

# Heavens to *Louie*

Whoever said that living  
in a small town was boring?...

DON BEMIS

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**E**verybody knows Louie....

Most would rather not. When he gets another bright idea, watch out! Something is about to go wrong. Not just a *little* wrong...a *lot* wrong. But at least people will have something exciting to discuss over coffee at Floyd's Fountain or whisper about at church.

No one would ever imagine that anything could go right when Louie is around. However, there is more to him than you might expect.

So step right in. Turn the page. Meet Louie....

*Louie*

**AND**

**THE ANGEL**

Winter was twenty minutes old. It arrived on its own schedule and paid no heed to the date the calendar had assigned. Fall clung desperately to tree branches with dry, leafy fingers, but Winter pulled it away and flung it shrieking out of town.

Bob wished Winter had waited at least a few more hours as he trudged homeward down the sidewalk. It had been a sunny fall morning when he stepped into Floyd's Fountain for lunch, but a gray winter afternoon met him when he stepped out. Fall's leaves and Winter's snow chased each other through the town park. Blue-faced ice skaters greeted their favorite season with freezing tears of joy. To their left, the community Christmas tree tried on a fluffy white coat but changed its mind and undressed in a gust of wind. A church steeple to the right pointed upward like a frozen finger. From a construction site behind the park, a black crane proudly towered above both the tree and the steeple. "You're not so great," Winter said, and it hid the crane behind a snow flurry.

The church lawn was undergoing its own metamorphosis. Folding chairs and chorus risers had sprouted like toadstools in the snow for that evening's Christmas pageant. Bob pitied the people who would have to sit on them. Part of the lawn had been staked off for a live display. There was still plenty of room for spectators, particularly if the weather kept many people home.

"Hey, Bob, wanna be in the Christmas pageant?"

Bob whirled around. There was Louie, with a dangerous sparkle in his eye. Louie was famous for dumb moves. It explained why he was usually between jobs.

"You crazy?" Bob replied. "Preach said we couldn't because of the Thanksgiving dinner thing."

"Aw, he was just sore then. I mean, we got free turkeys for the whole church. How was I to know the game warden's family wuz members?"

"Well, you hadn't been coming that long, I guess. But the

pageant's already all planned."

Louie winked. "No problemo. We'll just add a little to it. I've been reading about that first Christmas and we can make the whole show a lot more real."

That was a surprise. Louie was plenty bright, but he only read things that really interested him. *Church might be making a difference after all*, Bob thought. "Well, maybe. What do I do?"

"Church back door. Tonight. Six o'clock." Louie sauntered on.



The wind abated after it had blown the clouds away. It might as well have blown the sun away. The cold, clear sky was dark by six o'clock. Even in the absence of clouds, a few snowflakes floated down. They seemed to have traveled light-years through icy space from frozen stars just to land on Bob, who huddled by the locked back door of the church. No Louie.

"*Pssst*. Hey Bob, over here!" Louie was peeping out a basement window.

Bob jumped. "What're you doing in there?"

"The door was locked. C'mon in."

"Through the *window*? How'd you get in?"

"Never mind. Just hurry. We don't have much time."

Bob crawled uncertainly inward. Louie closed the window and motioned with a flashlight for Bob to follow.

"Why don't you just turn on the lights, Louie?"

"Shhh! This is supposed to be a surprise. The choir's practicing upstairs, and the shepherds are getting dressed in the men's room."

He led Bob through the dark basement and up the front stairwell. He stopped at the top and peered down the hall. It was empty and all the doors were closed, but they could hear the choir singing the "Hallelujah Chorus." After it ended, they heard the booming voice of Mr. Thrash and the higher voice of Miss Phelps complaining that their choir robes were missing.

“Don’t worry about it,” said the director. “Nobody’ll notice. The robes are white. So are your shirts.”

“But it’s cold! We’ll freeze!”

“They won’t notice anyway. The robes have blue trim.”

Louie hustled to a door that Bob had never seen opened, and quietly rapped on it.

The door cracked open. There was Harold. Not a good sign. Harold would go along with anything Louie did.

Louie pushed Bob through the door, and Harold closed it. Bob realized where they were. “This is the bell tower! We shouldn’t be in here!” he quailed.

“Quiet! Somebody’ll hear you!” Louie hissed, pushing Bob up the stairs.

“But I don’t like heights!” Bob hissed back.

“You won’t be up here long,” Harold whispered as they reached a landing by a tall open window about four stories above the ground.

Bob stared out. Even though he was scared, he had to admit to himself that it was quite a sight. Stars and snowflakes sparkled together in the sky. The big Christmas tree twinkled beyond the ice rink, where a hockey game was in progress. A crowd was assembling between the rink and the church. Many people had children, and some had dogs. Shepherds in bathrobes watched live sheep wandering around the staked-off area.

The choir filed onto the risers. Even from his lofty vantage point, Bob could hear the singers gasp when they sat on the frozen chairs. Mr. Thrash appeared to be shivering. Miss Phelps was turning blue. The director did not seem concerned. He wore a down coat beneath his robe.

Bob looked upward and worried anew. A steel cable stretched from the window to the boom of the construction crane. Above his head, the crane’s hook was suspended between the cable and a long nylon rope. The rope was as taut as a bowstring, and its middle was wrapped around the stair rail. “What’s *that* doing here?” he asked.

“I put it there,” said Louie proudly. “I swung the crane around so it’d be over the show. That rope’s called a tagline.

Harold and I used it to pull the hook through the window. Boy, it was hard to pull that far sideways! It was all we could do to get it in here.”

“But how’d you run the crane? I thought the contractor fired you.”

“That was for forgetting to empty the cement truck, not because I can’t drive a crane.” Louie pulled something out of his pocket. “I’m good with cranes. And I still have a key for it.”

