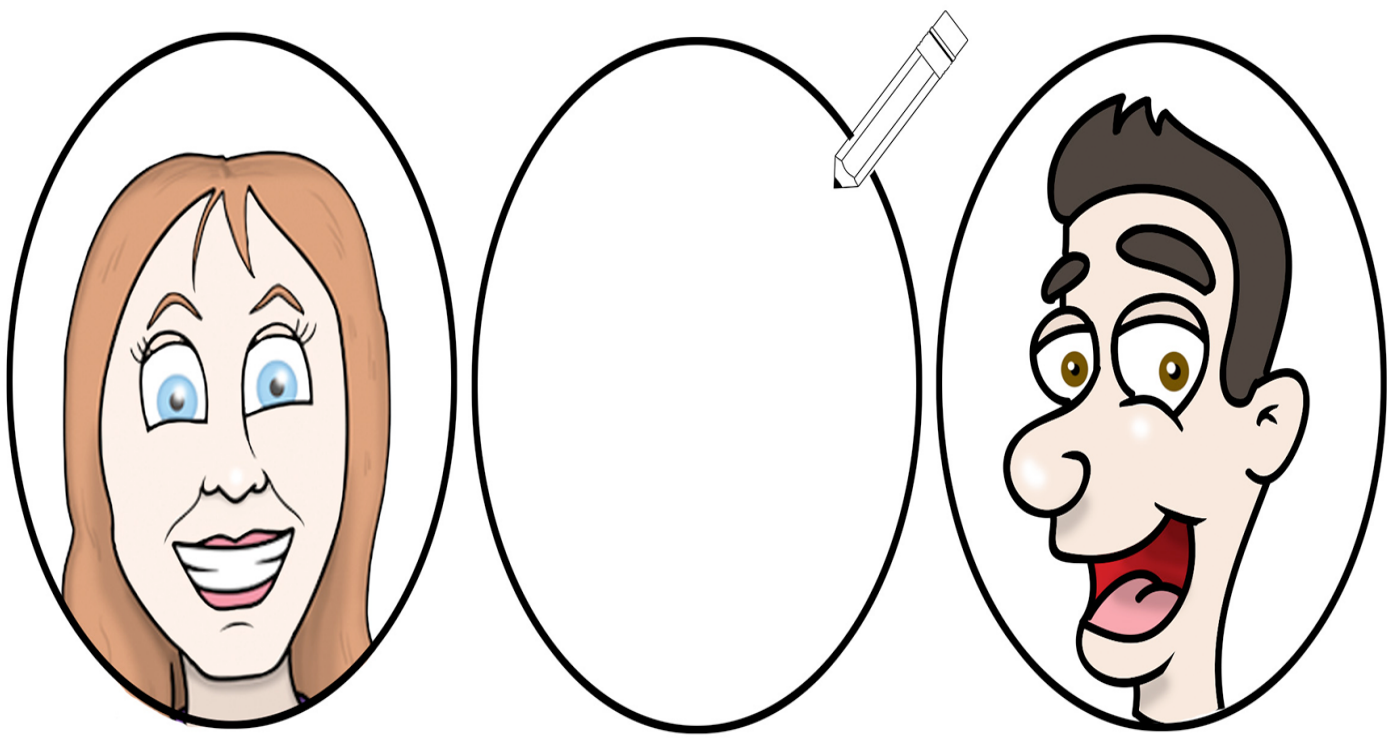
HOWIE

based on a true story

HOWIE



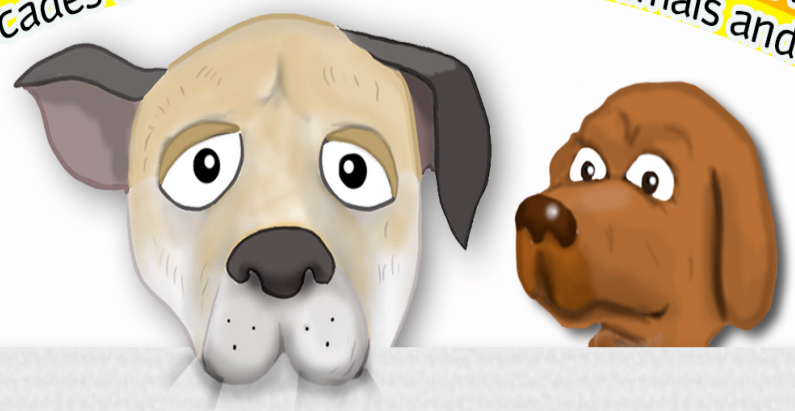
Author
Erin

Reader
This book belongs to:

_____

Illustrator
Mike

This book is dedicated to Shera Danese Falk,
recipient of the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award, 2015.
Thank you for decades of unrelenting service to animals and community.



