



by Linda Billo

I grew up in the fifties watching George Reeves on television in *The Adventures of Superman*. I remember when I had such a hard time at school and in life and got picked on almost daily. I was an easy target because I was shy. That's why I always looked forward to watching *Superman*. That show helped me get through the week. I had fun pretending to live in Metropolis. There the hero always won, and it cheered me up when I was down.

Superman symbolizes the ultimate hero. He is all that is good, and fair play is what he's all about. He has all the power and strength he needs to challenge authority, but we knew he never would. He has fans of all ages, no matter how young or how old.

Superman's secret identity, Clark Kent, symbolizes "everyman" -- Joe Average -- the father figure. Lois Lane is sweet, innocent and motherly. Jimmy Olsen is like everyone's brother. He's not dumb, just wonderfully naive; he means well and his heart's in the right place. Perry White is like the grandfather whose bark is worse than his bite. All of them are like members of our own family.

It's always sad when the wonderful actors and actresses die before their time. Some when they are the happiest and at the height of their careers. It is especially sad when they die in a tragic way. James Dean was 24, Marilyn Monroe was 36, Elvis Presley was 42, Judy Garland was 47, and George Reeves was 45. The list could go on and on. I wish they could have all lived to be 100. I wish they could have lived forever. But wishes do no good. They are gone and will never return. And yet they will forever remain alive because of all they left behind in their performances on television and in the movies. Maybe they were destined to be forever young in our minds, to remind us all of a happier time.

I also remember the great comedians of yesteryear -- Laurel & Hardy, the Three Stooges, and the great W.C. Fields. I think it's wonderful how the love of nostalgia keeps growing over the years. There is a certain charm in those originals which can never be recreated. There can never be another *Wizard of Oz* like Judy Garland's or another *Superman* like George Reeves'. The classics keep the inner child in all of us alive.

Now and then, when I get criticized and put on the defensive, or it seems like everything I do is wrong, my imagination soars. And when I read one of the Reader Profile questions about imaginary episodes (of *The Adventures of Superman*) in an earlier issue of *The Adventures Continue* it allowed me to once again reach into my imagination to produce a story of strength and courage. I was delighted and honored when a brief outline of that story was published in *The Adventures Continue* #10. I was even more delighted when Jim asked me to expand on the story for this issue. "The Birthday Letter" and "Around The World With Superman" influenced my writing, yet my story has a surprise twist at the end, and the names of the little girl and her aunt have a special significance to me. In grade school, when I was six, my very first friend's name was Dawn. My favorite uncle's last name was Shannon, and a wonderful aunt was named Norma. My uncle died in 1973, my aunt died in 1979, and the last time I saw Dawn after my folks and I moved away was in 1958 when we were only eight years old. I'll never

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forget them, though, for they, like those great stars of yesterday, will be in my heart forever. I'm dedicating this story to the cast and crew of *The Adventures of Superman*, to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, to the inner child and hero in all of us, to Christopher Reeve, and especially to George Reeves, the man who continues to touch that inner child and make us smile.

And now, to borrow a famous opening line . . .

Once upon a time there was the battle of all battles. A battle between Superman and the most dangerous monster who ever existed. The man of steel was determined to save Earth from total destruction even if it meant giving his own life to protect his adopted home. Of course, Superman did indeed defeat his opponent.

"Golly, Miss Lane, I can't get over the way Superman saved the whole world."

"He sure did, Jimmy. Thank goodness we have him to protect us."

"Jeepers, Mr. Kent, isn't this a happy day for all of us?"

"Well, Jimmy, nobody could be happier than I that Superman won the battle. But you know how Superman always stresses the fact that it's Earth that gives him his special powers."

"Oh, yes sir, but gee whiz, Superman's just being modest. I'm glad he's with us now here in Metropolis, aren't you, Miss Lane?"

"You can say that again, Jimmy"

Later, Lois and Jimmy come into Perry White's office and listen to him talk about the day's headlines.

