



Bespotted: My Family's Love Affair with Thirty-Eight Dalmatians

Linda Gray Sexton

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The Sexton family's long love affair with the Dalmatian began in Linda's childhood. There, on a snowy morning in the family home just outside Boston, Linda heard a whimpering coming from the basement. She discovered their first family dog giving birth to a litter. Witnessing the intimate act of birth had a profound effect on the family. Her mother, Anne, used the experience to complete the poem "Live," part of her third collection, titled *Live or Die*, which would be awarded a Pulitzer Prize. For Linda, the boundless joy of both breed and breeding triggered in her a lifelong love of Dalmatians. All told, thirty-eight Dalmatians will move through her life: the ones that cheer and support her through difficulty, divorce, and depression; the ones that stay with her as she enters the world of professional breeding and showing of Dals; and, of course, the one true dog of her heart, Gulliver, her most stalwart of canine champions.

Bespotted is a page-turning and compelling look at the unique place dogs occupy in our lives. It captures another piece of this literary family's history, taps into the curious and fascinating world of dog showing/dog fancy. *Bespotted* is an upbeat and commercial memoir by one of the most critically acclaimed memoirists of our time.

Bespotted: My Family's Love Affair with Thirty-Eight Dalmatians Details

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From Reader Review Bspotted: My Family's Love Affair with Thirty-Eight Dalmatians for online ebook

Christine Fay says

This book is a memoir chronicling the life of the author and how she battled through her depression with the help of a faithful Dalmation named Gulliver. It is a lighthearted read that provided me with much information on how dogs can indeed help a person overcome their depression and give them a reason for living when life is becoming hard for them to bear. Linda got super-involved with the AKC breeding program and the world of show dogs. This provided her with stability when her home life was falling apart. The story is a story of hope, challenge and ultimate triumph over inherited depression (through her mother, Anne Sexton) and the healing power of canine friends. An excellent read for the dog lover!

Anne says

This book evoked some strong feelings in me, both positive and negative. In general, it was well-written. Ms. Sexton is a capable, though not especially gifted, writer.

I breed and show pedigreed cats, and am very familiar with the world of pedigreed show dogs as well. For this reason, I was particularly excited to start this book. I imagine that the sections of the book describing some of the travails of showing and breeding would be of limited interest to the garden variety dog or cat owner. This is a memoir of how dogs, specifically Dalmatians, shaped Ms. Sexton's life. And when it's good, it's very good, but when it's bad, it's horrid.

Ms. Sexton's love for Dalmatians began in her childhood, when her parents acquired a Dalmatian bitch, partly because Ms. Sexton's mother, the renowned poet Anne Sexton, had a best friend who owned a Dalmatian. Ms. Sexton's parents were negligent dog owners, allowing their dog to roam freely, with the predictable disastrous results. Ms. Sexton's mother had severe mental illness, and Ms. Sexton indicates that the Dalmatians (each acquired quickly following the previous one's death) helped her mother to face her demons.

As a young adult, Ms. Sexton thought about acquiring a dog of her own, but grad school, moving due to her husband's job choices, and the birth of her sons kept her busy. Ms. Sexton attempts to satisfy her need for a dog by getting two Abyssinian kittens, but they are apparently insufficient, as they are rarely mentioned after their acquisition. Ms. Sexton finally acquires a young adult Dalmatian from reputable breeders in northern California; Rhiannon is initially described as "show quality," but it turns out that her conformation faults preclude real success in the show ring. Ms. Sexton discovers a true bond with Rhiannon, and derives much pleasure from that bond as well as the success she has with Rhiannon as an obedience dog.

The problems in keeping dogs start to present themselves. Ms. Sexton breeds Rhiannon, keeping a bitch puppy (Tia) from her litter. As Tia matures, Rhiannon and Tia often fight, sometimes viciously, needing multiple veterinary visits to suture lacerations. Distraught, Ms. Sexton turns to a ... dog psychic! Huh? By this point, she is fairly well-acquainted with experienced Dalmatian breeders in the northern CA area. This is but one example of Ms. Sexton's confusing and irrational choices. After the psychic doesn't work out, Ms. Sexton consults a dog behaviorist, who is not much more helpful. At no point does she consult with other breeders. Ultimately, after a particularly savage fight between the two dogs, Ms. Sexton has both of them

euthanized. Another questionable decision.

