



Evergreen Forevermore

The small apartment was plain with no bright colors. It had been the home of John Devore, and it had served his simple tastes well over the past two years. But now, he must make ready to leave for his home in Whitecap, Vermont. He has graduated from the Community College here in New York City. He is now a paramedic at the age of twenty-three. He is going home to start an emergency unit at the town firehouse. The town of Whitecap helped him with his schooling, and they have supported him through his training. Well, not all. The mayor was dead set against it. However, the town council overruled him.

John looked into the mirror as he brushed his sandy-colored hair. His hair was short, with a light part on the right side. His green eyes snapped with the thought of going home. John stood six-three, and he was heavily muscled from the farm work he had done growing up on his grandparents' farm. The same farm his dad had grown up on. John closed his eyes and thought about his parents, and for a brief moment, *he was surrounded by fire*. He quickly opened his eyes and held onto the vanity in front of him. The fear subsided, and John looked again at his image in the mirror. His thoughts turned to the love he remembered with his parents. He knew how proud his mom and dad would be of what he had accomplished. When he thought of his dad, he said aloud, "Evergreen forevermore." He then closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He missed his dad and his mom. Even so, he has one more day here at the local shelter, where he has worked for these two years, and it will be hard to say goodbye.

John looked at his watch, nine-forty-five, Wednesday morning. He still had some time before he had to leave. John gathered his clothes from the dresser and put them into a garbage bag. He did not own a suitcase. The bag would do him just fine. He had one medium-sized cardboard box with his personal things in it. He thought he was almost ready. He would pack the few things in the morning, get into his car, and head home. He took another look and was satisfied. He had given most of the things he would not take with him to the homeless shelter to use or to sell. What he was taking would fit easily into his car. He did not want to overload it. He hoped his old car would not give him any trouble on the way home. It had a lot of miles on it, and it burned a bit of oil. He thought about the old saying, *on a wing and a prayer*. He smiled and headed down to the sidewalk and the short walk to the homeless shelter.

John walked the three blocks to the shelter, and he said hello to all the familiar faces he had met over the past two years. He arrived at the shelter, which was situated on a block where there were warehouses. There were only a couple of residences on the block. The building was on the ground level, which helped wheelchair-bound individuals have easy access. At the side of the entry door was a large square button that opened the doors. John saw people coming and going in and out of the shelter. He went in and ran into the operator of the shelter, Luke Jennings.

"Hey, Luke, good morning."

“Morning, John. Doc Baker is in already.”

“Thanks, Luke. I’ll hurry back.”

“John?”

“Yeah,” John said, turning back towards Luke.

“We have a group coming in this afternoon to do a photoshoot about the homeless. Can you help them set up and make sure our people are okay?”

“Sure thing.”

“I know this is your last day, and I’m sure going to miss you. But these people are giving the shelter a nice, fat check. Are you sure you don’t want to stay around here instead of going home?”

“I really do like it here, and I like helping those who come here. But I have committed to the job at Whitecap. I guess with this photoshoot we will finish with a bang. I had better get in and help Doc Baker.”

John went down the hall, turned to his left, and entered a large room with two small rooms off to the right side. The large room had an examining table and cabinets with various medical supplies at the far end. Some curtains could seal that portion of the room off from the eyes of the rest. The wall on the left had chairs lined against it, and they were full of people waiting to see the Doctor.

“Good morning, John,” said Doctor Baker as he looked up from his patient.

“Morning, Doctor,” John replied.

“John, we have three patients in the bandage room. Would you take care of them? One will need a couple of stitches. I tagged him. The others just cleaned and bandaged.”

“Yes, sir, right away.”

“John?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to miss you. You are the best assistant I have ever had. Whitecap is getting a great paramedic.”

“Thanks, Doctor Baker. You have taught me so much, not just about medicine but about caring for people. I’m so thankful to have met you. Thank you.”

John headed into what they called the bandage room, which had a double door opening so that the room could be observed from the main room. He looked back at Doctor Baker. John watched for a second as the middle-aged man worked on a homeless patient. The Doctor was devoted to healing and caring for each one that he encountered. John turned back towards the room he was heading to. It had everything at hand to care for cuts and bruises. Even as John had to do, putting stitches into deep wounds. Many of the homeless suffered from these minor injuries. If they were not cared for properly, they could become infected. The individual would end up in the hospital if they were lucky enough to be caught in time. John went to the bandage room and saw the tag on the first patient. He grabbed a white coat, put surgical gloves on, and pulled a chair up to the man with the tag on his shirt.