"I'm proud of your story on Superman's great victory, but after everyone has calmed down from all this excitement, I'd like to see a good human interest story on the front page of the *Daily Planet*. As you know, Superman will be visiting the children's ward of the hospital this weekend. Clark is getting ready to go out of town on a special assignment, so I'm sending you two over there to cover the event."

"Right, Chief."

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"Olsen, I've warned you positively for the last time! If you ever call me Chief again, you're fired!"

"Gosh, I'm sorry, Mr. White . . . jeepers!"

The weekend came fast, and Lois and Jimmy went to the children's ward at the hospital to talk to all the young patients. Meanwhile, in a home nearby, a man and woman were having a very intense conversation.

"Eric, I'm not going to stand by and let you hurt Dawn anymore. I'm divorcing you."

"Have you lost your mind, Norma?"

"Not by a long shot, Eric. That little girl wants to get close to you but you won't even look at her unless you want to humiliate her. Can't you understand how much she's hurting inside ever since she saw her mom and dad die in that car crash? "

"Put a lid on it, Norma. You were the one who wanted to take her in -- and for what? You always wanted a kid. Well look what we ended up with, an eight-year-old girl who doesn't even care whether she lives or not and is afraid of her own shadow. But then that's what you can expect from girls. They're too weak and fragile to do anything important. Heck, they're not worth anything."

"How can you say such cruel things, Eric? Dawn is your own niece, your own brother's daughter, and I love her as much as if she were my own daughter. How can you treat her this way?"

"So what, Norma? What I'd like to know is why the kid loves Superman so much. She's always reading those Superman magazines when she should be trying to walk and make herself useful for a change."

"I'll tell you why, Eric. When little girls are ignored, rejected and ridiculed by a role model at home, they look for one elsewhere, and I can't think of a better hero for Dawn to choose than Superman. By the way, I'm taking her to the hospital now to find out what the doctors think about her latest medical tests. Superman will be there visiting the children and I want

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Dawn to be able to see him. Eric, you're always obsessed with this macho image of yourself that you'll never understand why girls need heroes too."

At the hospital Norma was talking to some doctors when Lois and Jimmy noticed the little girl in the wheelchair. It wasn't hard to see that the little girl looked sad, but started to smile when she looked at a magazine on the table nearby. Then they noticed that the young woman who was talking to the doctors started to cry. Lois and Jimmy walked over to help her in some way. They saw that the magazine the girl was reading was about Superman.

"I'm Lois Lane and this is Jimmy Olsen. We're reporters for the *Daily Planet* and are doing a story on Superman's visit with the children today. We noticed you're upset. Is there anything we can do for you?"

"I'm so glad to meet you. Thank you for caring about me. My name is Norma Shannon and this is my niece, Dawn. I'm afraid it's a sad story. A year ago my brother-in-law and sister-in-law were killed in a terrible car crash. They managed to get Dawn out of the car before being hit head on. Dawn only had minor bruises, but the next day she was paralyzed and has never walked since. Then we got the results of all the medical tests she was put through, the doctors told me that her condition is definitely not physical, but psychosomatic. Only another traumatic experience can make Dawn walk again. She's never even cried about the accident and is keeping all that grief and anger inside. Every day she becomes more and more depressed, giving up on life. She's even told me she's sorry it wasn't she who died instead of her parents. Now she's punishing herself by refusing to even try to walk on her own. Miss Lane, I know she must hurt deeply inside because she survived the accident and they didn't. The doctors here have told me that the longer her depression goes on, the greater the chance that she will never walk again. Maybe she's willing herself to die. Nothing on earth will save her then. Miss Lane, Mr. Olsen, she's a wonderful little girl, only eight years old, with her whole life ahead of her. I want her to be happy again, to have something to live for again." Then Norma told Lois and Jimmy why she's divorcing her husband. "There's something that gives me hope though. Dawn absolutely

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hero worships Superman. She was practically glued to the television watching all the news reports about him defeating that horrible monster. She also keeps talking about how Superman became an orphan too after his family died when Krypton exploded. Do you think he would talk to Dawn and help her want to live again?"

