

What will I be when I grow up?

Answer in the Stillness

by Donald Zolan, Hershey, Pennsylvania

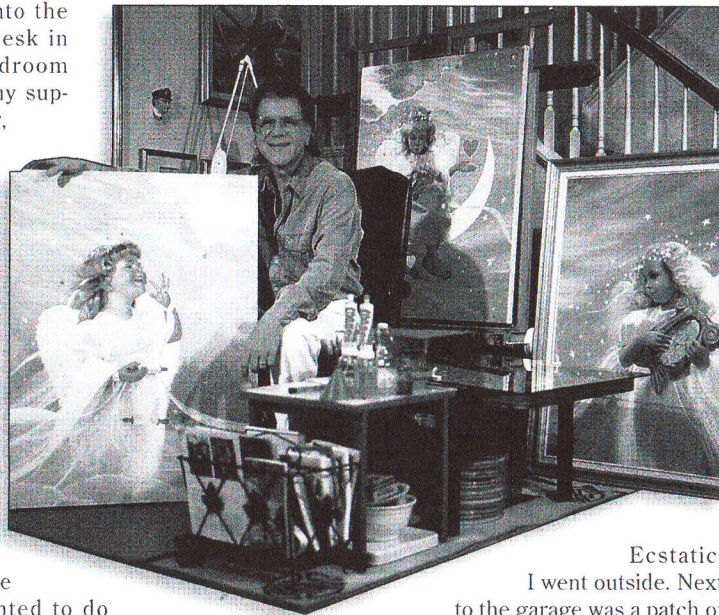
I climbed up onto the chair at the desk in Grandpa's bedroom and laid out my supplies: drawing paper, a nine-color paint set, two brushes, a tube of white paint, and a glass filled with water. I was four years old and it was summer in my small Illinois hometown, but I wanted to paint before I went out to play. Mom and Dad had been excited about a drawing of a horse I had shown them the night before. I wanted to do something even better. I took the comic book from my pocket and smoothed it out on the desk. There was a picture of Donald Duck playing cymbals and a drum. I spent a couple of hours drawing and painting my favorite cartoon character just the way it appeared in the book. When I finished I ran down the hall into the kitchen, where my mom was busy ironing clothes near the window, the white linen curtains undulating about her in the breeze.

She stared at my painting a long time, while I shuffled my feet impatiently. Finally, she looked at me.

"You did this all by yourself?" she asked.

I nodded and showed her the original.

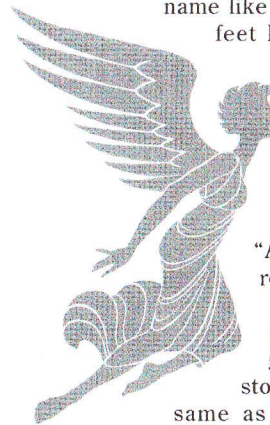
She smiled. "This is wonderful, Donny! When your father gets home tonight I'll talk to him about getting you some more art supplies."



Ecstatic, I went outside. Next to the garage was a patch of grass and dirt with a low granite boulder around which Mom had planted flowers. I had spent many afternoons on that rock, tracking ants or looking at the clouds. I sat on the sun-warmed surface, took a deep breath, and looked around me. The roses seemed to glitter in the light. Bees darted among the marigolds. I reached out to try catching a passing orange-and-blue butterfly and just missed it.

Then I peered closely at my paint-smudged palm. The breeze ruffled my hair the way my dad did. I thought of him going off in his big white truck each morning to deliver milk. *What will I be when I grow up?* I wondered.

For a moment the breeze stilled and it was completely quiet. "You will be an artist," said a gentle voice just above my head. I looked up but saw no one. I looked back down at my



hands. The voice continued, "A fine artist. And you will sign your name like this." In the dirt at my feet I found myself tracing a capital Z with a horizontal stroke across it, a capital O with a lowercase l through it, and a small a and n followed by a period. I sat staring at it. "An artist," the voice repeated.