Howie is a puppy that, through no fault of his own, ends up in an animal shelter fit for no dog. Making friendships with other shelter dogs, using bravery and wit to survive and relying on the help of wonderful volunteers, Howie finally finds a loving home.

A percentage of the proceeds from the sales of Howie will be donated to Peace of Mind, a remarkable dog shelter in Central California.

I invite my readers to visit my website The Eyes Of Erin...www.theeyesoferin.com to find out about all my books and the charities affiliated with each.

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Chapter 1

One beautiful spring day in the city of Santa Monica, California a male Beagle and a female Border Collie fell in love. Weeks later nine Beagle/Border Collie puppies were born.

As it happens with dogs, the mommy loved all her babies. She cared for them and prepared them for the challenges that lay ahead. She knew her little ones would be leaving soon for lives of their own.

And so it was...when the puppies reached eight weeks of age, many different people came to pick and choose a sweet furry baby to take home and love.

It is Howie, however, whose life story I am passing on to you. Why is this you may ask? Because everyone needs a hero...and Howie is just that...a hero for us all!

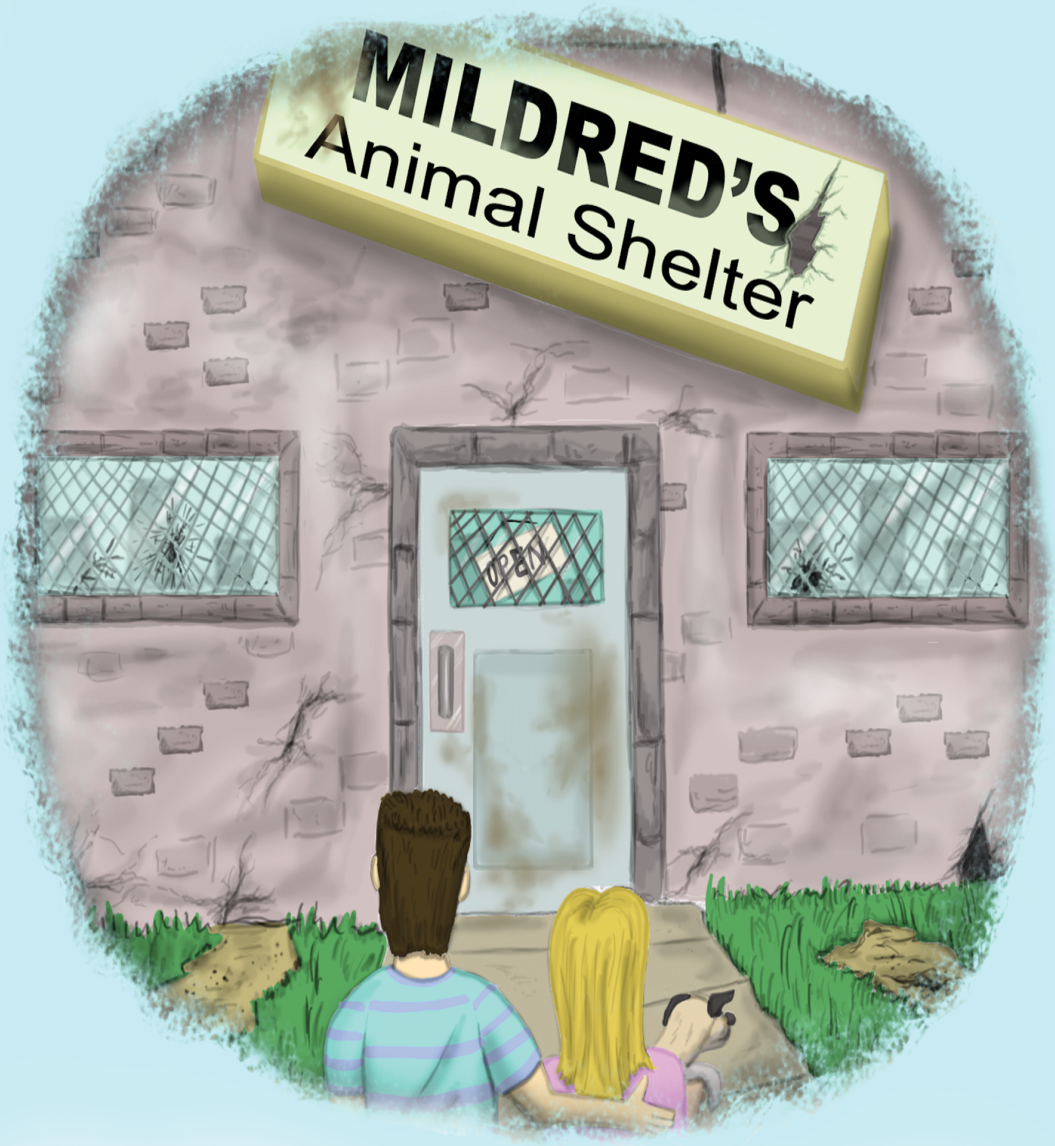
Howie was scared the day he had to leave the only home he had ever known. It was a real "tear jerker". Everyone cried...even Howie...who had never ever cried until that day.