"Of course, he will, Mrs. Shannon," Lois assured her.

"Please call me Norma."

"Only if you'll call me Lois."

"And you can call me Jimmy."

Norma smiled at both of them. "I'm so glad I have good friends like you to confide in. I feel much better now."

Just then, Superman flew in the window and began talking to the children. Later, Lois and Jimmy told him all about Dawn. It really got to him. He walked over to Norma first and talked to her for a while. Then he went over to Dawn and smiled. She smiled back and said, "Superman, I'm very glad to meet you."

Superman held her hand gently and said, "I'm also very glad to meet you, Dawn. I know how much it hurts you to lose your parents, but they will always be with you in your heart . . . like mine are with me. I was very lucky to have two wonderful people adopt me and raise me to use my powers for good."

Dawn looked away and said, "I wish I had died instead of my mom and dad."

"Why do you feel that way, Dawn? You have so much to offer."

"But I'm afraid, Superman. I'm just not worth anything since I can't walk and won't ever be able to again. I don't want to be a burden to Aunt Norma. Besides, Uncle Eric doesn't like me at all, and Aunt Norma is leaving him . . . all because of me. I really ruined their lives because I survived."

"But it's not your fault, Dawn. Please don't let your uncle upset you. I'll tell you a secret. Sometimes I feel afraid too."



"You? But . . ."

"When my enemies try to hurt me by putting my friends in danger, I still feel afraid. Sometimes I'm afraid when I think I won't be able to save them in time. The main thing is that I try to do my best to help people whenever I can. I believe things happen for a reason, Dawn. It was meant to be that I survived Krypton's explosion. My parents sacrificed their lives so I could have a second chance on Earth. My new home gave me another mother and father and so many good friends. I also believe there is a reason you were saved from that accident."

"Superman, I wish someday there could be a way we could help you for a change . . .to repay you for all those times you saved others."

"Dawn, I just want to see you walk again and be happy. There is one more thing you can do for me. Sometimes I get very lonely. Will you be my friend? Dawn gave Superman a big hug.

Before Superman left the hospital, Lois walked over to him. "Superman, there's something about Dawn that seems to capture everyone's hearts."

"I know, Miss Lane. I would do anything to help her walk and want to live again. She deserves that after all she's been through."

"She adores you, Superman."

"I know, Miss Lane." Superman smiled, winked, and flew out the window.

At their home, Dawn couldn't stop talking about Superman and what he told her. "Aunt Norma, Superman is so strong, but he's never a bully. He's gentle, especially when he held my hand, just like I knew he would be."

"Yes, Dawn, Superman has to control his strength, and he does that very well. Anyway, only evil people need to be afraid of him."

"Sometimes I worry about something happening to Superman. I read about all those times when he risked his life to save people."

"Don't worry, honey. Nothing will hurt Superman. Now go to sleep."

Late into the night in a very tough part of the city, three thugs were gathered around a table. Bulldog, the leader, did most of the talking. "Listen up, you guys. I'm sick and tired of Superman spoiling our fun. I vowed to get even with him if it's the last thing I ever do. He's been a thorn in my side for years, but no more! I'm going to get rid of Superman. I'm going to kill him."

"Hey, boss, I got news for you. Superman can't be killed. You saw how he pulverized that monster. The whole world knows he's the strongest guy who ever lived. He'll bounce you off the sidewalk like a basketball."

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"Basher's right about that, Boss, and that's just the least of what he can do. Now I know I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but if you think I'm gonna stick around and tangle with Superman, you're crazy!"

"Yeah, Boss, I'm scared even thinking about it."

"Boys, you worry too much. It just so happens I have the one thing that can destroy Superman -- kryptonite."

"Wow, Boss, but just how are you going to get Superman into a trap?"

"Simple. I'm going to use a special bait that will guarantee Superman shows up. The whole city read that story in the *Daily Planet* about that little girl who is unable to walk."