John held out his hand and said, “Hi, my name is John. What’s yours?”

The old man made no response, and John took his arm and looked at the side of his right forearm. He took the bandage off and saw that there was no bleeding. He again tried to make conversation with the homeless man. “That is a deep cut. Where did it happen?”

The homeless man sitting next to him said, “It’s okay, Ed, this guy is going to help you.”

“Well, I’m glad to meet you, Ed. Where did you get this?” John asked.

“In an alley,” Ed said.

“Those alleys can be dangerous with all the broken glass and things. I’m going to numb this so I can give it a good cleaning, and then we will stitch it up. Okay?”

“Okay, you don’t have to numb it if you don’t want to. I can handle the pain,” Ed said.

John smiled at him and said, “I’m sure you can, but you don’t have to. We have everything we need here. Say, Ed, where are you from?” John said as he began to work on Ed’s arm.

“Ohio.”

There’s some beautiful farm country over there.”

“Yeah, I was raised on a dairy farm.”

“No kidding, heck, I was raised on a beef farm in Vermont. Lots of work, huh, Ed?”

“Yeah, can see to can’t see.”

John laughed and said, “You got that right. How come you left the farm?” John said as he put the needle into the area around the cut.

Ed looked down, and his face wrinkled up slowly, and then he said, “Vietnam.”

“You got family in Ohio?” John moved away from any talk about Vietnam.

“I don’t know for sure. Folks are probably still alive. I had two brothers.”

“I wonder how they are doing?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been back in thirty years.”

“You know, Ed, I lost my parents when I was young, and there isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t wish I could see them again. But I can’t. I can never see them again in this life.”

“When I left, it was rough. I was having problems, and no one could help me. I left with things said that left deep wounds like this,” Ed said as he lifted his bandaged arm.

“Ed, those kinds of wounds are easy to fix. But heart wounds take a lot of effort. There is no shot to deaden the pain. The only thing I know of that can deaden that kind of pain is pure love. Were you and your family close at one time?”

“Yeah.”

“Then it can be that way again. I can give you a phone number that will hook you up with people who can help you.”

“Psychiatrist?”

“No, they are counselors, and they are the best at working with Vietnam vets.”

“I don’t know?”

“Here, just give it a chance and make up your mind you want to go home. Your folks aren’t getting any younger, Ed.”

“I know, okay, I will.”

“Good. Now you keep that bandage dry and clean. Get yourself back in here to see the Doctor next week, okay?”

“You be here?”

“No, Ed, I am going home tomorrow, and I can’t wait to see my family.”

“Okay, Doc, no pain, no gain. Right?”

“Right. You keep in touch with the shelter so I can see how you are getting along.”

“Will do, Doc. You done with me?”

“Yes, good luck, Ed. Alright. Who’s next?”

John took care of the other two by cleaning and bandaging their wounds. He finished up by wishing them the best and instructing them to come back in a few days to have their bandages changed. John went out to see if the Doctor needed any more help.

“I have the three patients taken care of. Is there anything more I can do?”

“No, John, we are all caught up for the day.”

“Okay, I’ll head to the kitchen and get ready for lunch. Have you seen the Judge yet?”

“Yes, he just walked by heading for the back.”

“Thanks, Doctor. I’ll see you later.”

John headed out of the medical room, and he went down the hall towards the kitchen. There were large rooms on both sides of the hall, and he passed many homeless people milling about. There were sleeping quarters and sitting rooms, and at the end was the dining hall. Behind the dining hall was the kitchen. The door at the end was marked, employees only. John went through the door and greeted the staff working on today’s lunch. The cooks were busy preparing the offering for the day. The menu was always wholesome but straightforward. For many of the homeless, this was the only meal they got each day. Getting meals to the homeless was a problem that bothered John, and he knew that everyone who worked here felt the same.

The cooks were in the kitchen area behind the serving counter. The staff was making everything ready to serve the homeless cafeteria-style. They would enter from the counter’s right, get their tray and utensils, slide their tray along the rails, and they would receive their food from the staff. There was a small room to the left of the serving area for the workers to sit in and eat their meals. John went into this room and found Judge James Wilcox seated at the table over a cup of coffee. “Good day, Judge.”

“Hello, John. It’s good to see you.”

“Looks like our last meal, we will serve together,” John said as he grabbed a cup of coffee and sat down opposite the Judge.

