**Penpal**

*by Chad Garcia*

About a month ago I moved into a new house in a small suburb of California. It was nice, rather upscale for its price. It even had a pool.

One day when I went to get the mail, I found a strange letter addressed to my house. It seemed plain, a standard 4” x 8” white letter. Oddly, though, there was no return address.

Walking inside, I scrutinized it thoroughly. When I opened it, a paper from inside fell out gracefully and landed on the table.

“Hello, who are you? Please write back.”

I laughed. Looking at the scrawling that could hardly be described as writing, I assumed it was some kid in the neighborhood playing a practical joke. I decided I would humor him or her. Taking the paper, I wrote a response on the back of the letter.

“Hi, I’m John, and I’m an adult who works at the local Social Security bureau. May I ask your name?”

I slipped the letter back into the envelope and tucked it away into the mail box again.

The next day I heard the mail man arrive. Walking out to the box, I found the usual bills, statements and junk mail. But among them was another crisp white letter.

When I opened it, there was the same paper, neatly folded into thirds.

“Hello, John. My name is Chris, and this is my street. I used to have a cat, and I like writing. How old are you? Please write back.”

I responded as any adult would to accommodate a small child.

“Hi, Chris. What happened to your cat? I’m about 33 years old. Could I ask why you’re writing to me?”

Again, I threw the letter back into the box, leaving the red flag up.

The next day, I went to fetch the morning paper. But this time the red flag was down. I walked up to the box and looked inside. There, by itself, was yet another white envelope. “It’s too early!” I thought to myself. “The mail man isn’t even making his rounds yet!”

“Hello, John. My cat died in our swimming pool. It’s made me very sad. I’m writing to you to ask why you are living in my house. Please write back.”

Inside the house, I quickly composed a response. The kid’s prank was beginning to weigh on my nerves.

“Hi, Chris. What do you mean your house? Did you live here at one time and move?”

I placed the response letter in the box and began to walk away. That’s when I heard a loud metallic thud.

My blood went cold. Inside the mail box laid another white letter. I picked it up, opened it, and read its contents.

“Hello, John. No, I still live here. How long will you be staying? Please write back.”