had the sudden wish to rebuild the angel—to provide a place for them to grieve their little ones. When I told my mother of my desire, she began to cry.

"Sue was never buried," she said.

I was ashamed that I didn't know this, but not surprised. My mother rarely spoke of Sue. One of the few instances I remember involving my sister was when, as a boy, I found my mother alone in a room crying. When I asked her why she was crying, she told me it was Sue's birthday.

My sister Sue was stillborn. In the social mind set of the day (one I still have difficulty understanding—the doctors, caretakers and clergy simply patted my mother on the back (figuratively and literally) and told her that it didn't count—that it wasn't really a baby. To go home and just forget. I wish that this was an isolated instance, but I have learned that it's not. As I travel across the country giving radio station interviews I am amazed at the number of women who call to share their stories of quiet loss.

My mother carried the pain alone for thirty years. Now, after three decades, she had a place to go to confront her grief and to finally heal. The giving of *The Christmas Box* had truly come full circle.

I love and miss you very much! Happy Easter.
I hope you got a new dress where you are. I think of you often; especially lately.
I will always love you. No more tears until we meet again.
Love, Mom

FROM A NOTE LEFT AT THE ANGEL MONUMENT



I asked a neighbor of mine, a funeral director, if he knew where I could find an angel sculpture. He told me of a renowned local sculptor named Ortho Fairbanks.

"You could never afford him," my neighbor said, "But his son, Jared, is also a sculptor. He might be willing to help."

I phoned Jared and was surprised by his response. "You need to talk to my father," he said.

"I don't think we can afford your father."

Jared was insistent. "You need to talk to him," he repeated.

The next day I met with Ortho Fairbanks and his wife, Myrna, in their living room. As I explained the purpose of the angel, the sculptor pushed back tears. He went into another room, returning a few moments later with the casting of a headstone he had made for their own child. Myrna spoke for both of them. "Don't worry about the cost. Whatever it takes to build this, will be done."

I felt strongly that the new statue, like the original, was to be placed in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. I called the cemetery and explained my intentions to the sexton's secretary. She asked that I send a written request. I sent the letter, including with it a copy of *The Christmas Box*. The next time we spoke she was excited about the prospect of the angel statue. She understood She too had lost a child.

"You'll have to meet with the sexton," she said. "He's out of town for the week. If you can call back next Thursday, I'll arrange a meeting."

The following Thursday I called. The woman greeted me despondently.

"There's a problem, Richard," she said sadly.

"What's wrong?"

"You'll just have to talk to the sexton. He's available to met with you tomorrow."

From the tone of her voice I knew that our request had been denied. The next day I drove up to the cemetery, contemplating the doomed meeting and wondering if an appeal was possible. For the first time I began to wonder if the angel would ever stand in the cemetery. Suddenly there came a strong impression. *The place has been chosen*. Doubt replaced the thought. *They're not ever going to let me build it*, I thought.

The impression came again: *The place has been chosen*.

The sexton had never heard of *The Christmas Box* and probably would not have cared if he had.

"I've heard your request, Mr. Evans. and I'm going to have to deny it."

Despite the secretary's warning, his response still came as a surprise. "May I ask why?"

He sat back in his chair, his fingers knit behind his head. "I get a lot of requests like yours and I

just can't do it. In the first place this would have to be approved by the City Arts Council, the director of parks, the city attorneys and architects, the city council, probably even the mayor. The red tape is considerable. It couldn't possibly be done by this fall, even if I had the desire to go to that much trouble, which frankly, I don't have time for. Besides, there is no place to put a monument. This cemetery is one hundred and fifty years old. The plots are all privately-owned. I'm sorry, but we just don't have the space."

The sexton returned to his paperwork. I just sat, my mind reeling in confusion. I thought I had received inspiration. Not knowing what to do, I did nothing. I just sat there. After a few

minutes he looked up, no doubt wondering why I was still in his office. "What is it that you are trying to accomplish, Mr. Evans?" he asked.

I looked down for a moment then back into his eyes. "I just want to build a place where people can come to grieve and be healed."

I may never fully understand what happened next. I consider it nothing short of miraculous. The sexton's countenance suddenly changed. He stood up, walked over to a map on the wall, then, with a pen, made an 'X' in the center of the cemetery. "Here," he said. "It could go right here."

The statue was set in place only two days before its dedication. By noon of December sixth, flowers, sent from around the country, had already piled at the monument's base until much of the four foot granite base was concealed. Nearly four hundred gathered that winter night in the bitter cold of the cemetery-illuminated only by the candles they held which somehow defied the waves of freezing rain that had already drenched the crowd.

It was an eclectic gathering. Educated and unlearned. Christian and Jew. The prominent and the unsung. But that night there was no division. No race. No class. Just one heart huddled together for shelter from life's storms-to find peace at the base of an angel monument.