“Yes, I truly will miss you, John. We have worked together for two years, helping out at the shelter. Are you sure you want to go home?”

“Yes, I gave my word, and I miss my family. But, I will miss all of you just as much.”

“You live in Whitecap, Vermont. I have never been to Vermont.”

“You would like it.”

“We have some time. Tell me about Whitecap. What is it like? What are the people like?”

“The people are the best. You would like our doctor, our only Doctor, Mary Lynn Morgan. Her dad was the town Doctor for many years, and she has taken up where he left off. He passed, and she set up shop in the same house. It is a big house, but she never married. She takes in needy people to help them with a hand up. She is a no-nonsense type, though. She can hold her own.”

“How old is she, being the only Doctor in town?”

“She would be in her early sixties, with brown hair and hazel eyes.”

“She’s a straight shooter, then?”

“Always, and she never misses. She can also be one of the kindest people in town.”

“What’s the town like? I mean, what’s the area like?”

“Whitecap sits on the east side of Lake Champlain. There is a cove that comes in from the lake. The cove is one-half mile across in both directions. The inlet is narrow. The eastern side of the cove is a beach that runs straight north and south. To the north is the marina, and south of that are the swimming beaches. There is a boardwalk, and then the motels line the boardwalk. Further east is the main street and the places of business. Everything runs south to north. The courthouse and the sheriff’s office are set towards the north of town, but still within the town.”

“Are your town officials good? Do you have a church?”

“Yes, they all are great people and good public servants. You would also like them. Maybe not so much the mayor. He can be a bit arrogant at times. We have a church and a great pastor, always helping wherever he can. His name is Pastor Lewis Niven. We affectionately call him Pastor Lou. He’s in his thirties. The place you would love is Molly’s Diner, owned and operated by Molly Macintosh. That is where the locals gather to eat and talk. My parents took me there when I was a baby, and I have been going there ever since.”

“Hamburger joint?”

“Yes, but she can rustle up anything from a steak to mashed potatoes, to fries and hot dogs.”

“Sounds like my kind of place.”

“There are many stores that cater to the tourists who come for the beaches and water sports. It can get pretty busy in the summer. Then it calms down in the fall. The fall is the most beautiful time of the year, spectacular.”

“Other than the mayor, do you have any troublemakers?”

“Most of the town folk are great people and have wonderful families with lovely children. There are a few that can have a bad day and let you know about it. There is one gentleman by the name of Fred Bates. Gramps calls him Bud. He does odd jobs for the storekeepers to make a few dollars. He lives in a shack outside of town. He stays pretty much to himself, and he has never caused any trouble that I know of.”

“How old is he? Does he have a family?”

“He is in his mid-sixties and has no family that I know of. With everything the way it is in Whitecap, it is still the most beautiful place this side of heaven.”

“You make me want to move there myself. You said that you live with your grandparents?”

“Yes, they took me in after my parents died. They live on a farm, and that’s where I learned to love farm life. Gramps taught me about farming, and the most important thing he taught me was to do your job and keep your word. He also taught me about animals and how to heal them when they get hurt. He has been a great influence on me.”

“I would say he did it right by the way you handle yourself.”

“Gramps always kept you on the ball. One time, when I was twelve, we were sitting around the table after supper, and he told me about mad dogs and animals that foamed at the mouth and how they had to be put down. He went into great detail about the sickness. I was hanging on to every word. Later, we all went to bed, *early to bed, early to rise*. Gramps snuck into my bedroom early in the morning, took a can of shaving cream, and covered my mouth with it. I am a deep sleeper, and I never woke up while he was there. He went out into the hall and yelled, ‘Johnny, time to get up.’ I opened my eyes and slowly put my hand on my face, and felt something, and I looked at my hand. I bounded out of bed and ran to the dresser mirror, and let a war hoop out of me. I could hear Gramps outside my door laughing. I opened the door and said, ‘Gramps....’ About that same instant, Grams came down the hall and saw my face, and she screamed bloody murder. She then realized what had happened, and she gave Gramps a verbal broadside. He just shrugged his shoulders and said. ‘I wanted to see if Johnny was paying attention.’ Then he started laughing again, and he has such an infectious laugh, we all were laughing by then.”

“That’s funny, sounds like you have a wonderful family.”

“Thanks. You said you live alone. Do you have any other family?”

“No, I am in my sixties also and never married or had any kids. I got too busy with my career and volunteer work. Time just passed by.”

“You are still a young man, Judge. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?” John said, looking at the man across the table from him. The Judge was a little over six feet tall and was broad at the shoulders. He looked younger than his age.

