



Never Turn Your Back on an Angus Cow: My Life as a Country Vet

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The star of *The Incredible Dr. Pol* shares his amusing, and often poignant, tales from his four decades as a vet in rural Michigan.

Dr. Jan Pol is not your typical veterinarian. Born and raised the in Netherlands on a dairy farm, he is the star of Nat Geo Wild's hit show *The Incredible Dr. Pol* and has been treating animals in rural Michigan since the 1970s. Dr. Pol's more than 20,000 patients have ranged from white mice to 2600-pound horses and everything in between.

From the time he was twelve years old and helped deliver a litter of piglets on his family's farm to the incredible moments captured on his hit TV show, Dr. Pol has amassed a wealth of stories of what it's like caring for this menagerie of animals. He shares his own story of growing up surrounded by animals, training to be a vet in the Netherlands, and moving to Michigan to open his first practice in a pre fab house. He has established himself as an empathetic yet no-nonsense vet who isn't afraid to make the difficult decisions in order to do what's best for his patients—and their hard-working owners. A sick pet can bring heartache, but a sick cow or horse could threaten the very livelihood of a farmer whose modest profits are dependent on healthy livestock.

Reminiscent of the classic books of James Herriot, *Never Turn Your Back on an Angus Cow* is a charming, fascinating, and funny memoir that will delight animal lovers everywhere.

Never Turn Your Back on an Angus Cow: My Life as a Country Vet Details

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Karen GoatKeeper says

Being a livestock owner I could relate to so many of the things Jan Pol wrote about. It made me regret having no television to see his program.

The book has an easy pace. It is not for the faint of heart as it deals with livestock realities, good and bad. I've had to pull a calf. Luckily it was easy, no adjustments needed and the cow was a pet. I've pulled several goat kids, some easy and some hard. He is so right that it is special every time to hold that newborn still wet and shaky as it finds itself in a new world.

At times Pol seems close to adolescence. Sticking a hand up inside an animal is often necessary. But sometimes he seemed to be egging on a ninth grade class about it.

Saying good bye to an animal I've had for years is not easy. His section on euthanasia was realistic.

I did not always agree with his opinions. At times he seemed almost naive about people. But these times only made me look more closely at my own opinions and attitudes.

The book did make me admire even more those dedicated knowledgeable veterinarians I've known and the work they do every day. It's definitely not the career for me.

That said, the book was interesting and well worth the time for me to listen to it.

Jeanne says

A charming book about being a veterinarian. The stories are folksy and informative. I never knew that Great Danes make excellent and willing blood donors for dogs. I've never seen the Nat Geo Wild show about the author's practice, but plan to look it up on the Internet.

Nancy says

Discovered Dr. Jan Pol's TV show earlier this year and have enjoyed watching it ever since. Got the book to learn more about the Pol family. This book was very good, humorous, and interesting. First half of the book tells the story of Dr. Pol, how he and Diane met and married; his family, and the beginning of his practice as a veterinarian. The last half is of things experienced in the practice and most can be seen on the television show - but still interesting.

If you like the James Harriot books you will enjoy this one. Dr. Pol is not as humorous but there are sections that made me laugh out loud.

Sophia says

The book Never Turn Your Back on an Angus Cow: My Life as a Country Vet is a book about a veterinarian in Weidman Michigan. His name is Dr. Jan Pol. Dr. Pol has a television show on Nat Geo Wild. He has

loved animals his whole life.

This book took me a while to read, but I could not get my nose out of it. This is a great book to read if you want to become a veterinarian. Dr. Pol uses old school techniques in his practice. I find his ways very interesting and they seem to be very useful.

Lizzy says

Anyone familiar with veterinary medicine know that there's some controversy regarding Dr. Pol's reality show (see here: <http://veterinarynews.dvm360.com/dvm/...>). I've yet to watch it, but apparently he practices veterinary medicine in a more traditional manner, which some critics argue is substandard care. I can sort of understand where he's coming from, as this book does shed light into his reasons for his sort of medicine and his background does make his approach seem more valid.

However, I do have a problem with some of the things he says in this book. There's a part where he criticizes small animal vets saying there are a "few" who "shame people into spending money for tests and treatments they don't want or can't afford - sometimes it's a sad outcome." Again, one of the criticisms of Dr. Pol is by his willingness to provide lower quality medical care, he cheapens everyone else who provides higher level care. People watch his show will want the cheap, quick and easy way, which doesn't mean better results. At the practices I've worked for, I've never met a vet who asked for tests and treatments that weren't purposeful - they were to diagnose an issue in order to treat it properly. His statement will undoubtedly only further the idea so many pet owners have that veterinarians are out there to scam naive clients out of their money for bogus tests and treatments, when in reality, veterinary medicine is advancing and thus getting more complicated. And, duh, there will be sad outcomes! A human goes to a doctor and finds out he has cancer. He gets treatment to increase his lifespan slightly, but ultimately dies. The other problem is that the owners "don't want or can't afford" these things. If one really wants to help animals, as Dr. Pol claims to want to do, one must be willing to provide them with medical treatments. Not wanting to is a ridiculous excuse. Not being able to afford the treatment can be excused, particularly for huge, unexpected medical problems, but pet owners should know what they're getting into, and recognize if they have enough money to properly address their pet's veterinary needs.