"Boss, you're a veritable genius."

"I know, Basher. It's a foolproof plan, absolutely perfect. Superman will be trapped with the kryptonite and the kid can't walk so she'll never be able to help him. We'll be dancing on easy street for the rest of our lives, and not only us -- every goon, gangster, and crook will celebrate, and with Superman out of the way I'll become the kingpin of organized crime in Metropolis."

As time went on, Basher and Boxer trailed Norma and Dawn from a distance to get their routine down pat. They noticed that Norma took Dawn for an outing in the park every day at the same time. Then one day they closed in on Dawn. Norma ran screaming for a security guard, but it was too late. Dawn was whisked away in a van which sped down the street and around the corner on two wheels.

Norma first called Inspector Henderson and then the *Daily Planet*. Mr. White listened to her story and then switched the call to Lois in her office. "Don't worry, Norma. Clark will soon be back, and he knows how to contact Superman."

"He's got to find her, Lois, he's just got to. She's all I have."

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As Lois hung up the phone, Clark walked in. "Thank goodness you're here, Clark. Dawn's been kidnapped and you've got to find Superman. We're all frantic, and the chief is going crazy."

"Well, Lois, I'll see what I can do."

"Kent . . . Kent . . . where in blazes are you?"

"Right here, Chief."

"Well, Great Caesar's Ghost, don't just stand there. You've got to find Superman. You understand, you've just got to."

"I'm leaving right now, Chief."

"Wait, just a minute ago a messenger left this note for Superman in care of you."

"I'll see that he gets it, Chief."

A second later, Superman flew into Perry White's office.

"Mr. White, please call Inspector Henderson and have him stand by. I may be needing him later. Right now I must try to save Dawn. This note tells me where she is, but I must go alone or something terrible might happen to her."

As Mr. White went to the phone, Superman flew out the window.

Norma waited with Bill Henderson in his office. "I had to come down here, Inspector."

"I know, Mrs. Shannon. I'm worried about Dawn too. We all are."

As Superman raced across the night sky he kept thinking about the eight-year-old girl with the sad eyes and polite manners. Here he was, able to bend steel with his bare hands, fly faster than a speeding bullet, and the possessor of myriad other fantastic powers, but he could not help Dawn walk. The man of steel's eyes filled with tears. He had never felt so weak as now.

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The neighborhood was quiet as Superman landed near an empty building, opened the door, and walked down a corridor and into the room which, according to his instructions, was to be the place where he'd find Dawn.

Once inside, however, he suddenly felt a strange weakness come over him. He felt dizzy. Then he saw the kryptonite on the floor and knew a trap had been sprung. Bulldog walked into the room. "Well, well, well, Mr. Superman. It looks like you're finally finished cramping my style. But just so you don't get lonesome in your final hours we brought you some company.

Basher and Boxer wheeled Dawn into the room.

"So long, Superman. Have a nice death. Let's go boys, this is my town now." Bulldog's evil laugh shattered the solitude of the night.



The man of steel was getting weaker with each passing moment. He slumped to the floor. Across the room, Dawn sat in her wheelchair, watching him with terror-filled eyes. In just moments she relived the death of her parents. Then she thought about all the risks Superman took to protect others. How he never used his strength to take advantage of others. How he talked about second chances and that things

happen for a reason. the tears began to fall for the first time, and she couldn't stop.

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I was given a second chance. I survived for a reason. I've got to help Superman. I've got to try.

Dawn started to lift herself up, but fell out of the wheelchair. She dragged herself slowly across the floor and managed to get near a chair. Then an amazing thing happened. Dawn painfully stood up using the chair as a brace. She started walking over to where the kryptonite lay on the floor. She picked it up and put it in a box Bulldog had carelessly left behind. Then she walked over to where Superman lay on the floor and took his hand.

"I want to live again, Superman, and I want you to live too. We need you. The whole world needs you. No matter how much evil there is in the world, you give all of us something to believe in. Please don't die, Superman. Please don't give up now."