“I guess I always have my work.”

“You ever thought about moving into the federal court system? You wouldn’t have to campaign then.”

“No, I like the county court, campaigning, and all. You can take the time to help someone even when you have to sentence them.”

“Even in small ways, we can make a difference.”

“That’s right, John. People need to feel how much you care, and then you have to show them.”

“I agree. Well, it’s getting close to time, and I guess we have someone coming in to take pictures?”

“Yes, that would be Katherine Walberg.”

“You know her?”

“Only by reputation. Her father is a tyrant, by actions.”

“What in the world does she want here?”

“My understanding is she is putting a portfolio together. I guess the shelter will show off her compassionate side.”

“Luke asked me to help her. Are you going to help too?”

“No, I can’t. You never know what may come through those courtroom doors. I have never recused myself, and I guard against ever having to.”

“I see, good thinking, Judge. Shall we?”

“We shall,” offered the Judge as he got to his feet.

John and Judge Wilcox moved in behind the serving counter. They put on aprons and plastic gloves. They topped their wardrobe with a paper cap that had elastic to keep it in place. Some rules had to be followed. They took their positions, and one of the staff members opened the door, and the homeless people started to come through. Many knew the staff by their first name, and they knew them. John and the Judge greeted each one as they came by. Many they called by name and asked various questions on how they were doing. Others asked who they were and where they were from. Occasionally, one would stop to report on how things were going for them. All was going like clockwork until the employee door flew open, and Luke came in and let a dozen or so people come in with him, carrying cameras and other equipment. One was a woman dressed like she was going to a high-class meeting. She stood five-eleven, and she had coal-black hair with eyes to match. She was an amazingly good-looking woman with a beautiful figure. Luke turned to John and said, “John, these are the people I want you to help.” Luke turned to the woman and said, “John will help you with anything you might need.” He turned and was gone.

John met the woman, held out his hand, and said, “Hello, I’m John. How would you like to set this up?”

Ignoring his hand, she said, “You can start by closing the doors and getting these people out of my way.” The woman said with a matter-of-fact tone.

“But Miss, we are in the process of feeding these people.”

“My name is Katherine, and you will stop and get out of my way immediately.”

John looked shocked. He finally said, “But some of these folks have not eaten in a couple of days. They are hungry and in need of food.”

Katherine looked at one of her company and moved her head as if she was slinging something aside. The burly man walked up to John and said, “You will do well to move out of the way and to stay there until we are done.”

“Look, there are rules that have to be followed. There are sanitation rules that have to be obeyed.”

The man looked straight at John and said, “Your name is John, right. Well, John, I don’t have time to tell you twice, the boss said to move, and move you will, now.”

John moved back where the others had been forced to, and he stood by the side of the Judge. He looked at the Judge and said, “Are you going to do something?”

“Like what, delay this whole show? No, the sooner we get the woman out of here, the sooner our people can eat. Don’t let your anger get the better of your good senses.”

John knew the Judge was right. He turned and watched the photoshoot.

Katherine began giving orders, and her people set up the area where they would take their pictures. Six of the men she brought had three-day-old beards, and they took off their coveralls and had on homeless attire. The six men went and got trays. And then they got in line, and Katherine began to serve them. They were taking videos and stills. Katherine smiled and asked how each one was doing. Then one of the prop homeless men collapsed onto the floor. Katherine ran around the end of the counter and knelt by his side, holding his head in her lap. She said, “Water!” A bottle miraculously appeared, and she gently poured some water into the mouth of the prone fake homeless man. He got up as if he were miraculously healed.

Katherine got up and said, “That’s a take, people. Let’s get out of here. The place makes me sick.” She walked by John and said, “Take over and feed your poor, hungry people.”

John was about to reply when the Judge grabbed his arm and held him back. John turned to the Judge and said to all, “Let’s get the doors open before the food gets cold.” John, the Judge, and the staff got back to work, and they moved the hungry people through the line. When the last one passed through, John sighed with relief. He always felt this way when they finished serving the meal. John looked at the Judge and said, “Now the easy part, cleaning up.”

“It always goes well,” the Judge said.

Luke came in and said, “How did the photoshoot go?”

John looked at the Judge and then back at Luke and said, “Oh, it went really well. You should have been here.”

“I was busy,” Luke replied.

“Busy, huh?” said the Judge.

Luke smiled, then he got serious and said, “They say she has quite a reputation, sort of like Attila the Hun.”