Jerry and Debbie Cooper seemed like a nice, young couple. But, they never realized what a huge responsibility it would be to raise a puppy. They lived in a small apartment with no yard for Howie. He depended on them for walks so he could relieve himself. Sometimes Jerry and Debbie forgot this and Howie would have "accidents", which were never his fault. This made Jerry and Debbie very angry.

Added to this "housebreaking problem", Howie had way too much energy for apartment living. He needed to run and play...to chase, tumble, and roughhouse, like he had with his family at his birth home. His needs were seldom met.

Jerry and Debbie always seemed to have better things to do than walk Howie or play with him. Soon, they began to call him names like “crazy dog” or “bad dog”. Finally, to Howie’s sorrow, they called him “a big mistake”!

One rainy day Jerry and Debbie left Howie alone all day. He had “an accident” and became so anxious that he chewed one of Debbie’s favorite pair of shoes. When Jerry and Debbie returned home, they were furious.



They were so upset, in fact, they threw Howie into the car and drove him to the nearest animal shelter. It was called, "Mildred's Animal Shelter". It was a dirty, smelly and disgusting place. Jerry and Debbie wrote a big check for Mildred, which she demanded, and left Howie without even saying goodbye! For the next five years, Howie suffered a life no dog deserves.

Chapter 2

Old lady Mildred had owned the shelter for many years. People in her community thought she was kind and loving. But, to all the dogs that lived there, she was mean and horrible and the cause of all their misery. Many people gave Mildred generous donations because they thought she was helping the poor dogs. Soon her bank account grew quite large. Kind strangers were fooled into believing that Mildred was a great humanitarian...Ha!

In reality, Mildred spent as little money as possible on the poor dogs. Instead of hiring dog walkers and trainers or making a nice yard for the dogs to play in and enjoy, she left them all in cement cages, separated from the world and each other. For two years Howie was never walked, played with, hugged or loved.

No dog was ever bathed unless it was adopted, and adoptions were quite rare. You see, Mildred's only concern was keeping the shelter full. That way people mistakenly believed she was an angel for caring for so many unwanted dogs.

Howie and the other dogs waited day after day for someone to adopt them. Unfortunately for Howie, the days became months and the months became years!

During those first few years at the shelter, the only humans Howie and the other "rescued" dogs ever saw were Jose and Jaime. These two men worked every day...for very little money I might add. You know Mildred! They worked hard hosing down the cement cages, filling water bowls with fresh water and feeding the animals donated food with the word "expired" written on the bag.

Fortunately, Howie was a clever dog. You could actually see him thinking! In order not to go crazy, Howie learned two skills that helped him get through each day...through the loneliness, fear and sorrow.

First, Howie discovered his acrobatic talents. He practiced tricks for hours and hours all day long. If Howie were a human being he would be called a great athlete...a gymnast even. Jose and Jaime watched in awe as Howie performed his many tricks and flips. They laughed so much that they started looking forward to coming to work just to enjoy Howie.

When Howie became exhausted from his daily work-out, he would stretch out in his cement cage and observe the other dogs. He watched everyone and everything and became very, very smart.

One of Howie's favorite dogs to watch was Big Red, a three-year-old Shepherd mix. He had a red coat and bright golden eyes. Big Red would rise up on his hind legs, like a stallion, showing all the other dogs his splendor.

Rocky was another shelter "brother" of Howie's. He came from the streets. He was a Beagle/Pit Bull mix. He had many scars all over his body and face. No one dared to imagine what little Rocky had suffered. But, in spite of it all, Rocky was always happy, outgoing and friendly. Howie learned from him that life is better faced each day with a smile.