Bob shook his head. “Stealing a crane for a church program. That doesn’t sound quite right.” Then he started. “But *why*? What are you *doing*?”

Harold was buckling a harness around Bob. “Don’t worry. This is my mountain-climbing rig. There’s no way you can fall out of it.” He snapped on a rope and slipped it over the crane hook.

“Are you crazy?” Bob yelled. “What if the thing unties?”

Louie went to work with the rope. “I’m good with knots. No way will this baby come off. When they get to the part where the angel shows up, you’ll swing right over their heads. That’s when they turn the spotlight on the heavenly host—meaning the choir. And you.” Louie slipped Mr. Thrash’s missing robe over Bob and the harness.

Down below, the pageant had begun. The preacher was reading about shepherds in the field. Up above, Bob was trying to untie the rope clipped to his back.

Louie stepped back, admired his work, and shivered. “Man, is it cold up here!” he said and wrapped Miss Phelps’ robe around himself.

“What about me?” Harold asked. “I’m cold too!”

“You shoulda snatched another robe.”

*Twang!* The tagline snapped from the stair rail. The hook swung out the window. So did Bob.

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,” read the preacher. The spotlight flashed on. “And the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.”

“*AAAAAH!*” screamed Bob as he swung over their heads.

“Mommy! Mommy! It’s a big white bat!” squealed a child.

“Hush, dear, it’s only an angel,” said her mother.

The startled preacher decided to continue. Meanwhile, the whirling tagline hit a sheep. The flock stampeded. Dogs tore from their owners and chased the sheep. Bob screamed over the ice rink, crashed into the Christmas tree, and swung back. The whipping tagline snarled the Christmas lights. There was a shower of sparks, and the swaying tree went dark.

“Fear not,” read the preacher over the turmoil.

“AAAAAH!” screamed Bob as he sailed above the crowd.

“Mommy! Mommy! The bat is flying backward!” squealed the child.

“Hush, baby, it’s an angel,” said the mother.

The preacher read faster and louder. Bob sailed almost back into the bell tower. The tagline flipped through the window. Louie grabbed it, pulled, and yelled. “Harold! Help!”

But Harold had gone downstairs to hunt for a robe. Bob and the hook swung back outward.

Louie tripped.

The preacher hurried on. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying...”

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” the choir sang a little raggedly.

“AAAAH!”

“AAAAH!”

...screamed Bob and Louie as they flew over.

“Mommy! Mommy! The bat caught something!” the child squealed.

“No, dear, that’s two angels,” said her mother.

“Oh.”

The tagline came apart over the ice rink. Louie hit at an angle and slid into the far net. The goalie dove out of the way. The referee blew his whistle.

“Mommy! Mommy! That angel fell!”

“Yes, dear.”

Two boys had watched the whole scene, their eyes arcing back and forth. “Oh wow. The first angel’s getting sick!”

“Cool!” said the other one.

The preacher gave up.

Bob swung like a pendulum for thirty minutes until the fire department ladder truck arrived. It had taken a while for 9-1-1 to believe the call. Louie was right about knots, though. The firefighters could not untie Bob from the hook, and fifteen more minutes elapsed while they cut him free. He was nearly frozen.



The next morning, Bob was still in the hospital for observation. He was bruised all over, and his face was raw from the collision with the tree. Louie was in the next bed with a broken arm and a concussion. Harold was warm, healthy, and nowhere to be found.

The preacher came in.

“Oh, no,” Louie groaned and turned to the wall. “I’m sorry, Preach. Don’t kill me.”

Preach sat down. “Louie, I wanted to last night. The show was wrecked. Miss Phelps has frostbite. Mr. Thrash is moving to Florida. *Somebody* owes the town for six strings of Christmas lights. Two dogs and a sheep are missing. The belfry stair rail was pulled loose. Bob, you were on national TV.”

“Even when I—?”

“Especially then. I was so mad I could hardly pray. But as soon as I started to pray, I began to laugh. I laughed so hard I cried. I think God was laughing too.”

“At me,” moaned Louie.

“At all of us,” said the preacher....

For more of the story,  
read on...

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## About the Author



**DON BEMIS** set out to be a city planner but has worked in engineering nearly all of his adult life. He finally obtained time and incentive to write when his employer downsized. Now he is a technical consultant. He also is a long-time adult Sunday school teacher and enjoys writing stories and Bible lessons. He plays clarinet in the community band and at church, and has spoken at jail musical services.

*Heavens to Louie* is Don Bemis' first published story. It originated as a crazy dream around Thanksgiving 2005. He was in an angel costume, swinging from a rope during a Christmas pageant, and got wrapped around a tree. The next day he wrote Chapter 1 as a short story. His wife read it and said, "Okay, now turn it into a book."

"The inspiration for Louie's painting came from my dad and Uncle Fred," Don says. "Uncle Fred was an artist. He told my dad he'd like to paint something for him. He was probably imagining a beautiful woodland scene or mountains or something like that. But Dad enjoyed putting a spin on things. He had visited the La Brea Tar Pits in the forties or so, and *National Geographic* had done an article on them. So Dad told Uncle Fred to do a Tar Pits painting. Uncle Fred did it, but he hated every minute of it. Mom wouldn't hang it in the house. We kids always thought it was an adventure when we could talk Dad into showing it to us." Don laughs. "Now our son Nathan paints. Our daughter, Sharon, a missionary in Romania, has asked him to send her a picture. I'm almost afraid to imagine what she'll get...knowing the family history!"

Don was born in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and graduated with a BS in geography from New Mexico State University. More important than the degree, he and his wife, Lois, met and were married while in college. They have five adult children and live in South Haven, Michigan, when they aren't off on a consulting trip.

For more information on Don Bemis:

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