“She makes him look like a near do well,” John said, and then he laughed.

Everyone pitched in and started the task of cleaning. Even Luke rolled up his sleeves and helped. Six homeless men worked at the washtubs in the back room, cleaning the trays and stacking them for tomorrow.

Everything was cleaned, and the eating hall was almost empty except for a few finishing their meal. John and all the rest grabbed some of the leftover food, went into the hall, and took seats together at a table. They visited, and they laughed as they ate. Doc Baker came and joined them, too. John was pleased, and he felt a little sad knowing this would be the last time together for some while.

The doors opened, and in came a man carrying a box, and he set it down on the table. The Judge gave him some money, and the man left. The Judge opened the box, took a cake out of it, and set it on the table. John looked at the cake and read the lettering in icing on the cake. It said, *Gone from our sight, but never from our heart.*

John was overwhelmed with emotion. He could only muster a “Thank you.” The Judge handed him a knife and said, “You get to do the honors.” John cut the cake and put the pieces on small plastic plates. After everyone had one, John sat down with them and enjoyed the delicious cake. They talked and enjoyed the moment. Finally, Doc Baker got to his feet and said, “John, I will make this short. You are one of us, and you always will be. May God bless you. We wanted to get you something to remember us by, and here it is.” The Doctor handed John a small but long wrapped package. John opened it up and found a stethoscope. It was engraved with the words,

Family now and always. John looked at the engraved sentiment and said, “Thank you, everyone, and I totally agree.” John sat back down, and he listened to his heart through the instrument and smiled, thanking everyone again.

The door from the hallway opened, and a homeless man came in. It was Ed. He walked over and stood beside John. John got to his feet and said, “You alright, Ed. You didn’t pull your stitches, did you?”

“No, Doc, I just wanted to let you know that I called home,” Ed said, showing no emotion on his face.

John asked, “How’d it go, Ed?”

“I’m going home, Doc, thanks to you.”

“That’s great, Ed, that is absolutely wonderful.”

“It was the luckiest fall I ever took, Doc, getting this cut and all. If I hadn’t, I would have never run into you. Thanks, Doc.”

“I’m happy for you. Did you talk to your folks then?”

“Yeah. When I left you, I walked up and down the sidewalk several times, and then I said, ‘I’m gonna do it. I called home, and it rang and rang. I was about to hang up when my mom answered. I said, ‘Hi, Mom, it’s Ed.’ And she burst out in tears and said how much she loved me, and my dad got on the phone and said he was sorry, and I said I was sorry, and they are sending the money for a plane ticket home.’”

“That’s great, Ed. When are you leaving?”

“As soon as the money gets here.”

“That’s wonderful news, Ed.”

“Doc?”

“Yes?”

“I want to give you something. I don’t have much, but I have something that means a lot to me. Hold out your hand.”

John held his hand out to Ed, and he placed something in it. John looked at it, and he said, “Oh my, Ed, I can’t take this. It’s your medal. It’s your Purple Heart.”

“I won’t take no for an answer. It’s yours now.”

“Oh, Ed, I don’t know what to say.”

“Then say nothing. It’s the way I want it.”

John took a pen and pad out of his pocket and wrote down his Vermont address. He gave it to Ed and said, “Ed, drop me a line and keep me posted on how things are going for you, and if there is anything I can do.”

Ed took the paper and said, “Will do, Doc, will do.” He held out his hand to John, and John took it, and then he embraced him. Then Ed headed for the door.

John said, “Ed, are you sure you want to give me your medal?”

Ed stopped and never turned around, and he said, “No problem, Doc. I have several more like those.” Ed continued out the door, and he was gone.

John watched him go out the door, and he stood there for a couple of minutes, and Ed’s words finally sank in. *More like those.* John realized that he had been in the presence of a real-life hero. Sadly, an unsung hero.

Thank you for your interest in this book. I am a Christian writer, a retired old farmer, husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. I hope you enjoy my books. May God Bless.

T. A. Cline

My Books on Amazon

Reed's Point

Reed's Point is an intriguing blend of Christian fiction, weaving mystery, romance, faith, forgiveness, and redemption. The themes explored are truly captivating, offering a profound journey of personal growth and hope. A heartfelt story where broken love, buried secrets, and unwavering faith converge in a small town shaped by tradition and brotherly love.

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The First Snowflake

A child's faith can save a family if they only believe. Waiting for the first snowflake can seem like an eternity for ten-year-old Andy.

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