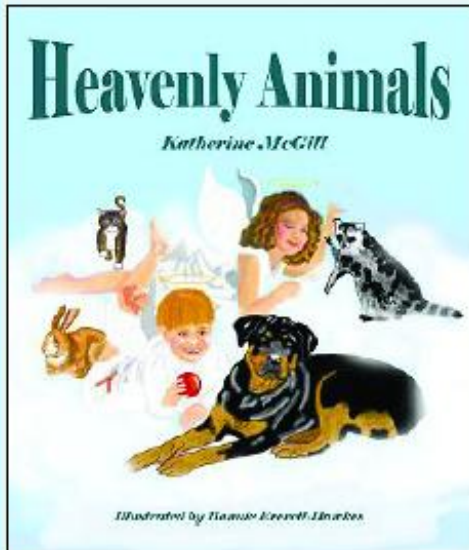


Book Review of Heavenly Animals

Author, Katherine McGill

BY E.M. FAY



Anyone who has ever lost a beloved animal friend has probably asked at one time or another: "Will I ever be with this dear friend again? Does my friend have a soul? Can we meet in the afterlife?" It does not matter if the animal friend was a "traditional" companion such as a dog or cat, a "farm" animal kept as a companion animal, or a wild animal that was adopted because s/he could not fend for herself – any animal can inspire deep feelings of love and affection in the human heart, which makes their loss nearly unbearable.

A beguiling possibility as to the continued existence of our animal friends is offered in a charming book, *Heavenly Animals*, written by an experienced wildlife rehabilitator and educator, Katherine McGill.

Katherine told us: "I never intended to write a children's book. This story was actually based on a dream that awoke me one night and I couldn't *not* write it."

In the Introduction, we learn that McGill was blessed with family members, both human and otherwise, who inspired her from childhood onwards to respect the lives of every living being. She recognizes the individual personalities that each animal possesses, and hopes to engender in children of all ages an appreciation for the value of every species.

Aware that contemporary society

not only discourages any belief in animals having emotions – in spite of scientific research that demonstrates animals' capacity to feel love, joy, grief, and other feelings just as humans do – McGill deplores the human "Rule" that dictates that we should not love animals "too much." In the story, breaking this wrong-headed Rule is a virtue recognized by Mindy and Max, two twelve-year-old angels who, when they were alive on Earth, had not seen eye-to-eye on how to treat animals. Max was naughty with a slingshot from time to time, but his sister Mindy more than made up for it with her compassion for all of God's creatures.

Now in Heaven, Mindy has been rewarded for her kindness by being put in charge of the Souls of Animals Department. Despite its SAD acronym, it's a happy place, where Mindy, Max, and other angels keep track of all the kind human actions towards animals on Earth. Not only do humans get heavenly credit for their good deeds, but the animals are assigned souls, too – a circumstance that seems only fair to many of us who have lost an animal friend.

McGill shows no favoritism to members of the animal kingdom. Although she herself mourns the loss of particular friends – her horse, Princeton, and a rescued raccoon, Zorra, among others – she values all animals equally, and, like the young protagonists of *Heavenly Animals*, hopes earnestly that more people will break The Rule at every opportunity. There can be no such thing as loving an animal "too much," no matter what some may think.

McGill adds: "We do need to ask ourselves today: 'What if...?' What if our actions towards all creatures are a test; if they really do matter more than we've been led to believe by other humans?' When your heart aches for the suffering of a 'mere nuisance animal,' how can one not question what we humans presume to know, or how we treat these animals every day? When that animal loves you back, as any animal can, your eyes and heart finally open."

I highly recommend this as an excellent addition to classroom bookshelves, either for youngsters to read themselves or for teachers to read aloud. The pictures, by Bonnie Everett-Hawkes are colorful and winsome. I especially liked clever details such as the angels' haloes hanging on hooks in their offices, and various animals being monitored on the angels' computers.

Although the moral of the story is inherent in the narrative, the frank Epilogue is instructive for adults. Most people do not realize the extent to which government agencies and policies harm wildlife, often, shamefully, under the guise of "conservation." McGill states clearly the need for public awareness of the unjust devaluation and maligning of certain species by government entities. Instead of allowing state agencies to treat wildlife as soulless "resources" to manipulate and profit from, we should insist that they recognize every individual's right to live its life, and never deny an animal's right to sanctuary. All animals are vital to a healthy eco-system, but if we don't take action to protect them, we cannot expect entrenched bureaucracies with self-serving agendas to care about them. As McGill says, "All Animals Matter!"

Heavenly Animals is available through most major retail outlets, or you may order a personal, signed copy from the author at www.SunChaserWildlife.com Discount packages are available for fund-raising events.

[Besides her work as an educator and rehabilitator, **Katherine McGill** is a founder of the **National Urban Wildlife Coalition**, an organization that unites wildlife advocates in seeking 21st century reform of our state wildlife management system. www.Uswildlife.us. She is also the State Outreach and Wildlife Affairs officer for the **League of Humane Voters**. www.lohv.org]