**Sally Turtle**

**Dawn Nicoli**

Life was great. I grew up in a small lake, surrounded by pampas grass, cactus flowers and eucalyptus trees.

As far back as I can remember, my mother led me down the dirt bank where I dropped into the cool waters and swam all day long, bobbing up and down, and snacking on a variety of vegetation.

Some days I would explore by diving deep down among the pretty colored fish. At first they were afraid of me but then we all got the rhythm of swimming together.

My shell grew big and strong and sometimes the little lizards would catch a ride on my back from one side of the lake to the other.

When I got tired i would come up on the side of the bank where the grass was and bask in the sun with the geese.

Yes, life was great. I had a lot of friends. I was always happy. It seemed that my happiness radiated out of me like rays of the sun. All the other animals were attracted to me and stayed close to me so they would be happy too.

One day everything changed. My life was never the same again.

I was nibbling on some weeds by the side of the road when all at once i felt the weightlessness of my shell as a young boy lifted me into the air.

I tucked my head and arms inside like my mother showed me but the next thing I knew I was inside of a cardboard box with no light from the sun at all. Then I heard the roar of a motor and felt the motion of going somewhere faster than I ever have before.

The boy had a sister and when they finally pulled me out of the box, I was in their home. They played with me for a while but then put me back in the box and slid me under the bed. Hours turned into days and days into weeks before they remembered I lived part time in the water.

The bathtub they let me swim in was nothing compared to my big, beautiful lake and I began to get very sad and lonely. I hardly ever opened my eyes anymore. There was nothing to see. I had no purpose, nothing to be happy about. Just when I thought things couldn’t get worse, their mother came into the room one day and said, “Get that smelly turtle out of here!”

They loaded me back into the roaring vehicle and when I was unloaded and finally let out of the box, I was in a cage with lots of barking and mewing all around me. I shut my eyes again and tried to dream about my life back in the lake with the fish.

Weeks turned into months and I had fallen into despair. I saw no way out of this life and back to my old life. Surely this is how I would spend the last of my time here. I was no longer happy and rays of sunshine did not surround me. I kept my eyes closed most of the time.

The cats and dogs would come and go but no one seemed to want a turtle.

One night I had a dream. My mother came to me and said, “Sally, don’t you realize that all that light came from inside of you, not from the sun. You were always so happy that the rays of light flowed from you not the other way around.

I woke up and realized I had to find a way to be happy no matter what kind of place I found myself in.

And wouldn’t you know it, it was that very day that Natalie walked into my life. I could feel the light radiating from her heart as she picked me up and cuddled my shell.

I heard her say that I was just perfect, exactly what she was looking for and that she had the perfect home for me.

Later that day, still inside my box, I heard the trickle of waterfalls and birds singing.

Natalie took me out and placed me into the most beautiful little pond that seemed to be made especially for me. Hummingbirds flew all around and I could smell sweet jasmine in the air.

The next couple of days I felt like I was in paradise. There were rocks to climb on and then to launch off of as I dove endlessly under the waterfalls.

There was even a little bridge and one day I was brave enough to swim under it. I held my breath and dove under but there was no exit from the other side, just a wall. I kept exploring and was amazed when I saw about 10 baby koi fish just floating in a quagmire, too afraid to venture out. As I tried to coax them out I realized they were protecting 3 baby turtles that were resting on a rock but didn’t know how to swim back to the main pond.

When they saw me, I think they thought I was their mother and the turtles jumped on my back.

I spent the next few days teaching them how to swim back and forth and get on and off of the rocks. One by one, the fish started to venture out also and pretty soon we had a little family.

I felt my purpose return to me. I had helped restore safety and happiness to the creatures of this little pond.

My rays of sunshine beamed out all around me and surrounded my new little family.

I knew now that the light inside myself is never ending. It will be with me forever.