Additionally, the book is described as "reminiscent of the classic books of James Herriot," as every general audience life-of-a-vet book is marketed as. This book does NOT remind me of James Herriot. The writing is sloppy and sounds more like a transcript of his tv show than a well-written book. Full of "oh my goshes" and sentences beginning with "buts" and "ands," it would work a lot better in that format. There are way too many of these guys ";;" and while I understand he's not a native speaker, some serious editing would've helped. It's way too informal, with none of the magic or charm of James Herriot or other veterinary authors.

To be fair, there are some interesting insights into his life and what it was like becoming a veterinarian in Europe

Some of the faults of the book can be excused by the fact he is an older gentleman, and does see a lot of food animal cases in a seemingly more rural setting. He does seem like a really nice guy, and the book is definitely entertaining, with plenty of funny or interesting stories. He obviously cares a lot about animals.

Another link, about his controversial actions, including specific offenses on his show and some information about his negligence (as found by the Michigan veterinary board): <http://www.petsadviser.com/vet/dr-pol...>

Tina says

This book has its' interesting and witty moments, but it meanders all over the place. There are some good tidbits for sure. However, if you are looking for a vet story as beautifully written as one by James Herriot, you will be let down. This book feels like a marketing push by the Dr. Pol television shows producers. I bet this guy is a heck of a vet, but writing a memoir is probably not in his wheelhouse.

Star rating: 2.5. I'd rather watch Dr. Pol's show rather than read his book.

Annemieke / A Dance with Books says

The Incredible Dr. Pol is a show I've watched a lot of. I found it very interesting to see a Dutch veterinarian in America. You can still hear it in his accent, and even some of the things he does and says.

So when I heard he had a book out and had the opportunity to get it, I did. I'm not quite sure what I was expecting from this book, but I guess I was expecting more details about his past as a vet and a addition to the tv show. But I don't feel that the book is quite like that. Mostly it just feels like a string of recollected memories that have little structure throughout the book.

He does start off with his study in the Netherlands, but he jumps forward and backwards in time very easily. I would have preferred a more in depth look in his study time, moving to America and the cultural changes, and his start up time as a practising veterinarian. We do hear about this in the tv show and the special, but I would have liked to have read more about that. I did appreciate the last chapter that was more focused on the creation of the show.

Talking about chapters, this book has 8 chapters with a good 300 pages. Some of these chapters felt way too long.

Mostly you get a lot of stories about things that happened with animals which is fun, but a lot are either ones we have heard about already or those that were actually on the show.

Regardless of these things I did enjoy reading this book, and if you enjoy the tv show you are likely to enjoy this book as well.

Charlene says

Wonderful and entertaining. Love the photo section in the back of the book.

Liralen says

Pol is not the sort of vet you took your puppy to as a kid. He's a farm vet, focused not only on bigger animals but also on the farmer's bottom line. He clearly loves and respects animals, and loves that he gets to work with them day in and day out, but he's also a realist. Will saving -- or trying to save -- this cow's life be beneficial to the success of the farm, or would it be better to send her to slaughter? But he's also clear about his focus on quality of life; saving a horse from slaughter doesn't necessarily do the horse any favours if, say, it's severely arthritic.

This is story after interesting story -- not a lot of through narrative, and not a lot of time to catch your breath, but tales galore. Honestly, if I ever needed a reminder that I'm happy I'm not a vet -- which, really, I didn't -- this would be it, but that doesn't keep me from *reading* about veterinary work. I passed my copy on to my s.o., who (currently about halfway through it) had a similar reaction to mine -- yikes, to some of the stories, and wow, he has a lot of stories to tell. They're good stories, and I bet he's charismatic as hell on television, but more structure here would have been nice.

Anyway, I haven't watched Pol's television show -- and given that I don't own a television, I'm not likely to -- but he comes across here as relaxed, down-to-earth, always practical. I would have loved some facts and figures (though I'm not entirely sure where they would have fit in) -- he talks a fair amount about birthing dead cows; how frequent is that, relative to birthing live cows? How many calls does he go on in an average week? Proportionally, how much of his business is small animals? So -- interesting read; stuff duly learned; plenty of questions.

I received a free copy of this book via a Goodreads giveaway.

Jean says

I have never watched the television show "The Incredible Dr. Pol" on the National Geographic Channel. Until I read this book, I had never heard of Dr. Pol. Jan Pol was born and educated in the Netherlands. He has been a veterinarian in Michigan since the 1970s.