Meanwhile, Ms. Sexton has yet another Dalmatian - Gulliver, who becomes her "heart dog" as she descends into mental illness. Ms. Sexton appears fragile and needy. Her marriage is, not surprisingly, falling apart. Ms. Sexton reveals that she suffers from bipolar disorder and casually mentions her numerous suicide attempts. Through it all, Gulliver is a loyal (sometimes her only) friend. Ms. Sexton shows Gulliver as a young dog with great success, but her mental problems preclude her from showing him regularly.

Perhaps Gulliver has some sympathy pains. He becomes neurotic, just like his mistress. He is aggressive toward other dogs, alarmingly so. Ms. Sexton begins a new romantic relationship. (It occurred to me more than once how any man could find her appealing, since her mental problems are so severe and pervasive.) In one part of the book, Ms. Sexton describes a near-calamity in which she had Gulliver on a Flexi-lead when he had a run-on with two smaller dogs. Anyone with a more than a smattering of dog knowledge knows that Flexi leads are contraindicated for a dog like Gulliver. Ms. Sexton really should know better, and her ignorance of these sorts of issues put her and others in danger.

Gulliver ultimately dies, at a relatively advanced age. Ms. Sexton is torn apart. I never found Gulliver to be the sort of dog I would want; in some ways, he was a Dalmatian version of "Marley and Me." Ms. Sexton, true to form, is excessive in her grieving, and describes it in great detail.

Ms. Sexton then acquires yet another Dalmatian (Breeze), one that is very successful in the conformation ring.

Ms. Sexton breeds Breeze, and Breeze's pregnancy has quite a few complications. One of the complications is that Ms. Sexton remains extremely neurotic. She does things during Breeze's gestation that the vast majority of breeders just don't do. The litter is ultimately born, the puppies are raised, and one by one, they are placed ... except for one, who remains behind.

All in all, I found this book to be reasonably entertaining, but I found Ms. Sexton to be self-absorbed, emotionally needy, and just plain crazy too much of the time.

Jill says

Bespotted is a must read for dog lovers. I love the way Linda Gray Sexton writes. Her love affair with Dalmatians could be a love affair with any dog, any breed--everyone who loves dogs can relate. Also, I love the journey; the learning curve we all been through with dog ownership, the quest for the perfect dog, until finally realizing all life has worth, has something to offer and is worth saving.

Jeanne Daly says

If you are a dog lover you'll love this book, if you've had Dalmatians in your life you won't be able to put it down.

Grace says

I feel bad for writing a poor review of any book, let alone something as deeply personal and visceral as this one surely was for Ms. Sexton. However, I really did not enjoy this book. I read some reviews that said this was negative, depressing, and didn't focus on the dogs very much. I tried to ignore those and give this a try, but sadly, those themes remained true for the entire book. I am a dalmatian lover, owner, and fancier, so I was so thrilled to read a memoir dedicated specifically to my spotted breed.

However, this book was very difficult to get through. I found it difficult to relate with the author, and the book was so depressing without much point than to share sadness. There was no unifying point or message or theme, and her memoir seemed to go back and forth between random storytelling with bursts of dog moments, to what felt like a journal entry. Her "cast of characters," so to speak, was thrown in assuming the reader would know these people, and it was frustrating to try to follow her friends and family without proper background.

I found this hard to relate to, difficult to read, and not very engaging. I empathize dearly with Ms. Sexton for her love of dalmatians and the struggles that come with losing our heart dogs. However, I do not recommend this book, as it was full of depressing stories that didn't serve much purpose, and I found the narrative hard to follow.

