

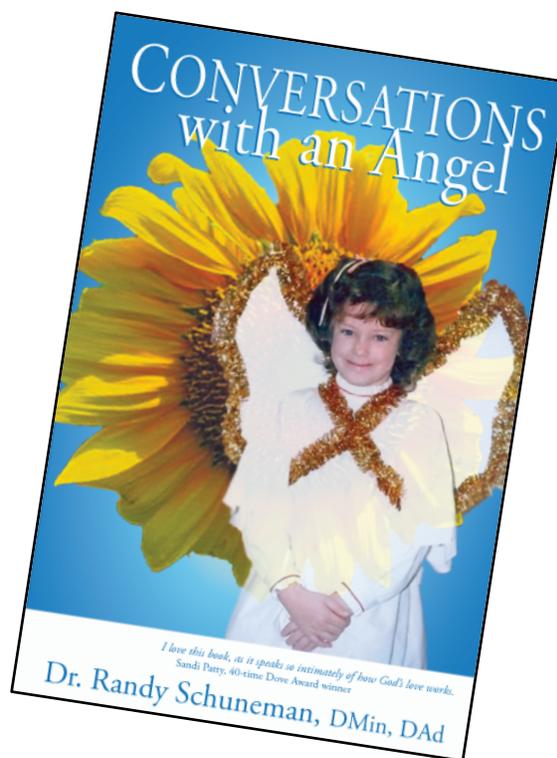
# WAYNE AND FIG NEWT-ON

*a Conversations with an Angel “web extra”*

by **Randy Schuneman**

Most of the time, the pets around our house were predictable choices: cats, dogs and parakeets, things like that. However, when Jennie was in grade school, she decided she wanted a turtle. At first, I did not think this was a bad choice. I remember growing up with those green-and-yellow striped little turtles that we had at home and at school. Of course, keeping one of these turtles meant purchasing a terrarium and a few other pieces of equipment. How much could that cost?

I probably tried to talk Jennie out of her choice, but I know I took her to a local pet shop and tried to purchase a turtle for my daughter. Did you know that those little turtles are now illegal to own unless it is by a school? Neither did I. Did you know that the smallest turtle that is legal to



purchase is at least four inches long? Neither did I. Do you know how much a four-inch long turtle plus a terrarium plus food plus “toys” for the terrarium plus all the other “necessities” that go with the purchase costs over \$100? Neither did I.

I lovingly, but firmly told Jennie that turtles were just too expensive for a pet. We could not afford that much money for a pet when we already had cats and a parakeet. Surely, the issue had been put to rest. The decision to not buy a turtle was a “no-brainer,” right? Jennie was very good about letting the issue drop until ...

One day, Jennie came home from school excited about learning that the very same pet shop where we had searched for turtles now had a special sale price on...wait for it...newts. You could purchase three newts for \$8. Jennie said, “They are only \$8. You said we could not buy a turtle because it cost \$100 with all the supplies. Daddy, this is only \$8 and you get three of them. Let’s go.”

I only had one problem...what is a newt? All I knew was that cartoon witches used the “eye of the newt” as a part of every poison potion they ever stirred up. Sleeping Beauty--eye of newt. The red in Snow White’s apple—eye of newt. Cinderella...okay, that had more to do with her shoes. Anyway, you get my point, right? The eyeball of a newt was apparently the most poisonous thing on the planet. Why would I bring a “ticking time bomb” into my home?

Reluctantly, I got in the car with Jennie and drove to the pet shop. Jennie asked the salesperson, “Do you have any of those 3 for \$8 newts left?” The salesperson affirmed that they were well-stocked with newts. I did not know what I was looking for, so both Jennie and I followed the lady back to the “newt section” of the pet shop.

There they were...tiny, slimy, lizard-like creatures no bigger than a salamander (newts and salamanders are cousins). The newts had red underbellies and long tails for a creature that small. Jennie decided we needed three of them. She named them *Wayne Newt-on*, *Fig Newt-on* and *Isaac Newt-on*. I felt good about our purchase. I mean, it was only \$8. I had saved \$92 while making my daughter happy.

Unfortunately, I asked the simple question, “What will we need to take care of these newts?”