Oz was another of Howie's favorites. He was a Weimaraner/ Labrador mix. He was sleek, grey in color, with amazing green eyes. Every day, Oz watched Howie excercise in the cold cement cage across from his. He would look at Howie with his piercing eyes as if to say, "Howie, you are brillant!"

Coming from a dog like Oz, Howie felt proud about this. In fact, it gave him strength to live on.

There were so many dogs, sixty in all, who lived with Howie in the shelter. There were many different breeds, different sizes and different personalities. To Howie, it was fascinating to realize that no two dogs were the same.

Chapter 3

During Howie's fourth year at the shelter, a wonderful thing happened. A group of "volunteers" came to help. Mildred did not like this, but one of her most generous donors insisted that it was a good thing. Mildred couldn't stand the thought of losing this person's big donations and so she agreed.

One day a man named Sal took Howie hiking in the mountains. Another day, a man named Michael took Howie for a day at the beach. However, since Howie was always in a panic to escape, he was a handful to walk. He dragged both these men by his leash. They had to be in the right mood to deal with Howie. For this reason, Howie was not often chosen for walks or outings.

That is...until Shera came to the shelter. She was amazing. Howie had never met anyone like Shera. She was beautiful, fun, exciting and CARING! Jose and Jaime loved Shera, too. They even let her go back to the "big dog" cement cages where no one was ever allowed. She made friends with all the dogs and got to know each one by name. She brought fresh chicken to feed all her shelter friends. She would say, "I'm going to find homes for each and every one of you!"

Jose, Jaime and the dogs believed her. You see Shera was the kind of person who was true to her word. Somehow, a miracle perhaps, she began to have power over Mildred.

She took many sick dogs to the veterinarian. One day she brought the vet to the shelter (when Mildred wasn't there) and he gave all the dogs vaccinations to protect them.

Shera came every other day to the shelter. She brought fresh healthy food and treats and chewies to calm the nerves of all the dogs. Also, although some of the dogs were too afraid or difficult to walk, Shera managed to walk many others. Rocky, Big Red and Howie were three of the lucky ones to be walked each time Shera came (no easy task)!

One day, Shera brought a dog trainer named Leonard to the shelter. She had hired him to work with the most nervous and energetic dogs. She told Mildred, "These dogs can be healed and they deserve a chance!"

Mildred, of course, did not want this! She ended up in a screaming match with Leonard. She told him to get out and not to come back after he told her she was a disgrace to the human race!

Shera would not give up. She was a problem solver. She knew the dogs needed exercise, discipline and, most importantly, love from human companions.

This is when and how, "The Team" was born. It was made up of four of Shera's good friends who also loved dogs and wanted to help. They came ready to work!

Shera and "The Team" could not fix all sixty dogs at once, so they came up with a plan. They decided to concentrate on five or six dogs at a time. This was the best strategy. Calling them their "focus" dogs, "The Team" worked hard to heal them. Slowly, but surely, the "focus" dogs became calmer, happier...and adoptable.

Howie was thrilled that morning in November when Shera declared him the newest "focus" dog. He was so excited that Jose and Shera had to hold him tight as his choke collar and leash were secured.

For several weeks different members of "The Team" came to give Howie his daily walk. As he began to trust his volunteers, he started to enjoy these walks, smelling bushes, saying "hi" to many passersby and obeying commands like "stay", "no", "relax".

All the volunteers thought Howie was fun and funny. They laughed at the clever things he did. Best of all they called him "good dog", "good Howie". They kissed him, hugged him...loved him.

While Howie, Oz, and Rocky and a few others were handled by "The Team", Shera paid Leonard, the trainer, lots of money to work with the dogs who had "special needs"...without Mildred knowing. She would come early in the morning, smuggle high-maintenance dogs into her car, and drive them to her home where Leonard waited. Dogs like Big Red, Rusty and Rudy improved a lot when this big, strong, strict man worked to train and discipline them. It was remarkable to watch Leonard recreate a wild dog into a peaceful dog.

In addition to all this training, Shera and her "Team" got the word out to the community. They put posters up all over town with pictures of the shelter dogs ready to be adopted.

They advertised in many different newspapers and on the internet as well. It was from an ad on the internet that Howie's chance finally came!

Chapter 4

Their names were Tom and Myca. They had seen Howie's picture and had fallen in love with his face. Although they lived in Santa Barbara, a city ninety miles away, they wanted to come and meet this adorable Howie!

When Shera told Mildred this great news, she was not happy. "Santa Barbara? Are you crazy? It is too far away!" She said in her usual grouchy voice.