A dedicatory prayer was given, preceded by the unveiling of the statue. Then, a moment of silence was observed, followed by the innocent, pure strains of a children's choir singing *Brahms Lullaby*. My mother, June Evans, lay the first flower, a single white rose, for Sue. She was followed by Myrna Fairbanks, who lay a white flower for her son, Hyrum. As the crowd proceeded towards the angel to lay their own flowers, reporters and television camera crews were observed pushing back tears from usually stoic faces. "In twenty years of newscasting," said one hardened newscaster, "Nothing has gotten to me before. Not like this."

A woman, mourning her own stillborn child, poignantly summed up the event: "Finally, someone has said it is okay to cry."

Since its dedication, the statue has attracted a steady flow of visitors. Its base is adorned, year-round, with flowers and notes to loved ones. Even tourist buses wind their way through the cemetery. We announced at the statue's dedication that the ceremony would be held every year on December 6th. Last December, as word of the angel continued to spread, the crowds at the ceremony grew considerably, with many attendees flying in from other states. Others, unable to attend the event, held their own angel ceremonies, lighting candles and laying flowers at the base of an angel.

That first night, as I witnessed the procession of those laying flowers, I understood finally that I had been a cog in some great cosmic machination-a process where the end, perhaps, was known from the beginning. That, someday, people would come from all over the world to find solace in the statue's presence-to lay their grief in the outspread arms of an angel. A stone angel.

An angel with hope in its wings.

THE CHRISTMAS BOX ANGEL

THE CHRISTMAS BOX ANGEL was introduced to the world in the book *The Christmas Box*, a worldwide bestseller and hit television movie by author Richard Paul Evans. In the book, a woman mourns the loss of her child at the base of an angel monument. Though the story is mostly fiction, the angel monument once existed but is speculated to have been destroyed. The new angel statue was commissioned by Richard Paul Evans, in response to reports that grieving parents were seeking out the angel as a place to grieve and heal. The monument was dedicated on December 6, 1994—corresponding with the date of the child's death in *The Christmas Box*. (Coincidentally, December 6th is celebrated in many parts of the world as Children's Day.) The sculpture is the creation of a father and son team from Salt Lake City, Utah, Ortho and Jared Fairbanks, and modeled according to the description in Evans' book. The face of the angel is that of Evans' second daughter, Allyson-Danica. If you look closely you can find in the angel's right wing the word "hope." Flowers, sent from around the world, adorn the base of the monument year round, accompanying notes left by parents for their "little angels."

The Christmas Box Angel Monument Dedicatory Prayer

Our Father in Heaven,

We, a few of thy children, assemble here tonight to dedicate this monument and this ground as a place of remembrance and healing and love. That those who come here may feel Thy healing influence and be filled with the understanding that while this monument holds no small body, that no grave anywhere holds a child, for in Thee, all children live.

We pray that we, Thy children, might remember the beauty and joy of childhood and drink of it fully while we have it with us. That we might remember that while a child can be taken from us, the precious fleeting moments of childhood also can be lost through our own poor choices. We dedicate this monument to serve as a reminder to all, to cherish the brief time we share as "fellow passengers to the grave." We dedicate this ground, hallowed by tears, as a gift to the world. That it might last for centuries as a reminder to still unborn generations of the sanctity and honor of parenthood and the power of a parent's love, that this very spot might become a symbol of that love, which is a symbol of God's love for all of his children.

We ask that Thou would hallow this ground and protect it from those, who, blind of its message, would destroy or deface it.

We pray for peace over all those here tonight and a heightened awareness of all things eternal, that we might, through the exercise of our own choices, choose love over hate, joy over sorrow, forgiveness over anger, childhood over cynicism, and peace over all.

And this we pray in the name of God, Amen.



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Candlelight vigil brings thousands together to heal at base of Angel Monument.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH—On Monday, December 6, thousands of people will gather in Salt Lake City Cemetery for the five year Christmas Box Angel dedication to mourn the loss of a child and to lay a white rose at the base of The Christmas Box Angel Monument.

The Angel Monument was introduced to the world in the international bestselling book and hit television movie (starring Maureen O'Hara and Richard Thomas), *The Christmas Box*, written by NY Times bestselling author Richard Paul Evans. In the book, a woman mourns the loss of her child at the base of an angel monument.

Although Evans' book is mostly fiction, the angel monument once existed in the cemetery but is speculated to have been destroyed. The new angel statue was commissioned by Evans, in response to reports that grieving parents were actually seeking out the angel as a place to mourn and heal. Since its dedication, the statue has yearly attracted thousands of visitors. Year round, flowers sent from around the world adorn the base of the monument, accompanied by notes from parents for their "little angels."

At 7:00 p.m. (MST) on December 6, a candlelight healing ceremony will be held at the sight, presided over by Evans. After a few remarks, music, and a moment of silence, the attendees are invited to leave a white flower at the base of the angel statue. The public is welcome to attend.

For more information regarding the vigil to be held December 6, or for more information about any of the Christmas Box Angel locations, please call (801) 201-1991.

