

A Cub Scout is Kind

By Joanne Osmond

Based on a true story from Alyson Antonio

Joe wasn't sure he wanted to go to school. Sometimes he had a hard time saying exactly what he wanted to say. His words came out the wrong way and the kids in his class laughed. He laughed too but he didn't laugh because he was happy. Sometimes he would trip and act silly so everyone would laugh. But that didn't make him happy either. Most of the time he just sat quietly at his desk and wished he could go home.

"Why do I have to go to school anyway," Joe thought. "I could go to school at home. Mom can teach me just as well as the teacher. She knows as much about reading and writing and math and science and history as the teacher does. I could study on the computer. No one laughs at me at home or talks about me behind my back." Then he thought about his brother. Sometimes his brother, Noah, wasn't nice to him and called him names, but his Mom always told him to stop. She listened to Joe. Besides with his brother it was different. He made Joe feel mad, not sad. "I wish I didn't have to go to school, then I wouldn't feel so sad."

That wasn't exactly true either. Today he would be sad at home too. His best friend died last week, but no one cared at school. It was hard to imagine going home with no Chubby to greet him. He wouldn't be able to pet his soft fur and rock him in his arm while he watched TV. Chubby was the best guinea pig ever and Joe missed him. His brother had a guinea pig and a cat but that was different. Noah's pets seemed to understand that Joe missed his guinea pig and he guessed that they missed Chubby too.

As a tear started down Joe's face, Noah walked into his classroom. "Joe, remember Mom is picking us up from school to go to a doctor's appointment then to the pet store. Are you ready to go?"

Joe had forgotten they were going to stop at the pet store to pick out a new guinea pig. It made him feel sad again because he didn't think anyone could replace Chubby. He felt better as Noah helped him put his books in his backpack. Noah took an assignment sheet from the teacher and put it in the pack. When they received a text from their Mom, they were ready to go.

The boys loved going to the pet store. There were fish in every color and small cages with hamsters and guinea pigs. There were exotic animals, like snakes and spiders. It was fun to walk down the aisles and look at the cool toy for pets; balls, bells, ropes, squeeze toys, chew toys, and toys in all sorts of funny shapes and sizes. They looked at the hamster habitats in all different colors with tubes, and wheels, and balls. They were various sizes and themes. Some looked like space ships and other like farms. There was even a game called Hamster Habitat. Noah had a hamster once, but the pet would escape and he had a hard time keeping track of him.

"I never lost Chubby," Joe said quietly. He had little money in his pocket. "Maybe I should buy something for my new guinea pig." Their guinea pigs lived in a very big 'house' compared to the hamster habitats and it wasn't really a cage. They didn't play with all of the fun toys that the hamster did, but they played with each other and loved playing with the boys.

Noah turned the corner in front of Joe and stopped. "Hey, look at this black cat." Noah pointed to a long hair very black cat that should have been in a Halloween movie. "Wouldn't he look great next to our white cat? I wonder if their babies would look like zebras."

Joe thought that would be funny. But, he didn't think the cat would want to be held like Chubby did. His fur looked soft, but would the cat sit still and let him rub his back?

There were cute kittens and puppies, but what Joe wanted was a guinea pig. He finally walked over to the cages where the guinea pigs were playing. There were beige fuzzy ones, brown and white striped ones, black and brown ones, and even white ones. None of them seemed to be the right fit.

"You know," Noah said over his shoulder, "Guinea pigs aren't even related to pigs and they aren't from Guinea. They are rodents like rats!"

Joe didn't like it when Noah called Chubby a rat. It wasn't nice!

"Guinea pigs originally came from the Andes Mountains in South America where they have been pets for over 7000 years," explained the sales man with a green tunic on. The tunic had a picture of a dog and the name of the store so Joe figured he knew what he was talking about.

The man with the green shirt continued, "Guinea pigs may not be in the same family as the rat. Scientist don't agree on exactly who they are related to. Most guinea pigs live for about five years, but some live to be ten. How old was your guineas pig?" he asked Joe.

Joe thought a few minutes and shook his head. "I don't remember, I have always had him."

"Well, guinea pigs grow to be about 10 inches long and 2-3 pounds. They rarely bite, even when stressed. They like people and other guinea pigs. Do you have other guinea pigs at home?"

The boys nodded and watched the friendly guinea pigs walk around their cage like they were parading for them.

"They have a slightly more demanding diet than other small pets and need a fresh supply of hay and veggies as well as lots of vitamin C. They need more space and attention than hamsters, but they make an awesome pet. They live longer, are awake during the day, don't disappear on you when they escape from their habitat, and they love the attention you give to them. Do you want to see my favorite guinea pig?" the man asked.

Joe shook his head "Yes," as he walked to the back of the store. The man explained that he loved the guinea pig because he was the little engine that could.

Joe looked confused. "How can he be a little engine?"

"This guinea pig was only born with three legs, but he can do everything the others guinea pigs can do. He had the right attitude to do whatever he had to do to keep up with the other guinea pigs. What came easy to his fellow animals was hard for him. He was so determined he just kept trying until he could do what they did. He really is the little engine that could."

Joe held the little guinea pig and rubbed its back. He remembered what it felt like when he had surgery on his foot and he had to wear a cast and use crutches. It was hard to walk and he got very tired at first, then he got better and better at walking until he could run again.

"I want to take this guinea pig home and care for him. I love him." Joe announced, as he held the little follow in his arms.

The sales man looked down at his little guinea pig and smiled. Joe missed the tears in the older man's eyes as Joe carefully placed his new best friend in a box to carry him to his new home.

“I think I will name him Nubby,” Joe announced.

As they checked out all of the store employees came over to say goodbye to Nubby. They thanked Joe for taking good care of their little engine that could.

As Joe sat in the car on the way home, he felt so good inside. He was excited that he had someone special to take care of, someone who would listen to him, and not say anything mean to him. “I can do good things and I don’t need to worry about others laughing at me. I can be an engine that could.”

Joe looked at his brother who sat quietly next to him petting Nubby. Joe smiled. He thought, “Noah feels different, too. He hasn’t called me a name or said anything mean to me since I told the man at the pet store that I wanted to adopt Nubby.”

After they arrived home, the boys introduced Nubby to Noah’s pets. Their Mom took pictures and posted a picture of Nubby and the boys on Facebook. She also sent a picture of Joe and Nubby to his teacher who posted it on the smart board in his classroom.

Joe frowned, “The kids at school are going to laugh at me”

The next day when Joe arrived at school, the kids in his class didn’t laugh. In fact they were very excited to meet Nubby and play with him. They wanted to hear about everything his special new friend could do and how Nubby overcame his challenges.

As Joe sat quietly at his desk, he thought “My class isn’t so bad after all. I can bring my new best friend to school with me!” then, he didn’t feel sad at all.

The Scout Law

A Scout is **Trustworthy**.

A Scout is **Loyal**.

A Scout is **Helpful**.

A Scout is **Friendly**.

A Scout is **Courteous**.

A Scout is **Kind**.

A Scout is **Obedient**.

A Scout is **Cheerful**.

A Scout is **Thrifty**.

A Scout is **Brave**.

A Scout is **Clean**.

A Scout is **Reverent**.