Shera would not give in. This was a chance of a lifetime for Howie. She knew this when she told Mildred, "You must not say no, Mildred. Howie has been living in a cage for so long now. He deserves this. Besides, I am sure they will give you a generous donation."

Mildred loved this idea and finally, she reluctantly agreed. It was final...Myca and Tom would come in one week to meet little Howie.

All the volunteers were thrilled when they heard the good news. They worked extra hard all week long preparing Howie for his big day.

Howie loved the special attention everyone showed him. First, Erin, Howie's most frequent volunteer, took him to the pet store and bought him a special halter. This made Howie easier to walk. "The Team" worked on commands like "stay", "sit", "slow down", "relax", constantly! They exercised him until he dropped. Everyone gave him lots of love.

That's not all this group of tireless volunteers did that week. They continued to work just as hard with all the other "focus" dogs as well. They knew it would not be long before these other dogs got their chances, too.

On a bright and sunny Saturday morning, Shera arrived at "Mildred's Animal Shelter" super early. She brought Howie out of his cage and, with the help of Jose, lifted him into a big sink. It was Howie's first bath, and he really enjoyed it! He felt happy and proud when everyone, including Mildred, told him how great he smelled and how handsome he looked.

Myca and Tom arrived at the shelter at12:00 noon. Mildred greeted them very kindly pretending to be the dog lover she wasn't. Then the big moment came. Howie and Shera walked through the door. For Howie, Myca and Tom it seemed to be love at first sight. Howie was lovely to Tom and Myca and they were lovely to him.

Then came the words, "We want Howie!" Shera cried, Jose and Jaime high fived and Mildred scurried around trying to find the necessary papers for Tom and Myca to sign. Howie was going to Santa Barbara...To a wonderful home...To a wonderful life!

But Mildred had one final rule. "I need to see where Howie will be living. I want to make sure he'll be safe and happy in his new home." What a joke!

And so, Tom and Myca said their tearful goodbyes. Shera promised to bring Howie to Santa Barbara (along with creepy Mildred) in a few days. Can you believe it?

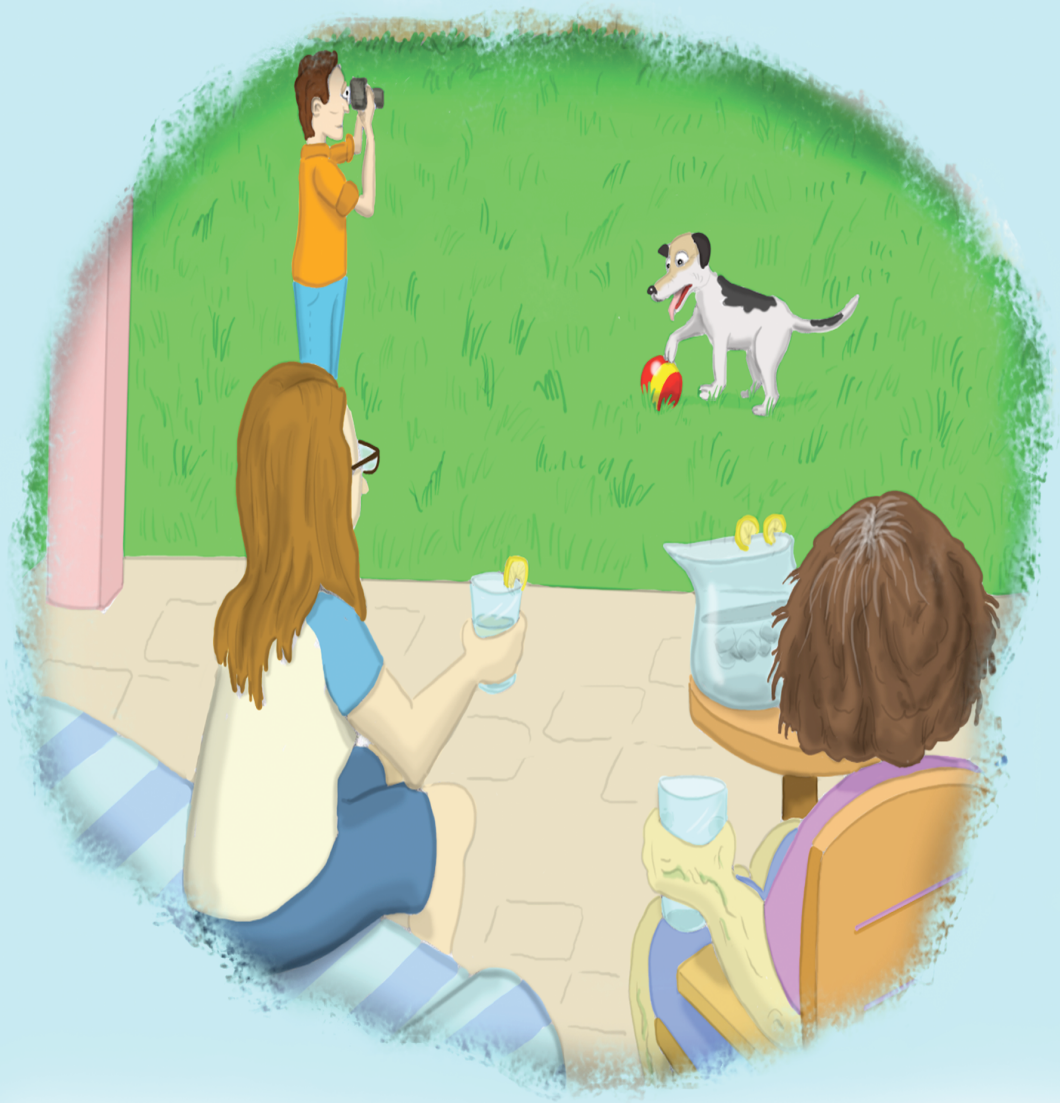
The news spread fast among the volunteers and all of Howie's shelter pals, and, as if on a role, Aspen, Big Red and Oz all found homes within a week of Howie's big break.