Joan Colby says

. In reading this book about Linda Gray Sexton's *Dalmations*, I was initially irritated by her propensity to blame others (such as her parents for letting their dogs run loose and get hit by cars, her irritation with the breeder who introduced her to dog showing, claiming that the woman had pawned off a dog on her as top quality, her infighting at dog shows, and finally that she put down her "beloved" females for fighting when anyone knows two females often fight for primacy and Sexton could have solved the problem by rehoming one of them instead of deciding they were just "aggressive", not to mention the execution of deaf Dalmation pups which she insists the Dalmation Society demands, though now that practice is controversial.)I felt more forgiving of Sexton on learning half-way through the book that she was diagnosed as bi-polar, had three suicide attempts, suffered from clinical depressions and that her husband left her (again, blaming, Sexton says "for another woman" not crediting that he might clearly have been exhausted by her obsessions and her lack of attention to his wishes—obtaining dogs without even telling him, involving herself so deeply in the world of dog showing that she rarely was home with him and their sons). In a way, this book is as much about Sexton's psychiatric problems, as it is about her dogs which she views as providers of emotional therapy. As Anne Sexton's daughter, Sexton certainly was traumatized by her mother's ongoing mental illness and her suicide when Sexton was 14. One feels a mixture of sympathy and frustration with Sexton who, it is plain, fails to comprehend much of her own neuroses. Ultimately, she finds a new husband who is supportive of her and her dogs and it looks like a more or less happy ending.

Laura Harrison says

I am not a huge fan of animal breeding or pet shows but the author clearly has a deep love and passion for dogs. I think they are pretty awesome too. *Bespotted* is an emotional and interesting memoir. Great for the dog lover but also just a terrific read. Pretty perfect book for gift giving as well.

Marianne says

It's no fault of the author's, but some of the very same aspects of her voice and perspective that made her previous memoir so compelling, made this one more of a struggle for me.

Amanda Morgan says

This very well-written book documents the dogs who have been a part of the author's life, and describes how each relationship was different. Undoubtedly this author is an expert on the dalmatian breed after owning so many, breeding them, and showing them, and she knows even though they can be rambunctious wanderers, they can also be extremely loving and loyal animals as well. My first pet was a dalmatian who loved nothing more than to get free and run across the very busy street we lived on when I was a child, so I was interested in hearing about dogs who had similar personalities as well as dalmatians that didn't feel the need to wander. The pictures included before each chapter are adorable, of course, and show that even though dalmatians all have spots, they definitely do not all look exactly the same. The author was very frank about her own emotional struggles and how having a specific dog would help when she was ailing. She also wrote a lot about the world of show dogs, which I knew very little about and found interesting. She also has bred several of her females in order to create more potential show dogs and also to sell to families as pets, and talks about this extensively as well. I actually learned quite a bit about several things by reading this book and I was also touched emotionally several times. I felt the author was completely authentic and I wish her nothing but the best after reading about her life. Thank you for the First Reads contest copy.

Rebecca McNutt says

Is *Bespotted* what *101 Dalmatians* would be in real-life? Well, the number of dogs is cut down but the story of a family who finds joy in dalmatians is still strikingly similar. Author Linda Sexton shares stories of the numerous dogs which have been in her life and the way these experiences shaped her admiration for the breed, as well as her personal life. Starting from the time Linda was a kid in Boston and she witnessed puppies being born for the first time, the story of the meaning of dalmatians for her and her family is one filled with humor, originality, love and a surprising amount of depth. Although this is largely an inspirational memoir to appeal to readers who love animals, it's also an important story about the interconnections of family and friends.

While *Bespotted* often repeats the same ideas and the dalmatian love theme can sometimes get a bit hokey after a while, it's obvious that the author has found a value in dalmatians and the way she shares her passion with readers is unforgettable. Reading it is a nostalgic experience and it could easily appeal to almost any reader. I wasn't expecting to like it at first, but it was definitely worth the read and I'll be looking for other books by Linda Sexton in the future.

Bernadett says

Bespotted tells the genuine memoir of Linda who's mother, Anne Sexton (who wrote wonderful fairy tales and poems (won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1967 for her book *Live or Die.*) battled with depression and how their very first dalmatian soothed her inner turmoil and helped her in the battle to stay alive.

