

## **Angels in the Autumn Clouds**

By Kelley Delano

My six-year-old Riley and I love to play a game we call “Cloud Watching.”

Not surprisingly, it involves doing nothing but sitting comfortably and using one’s imagination to see shapes and pictures in the clouds. It’s a game we’ve played often, and I look at it as an excellent way for her to exercise that wonderful imagination she has.

One cool, breezy evening last fall, we were playing our game again. The wind, being very high, stretched the clouds across the sky in long, feathery wisps, backlit by the setting sun.

Suddenly, my little girl pointed and squealed “Mom, look! An angel!”

Sure enough, I could see it too. Her robes billowed out behind her and her wings seemed to curve around her shoulders. “She’s cold,” Riley said. “She’s wrapping her wings around her to keep warm.” I laughed, delighted at her creativity.

“Look, there’s another one,” she said. “And another...and one over there...” Spinning in dizzy circles, we could see an angel in almost every cloud in the sky. “Can’t you see anything else?” I asked, hoping to spur her imagination on. “Nope,” she said, “just angels.” And after a few minutes of searching, I had to admit that was all I could find too. Large angels, small angels, angels kneeling and even a child angel seated on a tricycle. At last count, we had spotted over 15 angels.

If it had been any other day, that game would have been nothing more than a pleasant memory for me.

It would have been added to the thousands of other scenes I have stored in my head, all wonderful times and events I’ve shared with my children over the years. The exact date of that evening, I never could have recalled.

As we gathered around the television the next day in horror, that little game was the furthest thing from my mind. We watched, dumbstruck, as those giant buildings crashed to the ground and the people below ran for their lives. We simply couldn’t believe it was happening.

My son, who was 8, was peppering me with questions, trying to understand.

He wanted to know how many people worked in the World Trade Center, and if they all got out. I told him there were thousands of people, and I thought a lot of them would

still be in there. Then he wanted to know if I thought that any of them would still be alive under the rubble. I said I didn't know, but we could hope.

Riley, who had been unusually quiet up until now, said simply, "It doesn't matter."

Confused, I looked at her and asked "What doesn't matter, honey?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "It doesn't matter if they're dead or not," she said. I was shocked to hear something that seemed so heartless come out of my little girl's mouth. This was the child that insisted any bugs found in the house were released safely outside. "Why doesn't it matter, Ry?" I asked.

She rolled her eyes at me and spoke a little slowly, as if I were the child instead of her. "That's why there were so many angels in the sky last night," she said. "They came to help all those people." And with that, she left the room to go play, comforted by her own simple thoughts.

Her words floored me. I hadn't given that game another thought until that very moment. All those angels...

The logical, rational part of my brain told me I was being silly and sentimental, grasping for anything to stop my heart from aching for all those New Yorkers.

'Get a grip,' I told myself. 'You're a grown woman.' But that little spot that I keep hidden, the place where I still believe in miracles and magic, told me not to dismiss it so quickly.

Why couldn't we find anything but angels the night before? Where were the elephants, boats and bunnies we always found? Not even Riley's favorite, a cotton ball, was there. Why?

Omen or coincidence? Most would dismiss it; some would cling to it. I'm still on the fence, leaning one way or the other, depending on my mood. But Riley just chugs on forward, unwavering, convinced the angels came for those people.

Men can erect buildings, and men can knock them down. But in the chaos and uncertainty of today's world, sometimes the simplest of notions can give you the greatest peace of mind. I wish for us all the faith of a child.