The breeze picked up again and wafted gently over my face. I stood. Everything was the same as before—the sun, the bees, the blossoms—but it all looked clearer somehow, more vibrant.

I trotted into the house to find my mother. "Mommy," I said, tugging the hem of her dress. "There was a voice talking to me out there."

"Who was it?" she asked with a curious expression.

"I'm not sure," I said, and explained the voice and what it told me.

She put down the iron and bent to hug me. "Always remember that voice, Donny," she whispered. "That was your guardian angel."

Soon after, my parents bought me an easel and more art supplies. I painted every day. At age 11 I earned a scholarship to The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and later to the American Academy of Art. Today I earn my living as an artist and still sign my name as I was instructed years ago. I have portrayed many different subjects. But most of all, I love to paint children, to try capturing the image of that time of life when I believe we are most receptive to God's will, the time when I was fortunate enough to hear my true calling in an angel's gentle voice.

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What would I be when I grew up, I wondered

ANSWERED BY A VOICE

Donald Zolan, Hershey, Pennsylvania

I climbed up into the chair at the big oak desk in Grandpa's bedroom and laid out my supplies: drawing paper, a little nine-color paint set, two brushes, a tube of white paint, and a glass cup filled with water. I was four years old and it was summer in my little Illinois hometown, but before I went out to play that afternoon, I wanted to paint. Mom and Dad had been really excited about a drawing of a horse I showed them last night. Now, I wanted to do something even better. I took the folded comic-book cover out of my pocket and smoothed it out on the desk. It was a picture of Donald Duck playing cymbals and a drum. I spent a couple of hours drawing and painting my favorite cartoon character just the way it appeared in the book. When I finished, I ran down the hall into the kitchen, where my mom was busy ironing clothes near the window, the white linen curtains billowing about her like jibs in the breeze.

She stopped and stared at my painting a long time, while I shuffled from foot to foot. Finally, she looked at me.

"You did this all by yourself?" she asked.

I nodded and showed her the original.

She smiled. "This is wonderful, Donny! When your father gets home tonight, I'll talk to him about getting you some more art supplies."

Ecstatic, I went outside. Next to the garage was a small space with a big, low granite boulder around which mom had planted flowers. I spent many afternoons on that rock, tracking ants or staring at the clouds. Today, I sat on the warm stone, took a deep breath, and looked around me. The roses seemed to glitter in the sunlight. Bees darted among the marigolds. I reached out to try to catch a passing orange and blue butterfly, just missing.

I peered closely at the paint-smudged palms of my hands. The breeze ruffled my hair the way my dad did. I thought of him going off in his big white truck each morning to deliver milk. *What will I be when I grow up?* I wondered.

For a moment, the breeze stopped and it was completely quiet. "You will be an artist," said a gentle voice just above my head. I looked up but saw no one. I looked back down at my hands. The voice continued, "A fine artist. And you will sign your name like this." In the dirt at my feet I traced a capital Z with a cross through it, a capital O and L with a small a and n followed by a period. I sat staring at it. "An artist," the voice repeated.

The breeze picked up again and blew quietly over my face. I stood. Everything was the same as before--the sun, the bees, the blossoms--but it all looked clearer somehow, even more vibrant.

I trotted into the house to find my mother still ironing. "Mommy," I said, tugging on the hem of her dress. "There was a voice out there."

"Was there anyone nearby?" she asked.

"No," I said, and explained the voice and what it told me.

She put down the iron and bent down to hug me. "Always remember that voice, Donny," she whispered. "That was your guardian angel."

Soon after, my parents bought me an easel and more art supplies. I painted every day. At age 11, I earned a scholarship to the Art Institute of Chicago and later to the American Academy of Art. Today, I earn my living as an artist and have portrayed many different subjects. But I most love to paint children, to try to capture the openness of that time of life when I believe we are all most receptive to God's will, the time when I was lucky enough to hear my true calling in an angel's voice.

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