Suddenly Superman opened his eyes as he felt his strength return. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Dawn bending over him. "Dawn. You saved my life?"

"I had to pay you back, Superman."

Just then Inspector Henderson and a few of his officers ran into the room. "What are you doing here, Inspector?"

"A patrolman on the beat spotted Bulldog and his men running out of this building and reported it back to headquarters. I had a hunch he had something to do with the little girl's disappearance, so we came right over."

"I'm afraid you would have been a little too late, Inspector. But thanks to Dawn here everything's all right. Now, if you'll be so kind as to take her and her aunt home, I'll round up those thugs and deliver them to headquarters by the time you get back."

"We can always count on you, Superman. Come along, Mrs. Shannon."

"Oh, Dawn, this is wonderful. Let's go."

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It didn't take long for Superman to round up the three thugs. Superman picked up Basher and Boxer and hung them up on a couple of burglar alarms. Then he grabbed Bulldog. "We're going to take a little trip by air to Inspector Henderson's office. You'll get a big kick out of it, Bulldog. A couple of policemen should be along real soon to take care of your friends there."

Back at the *Daily Planet* everyone was cheering and crying at the same time. Lois and Jimmy hugged each other. Even Perry White was crying, but he'd never admit to it. "Well I'll be a monkey's uncle. This is the best human interest story the *Planet* has ever published, bar none. It will knock every other story off the front page!" Just then Mr. White looked around. "Lois! Olsen! Where's Kent?"

"He went to talk to Superman, Chief."

"Great Caesar's Ghost! All the phones are ringing at once. The whole city is going crazy. I can't find my cigars."

The excitement continued late into the night.

The next morning, Lois, Clark, and Jimmy met Norma at the hospital. The doctors examined Dawn and all agreed that it was a miracle. The trauma of seeing Superman suffer the effects of the kryptonite shocked Dawn into walking again. She willed herself to walk and was completely cured.

Later that evening there was the biggest celebration in the history of Metropolis, the party of all parties. Every person in the city showed up. Why, nobody went to sleep that night. They were all dancing in the streets, including Dawn. But as she grew more tired, she walked cautiously toward Superman and whispered in his ear, "I'll never forget you."

"And I'll never forget you either, Dawn. But you know, you did this all by yourself." Then Superman gently picked her up and placed her on his shoulder.

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That day the people of Metropolis learned that there are forces even more powerful than super strength. They are love and hope. They can triumph even when you are at your weakest point, when you think you can never go on. You see, sometimes you have to be your own hero.

The following weekend Norma and Dawn went to court to finalize the divorce. The judge allowed Dawn to choose the person she wanted to live with. Uncle Eric walked over to Dawn and said, "Look, kid, I'm your uncle by blood. Norma is just your aunt by marriage to me. I'm the one who should get you. Now come home with me. It's the only smart thing to do, kid. Beside, I didn't think you had it in you to save Superman like that. You're not as weak as I thought."

"No, Uncle Eric. I want to live with Aunt Norma. She's the one who always loved me for who I am even when I couldn't walk. She's my mom now and I love her. But that doesn't mean I hate you, Uncle Eric. I hope you have a happy life."

The next morning it was raining hard but after a while the sun started to shine though. Norma and Dawn went to the *Daily Planet* to visit Perry, Lois, and Jimmy. Clark was on an errand and would be back soon. Lois was standing by the window. "Look, there's a rainbow. All's right with the world."

Just then people on the street heard a familiar sound and gazed upward where they saw Superman fly up, up, and away over the rainbow, a symbol of hope and new beginnings.

Dawn went to the window to see the rainbow. "Look everybody!"

"What is it, Dawn? Is it a bird?"

"No, Mr. Olsen.."

"Is it a plane?"

"No, Miss Lane."

"Well, Great Caesar's Ghost, Dawn, what is it?"

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"It's Superman, Mr. White. It's Superman."