The list began to grow...an enclosed terrarium with a light...plants and “toys” to make the newt feel as if he or she was in a tropical paradise...special food...special treatment for the water and...a heater to keep the water and atmosphere moist and warm. Not being a newt expert, my thought was the “bigger, the better” heater would be the best investment. I bought the largest heater they had. The total purchase came to...wait for it...\$100.

When we got home, the “set up” seemed quite simple...place the sand at the bottom of the terrarium, add the plants and toys, cover the

bottom of the tank with about two inches of water, turn on the heater and add three newts. What could possibly go wrong?

Shortly after we got everything in place, Jennie came running downstairs from her room. She said, “Daddy, you have to come quickly. The newts are acting funny. They are clinging to the side of the bowl and breathing very hard.”

Sure enough, I discovered all three newts clinging to the side of the terrarium in breathing distress. What does a healthy newt look like? I don’t know. Maybe they are supposed to cling like that. I knew I had added enough water and plants. We would wait until morning to see if there was any change. There was. Wayne Newt-on had passed in the night. I knew he was not well when I saw him lying motionless on the bottom of the terrarium. He had turned completely white.

So that the other newts would not notice Wayne’s absence, I gave the old boy a “burial at sea” by flushing him down the toilet. I immediately got the pet shop on the phone and demanded my money back. What were they doing selling such old newts that would die in one day? Did you know you can only *exchange* newts? Or that you can only exchange a newt if you still have the “carcass?” Since I could not get my money back, I demanded another newt. The lady at the store was gracious enough to make this exchange without the body of the deceased newt.

I picked up another newt and gave him the name of Wayne Newt-on so the other two little friends would not realize what had happened. The other two newts were still clinging and breathing hard, but maybe that is what a normal newt does. I believed that theory until I woke up to find all three newts were dead. I wiped Jennie's tears away and sent her off to school.

Now, I was really upset. Not only had my \$8 investment ended up being over \$100, but now I had the added inconvenience of replacing the creepy things every day. When I got to the pet shop, I started letting the salesperson know that I could not believe how hard keeping a newt alive truly was. Did they get a bad batch or something?

The woman said, "This is very unusual. Newts are one of the easiest pet to keep alive. They live for a long time and take very little maintenance. Tell me again what you bought when you bought the newts."

I proceeded to show the lady the terrarium that I purchased...the food...the plants and toys...and the heater.

She said, "You bought this terrarium with that heater?"

I answered, "Yes."

She continued, "How much water did you put in the tank?"

"I put in about an inch or two of water? Why?" I responded.

Then she recognized the cause of the plague that had come upon our home. She laughed and said, "Sir, if you put that little water in the

tank with that large of a heater...wait for it...you “fried” the newts. It was like putting them in a boiling pot of water.”

I did not want to admit to Jennie that I had “murdered” her little friends, so I bought a smaller heater and ...three more newts. We had much better luck with this new group. It had only cost me \$108 and three trips to the pet store.

The remainder of the “season of newts” went well except for the morning Jennie started counting her newts to make sure they were all present. By this time, we had four newts (don’t ask). There were only three to be found. The tank was kept on top of Jennie’s dresser which happened to have accumulated quite a bit of dust. We began our “detective” work and quickly found a trail from the top of the enclosed tank, down to the top of the dresser with “tail prints” leading to the edge of the dresser. If he had survived the tremendous fall to the floor, surely the “escapee” had to be in the room somewhere.

When all else fails, pray. Jennie, Bonnie and I knelt down beside Jennie’s bed and began to pray for God’s help to find our missing friend. When we opened our eyes, there he was. He had made it all the way over to the floor fan and was nestled into the dust at the bottom of the fan. God had answered our prayers. The little fellow was even easy to catch. In fact, when Bonnie reached down to pick him up, he did not move at all. He

wasn't even three-dimensional any more. He still had length and width, but he had no height. He was flatter than a flitter.

Bonnie said, "Maybe he just needs a little water." She took the crispy critter to the restroom, turned the faucet on and tried to revive him like a sponge. Did that go well for us? Not so much. It was not a far journey for this lizard-y thing to meet His Maker. One more "burial at sea."

The lesson to be learned is very clear---there is nothing Newt under the Sun."