



THROUGH THE EYES OF OUR STUDENT REPORTER

Lucky the hamster survives storm drain adventure after daring rescue by city employee

David Paladini

Hello! Welcome to my cage, "Lucky's Desert Paradise." It's nice and warm in here, and now that you're here I can tell you my story. I myself am surprised I'm not dead!

Oh, I'm sorry, we haven't been introduced. I'm Lucky the hamster. Right now, I'm sitting in Ken Merkle's office at the city's Water Quality Control Facility. This is where I spend most of my time nowadays. Well anyway, back to my adventure...

A couple of months ago I couldn't have dreamed up where I am now. Basically I thought it was all over. I was sitting in the deep, dark depths of a rockwell storm drain. All alone. I was scared stiff and, at night, I would sit up and wonder what was going to happen to me. Sometimes I would hear a ton of water coming down the gutter to pour down on me and possible end my life! Fortunately that didn't happen.

Anyway, the best that I can figure (it's all still kind of blurry) is that I was chased by a cat, until I found refuge in a hole in the gutter which turned out to be a storm drain. You might remember from David Paladini's article on storm drains that water, hamsters and other small objects flow down into the catch basin, which is located in the gutter. From there the water flows through a pipe on the wall of the catch basin and



ends up in the core pipe. This was quite a long trip for me and I was thoroughly exhausted by the time I was in the core pipe under the sidewalk. I realized that the odds were 99% against me! I was doomed!

Then from the heart of that rockwell storm drain I saw the light! Literally. From the hole of the storm drain cover above I saw the silhouette of the head and shoulders of Ken Merkle, a wonderful man who I have come to love over these last months. Anyway, I was still groggy from being so tired that I even pinched myself to see if I was dreaming.

Suddenly I felt a prodding and heard a chuckle. It wasn't a mean chuckle. It was one of those chuckles that says, "Oh boy. This is incredible! How in the world did you get in here little guy?" I was so excited.

I later heard Ken referring to the moment: "Well," he

would say, "I was out checking rockwell drains for location evaluation, to see if they needed to be cleaned or rejuvenated. I looked in and saw a little round dirty ball of fur." (I had never in my life thought I was a dirty ball of fur but I realized now what I must have looked like).

Now I am very grateful to Ken for not leaving me there. I mean, some people would have said, "He'll probably bite me!" But Ken tells people that he could tell I wasn't vicious. At least I still had some dignity left.

Ken carefully reached down with a rake and scooped me out. That was another adventure - being lifted four to five feet, riding on a rake! Ken placed me in a bucket and took me home to get all cleaned up so I could make a great first impression on everyone back at the office.

So far as I can tell, I have made a good impression down here. The secretaries hold me and say nice things to me. In fact one of them named Christine said, "She's the nicest little hamster I have ever seen!" Isn't that sweet?

During the week I stay here at the office and guard the place. But on the weekends I go home with Ken. Sometimes when Ken is cleaning out my cage he puts me in my orange ball and I get to run around on the floor. Sometimes Ken's little 4-year old son plays down on the floor with me. It's a lot of fun to watch him chase me around the house.

So, that's my story. I am now the mascot of the Water Quality Control Facility and the happiest, most spoiled hamster in Modesto -- maybe, I'm even the most famous. I really am thankful for all everyone has done for me!

The End