The book is well written and tells the story of his life as a large animal vet. Pol does a good job describing what the life of a vet is like and how it has changed since the 1970s. He states there are less small farms now than in the 70s. Therefore, he does more small animal vs large animal veterinary work now.

I found the book an enjoyable read and learned what it was like being a large animal vet. He told some great stories about cows and horses. There is some repetition in the book that the editors should have removed. The quality of writing does not match that of James Herriot, but it is highly readable.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is almost nine hours. Tom Perkins does a great job narrating the book. Perkins is an award-winning audio-engineer for over forty years. Now also narrating audiobooks.

Jason Koivu says

This ain't no *All Creatures Great and Small*, but it ain't bad neither!

Jan Pol is a veterinarian practicing in Michigan and the star of a reality show on Nat Geo Wild. In fact, it's the channel's most popular show.

Never Turn Your Back on an Angus Cow is Pol's cash-in-on-popularity book. I don't blame him! I don't think he even wanted to write it, but when the people want it, you do what you got to do.

It's apparent that writing isn't Pol's number one strength. He's an immigrant from the Netherlands, so English isn't his first language. Plus, he's a doctor, damn it, not an author! There are occasional awkward phrasings and a few repetitions. However, all in all, it's a good effort.

Any time a vet writes a book about his/her adventures in large animal practice, it's going to be compared with James Herriot's beloved work. It just is. Pol is no Herriot. He isn't trying to be. Herriot was a grand storyteller, who added fictional flourishes to his factual narrative. With this book, Pol just dishes out case after case without embellishment or much flair. Certainly he is a character to rival those found in the Herriot books, but he is a 100% real person and that comes through in his writing.

Pol has come under scrutiny since his show began airing. Seems some viewers don't like the way he's handled some of his cases. That gets addressed in the book and it's nice to hear his side of the story.

Warts and all, this is an enjoyable story that I recommend to anyone with an interest in animals.

Ryan Dejonghe says

I may have never seen his show, but after reading this book I feel like I know and love Dr. Pol. My co-worker saw me reading this and asked, "Is that the guy that sticks his arm up a cow's butt?" Before finishing the first chapter, I could reply, "Yes. Yes it is." Or, as the awesome Dr. Pol writes, "for many people their careers as a vet begin the day they stick their hands inside an animal's butt for the first time." This all began in the Netherlands, gloveless, and green armed.

I'd imagine that Dr. Pol is mesmerizing to watch. To his credit, David Fisher did an excellent job of organizing all Pol's stories into interesting categories to capture this same feeling. He groups stories together such as early beginnings of his education, to his own practice, etc. From there, you'll go all over the place—and that's totally cool. One minute Pol will be talking about scaring his wife with a snake for a \$20 bet to castrating two-hundred pound pigs. And it's all great reading.

Speaking of Pol's wife, Dianne, of the early courtship, "How could anybody not find a woman who played tag with her pet duck attractive?" He's so cute, isn't he?

As he writes, Pol says, "until they start inventing new animals, I think I can say there isn't a type of animal I

haven't looked in the eyes and wondered how it was feeling." From there, and throughout the book, Pol talks about all kinds of animals: including skunks, porcupines, and even an alligator. Oh, and the wildest animal of all: humans.

Pol's integrity shines through: "Be honest with your clients. That was always first. Work hard, and if you don't know what the problem is, don't be afraid to admit it." Pol has a life experience unparalleled to many, which makes him so darn interesting. From hiding cows from the Nazis (yeah, those Nazis) to filming the Amish: he brings it out so well.

"I became a vet because it was the only thing I ever wanted to do." Thankfully his dad sold that cow for his son's first microscope: as his clients and as many watchers of his show know, and now the many readers of his book, the world is a better place because of Dr. Pol.

Thanks Gotham Books for sending me this book to review. It was a pleasure.

Anna says

A fun book, but it moves a bit too quickly, it would have been more enjoyable if we had time to really get to know some of the people and animals. Something that James Herriot excelled at; on the other hand every word of these stories is true which I understand cannot be said for Herriot.

Diana says

Like most people, I first heard about Dr. Pol on his Nat Geo Wild show, and I loved it from the first viewing. So as soon as I saw he was releasing a book, I put it on request at the library. This book gives some more background on his life and why he became a vet. I listened to the audiobook and it was really well done.

Mlpmom (Book Reviewer) says

I have to be honest, this isn't a book I would have normally picked up on my own and having never watched the main character's show before, I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into when I picked this up.

I can say this turned out to be a delightful and even fun and sometimes funny and informative read all about the life of Dr. Jan Pol.

I feel like after reading this not only do I understand a bit more about the life of a vet, but I feel like I actually know Dr. Pol as well.

This really was quite the read and even though it wasn't something I normally read, I'm glad that I picked it up and gave it a go.

A Copy of this was provided by the Publishers in exchange for an honest review.