Chapter 5

Finally, the day of departure arrived. "The Team" was all there. They gave Howie a big send off. There were lots of going away gifts, including a beautiful fleece bed, a new ball, a stuffed toy and some delicious chewy bones.

Shera arrived in her Rolls Royce luxury car looking like a movie star. Then, the volunteers loaded Howie's bed and gifts onto the back seat. Erin, Howie's most loyal volunteer, climbed into the back of the car with Howie, while Mildred climbed onto the front seat next to Shera. As the car pulled away from the shelter, Howie took one last look and then settled down for the long ride on his new cozy bed.

Tom and Myca were so joyous when the Rolls Royce pulled up in front of their home. They took lots of photographs as Howie and his fellow travelers exited the car. You would swear that Howie had a big smile on his face when Myca ran up to greet him!



They all took a tour of Howie's new digs. It was a really pretty house. Howie loved his big back yard. There was a couch on the patio where Tom said Howie could sun bathe. He found his food and water bowls in a special spot in the kitchen. It was obvious...Howie was going to be very happy with Tom and Myca...and very much loved!

Shera and Erin shed tears of happiness and sorrow when it was time to say goodbye. Mildred was too busy collecting a big donation from Tom and Myca to become emotional over Howie. She barely patted him on the head as if she hardly knew him or cared, which of course, was the truth.

Howie stood with Myca and Tom and watched the luxury car as it disappeared from view. Then, with his new red collar and leash secured, Howie and his new family went on their first walk of many they would experience together...as the days became weeks, the weeks became months and the months became years.

The End

P.S. So why is Howie a hero?

Well, he never gave in to his sorrow, he never gave in to his fear and he never turned his anger onto anyone. Howie hung in there, finding the good in every day, even though he existed for so long in a cage.

This, to me, is heroic...don't you agree?

HOWIE was a book that needed to be written...for many reasons! Although the events depicted in this story occurred in 2002, the messages remain the same.

First the book is a plea to the Departments of Animal Regulations in every city in this country to do their jobs. It is imperative to make sure all those who run animal shelters follow the law, making certain the health of all animals housed in them is the number one priority.

Second, the book is a "thank you" to all the volunteers who give countless hours and much energy helping the unfortunate animals living in cages while waiting for homes.

Third, it is a "thank you" to the many people who adopt animals from our shelters, committing themselves to these deserving, yet sometimes difficult beings.

Fourth, this book is my salute to my friend and warrior spirit,
Shera Danese Falk, who has given and continues to give much love, time, energy and much money helping deserted, rejected and wounded animals get a second chance at life.

Last but not least, I want to thank Howie, whose life of patience, bravery, and fortitude is a role model for us all.

I am a native Californian who has been a school teacher, a massage therapist and now an author. I have written many children's books throughout the years but it was not until I met Mike Goldstein, my fantastic illustrator, that the true meanings and feelings of my books have, finally, been captured!

Myca and Howie

Tom & Howie