The book introduces us, readers to the dalmatians smile and tenderness. It does touch on the subject of detecting deafness of the puppies and how litters are handled. It is a really well build book of time periods and it tells amazingly how a god senses the changes in people and how they act accordingly. how Gulliver's temper changed when the family itself was in a rut, and how he became mild and loving again when the emotions settled and Linda's own depression subsided.

I know firsthand how depression affects ones mentality and everyday life so her portrayal of the way she didn't want to step into the kitchen and cook and do simple day to day tasks others don't even thing about much because 'whats the point?' and how much an animals love can mean to someone.

I the fact that she honestly tells how her life got rebuild and that she could start to feel good in her skin again. I think this is an important work for those who seek the subject 'life with and after depression' and those who want to know more about depression (without casting the usual judgement of 'you are just lazy').

I myself, who had a fox terrier, a German shepherd and a dash hound, knew that I'll be a snotty mess while reading this but I never thought I would grow so fond of a dog I never even met such as Gulliver while I was reading. he really did have a huge presence and this way not only in Linda's life but anyone will fall in love with him who reads this.

I was so happy for the firework puppies and for how Linda was back on track and experiencing again that tremulous excitement, and the way she finally started to shift her focus from self explanatory to shine light on the litter.

the rainbow puppies are the most adorable thing to read about and i wish every breeder was as responsible and sensible as Linda and her kennel.

Lucille Day says

I didn't buy *Bespotted* out of an interest in dogs. No, my interest in this book stemmed from my interest in the memoir genre, having read Linda Gray Sexton's two previous memoirs, *Searching for Mercy Street* and *Half in Love*, and having found both books to be moving and insightful. From *Bespotted*, I learned a lot about the struggles and rewards of dog ownership, but what mattered most to me was how owning dogs fit into the story of a life: growing from childhood to adulthood, getting married, having children, suffering personal setbacks, and overcoming obstacles. The portrait of each dog was lovingly drawn, enabling me to see and understand how they provided the companionship, even therapy, Sexton needed at critical points in her life. The information on breeding and showing dogs was presented in a way that was intriguing and enlightening for someone who has never even owned a dog, let alone bred or shown them. *Bespotted* is a compelling, memorable book, and I hope that people will read it regardless of their interest in or familiarity

with dogs.

Catherine says

This review is from a book won through a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

Bespotted: my family's love affair with thirty-eight dalmations is author Linda Gray Sexton's memoir of her lifelong love affair with dalmations.

I expected to enjoy this book, because I am a dog lover and enjoy reading true stories about dogs. I didn't expect to experience the range of emotions that I did while reading this book. I learned about the inside world of purebred dog breeding and showing. I cried and laughed as I related to the author's experiences with her pets, especially her beloved Gulliver. The author also opens up and shares a great deal of her personal struggles and how she was able to face, and eventually overcome, them with the love of her dogs.

I recommend this book for any dog lover.

I also feel that readers who enjoy memoirs, whether or not they may be a dog lover, would enjoy this book.

Diana Raab says

This fast-paced and inspiring memoir is a glance at another side of the poet Anne Sexton's family life--a portrait of their deep connection and love for Dalmations. The dogs are portrayed as "therapy dogs" because more than once they pulled the author's mother out of a deep depression, providing joy and solace, while as Linda says, the family felt they were often "dancing with death." This compelling book offers a glimpse into the power of pet therapy, written by a master storyteller. The reader also gets a glimpse into the personality of the Dalmation, portrayed as an "always-hungry food thief." Finally, Linda shares the pain of losing a beloved dog and what that can do to a household. This book is a gem for anyone who has ever had a love affair with a four-legged animal. This page-turner is highly recommended for yourself and/or as a gift.

Elizabeth says

I won this book through goodreads First Reads. This review is not shaped by the fact that I received this book for free.

This may not have been the best time for me to try to read Bespotted. Bespotted is the memoir of Linda Sexton, who was an owner and lover of dalmatians, showing them in dog shows. As I was about 100 pages into the book, I learned my own beloved dog (a beagle) had cancer and is currently dealing with an array of medical issues. My family would do anything for our old pup. I realize not everyone is the same in what they would do or could do for their animals, but I had a hard time reading this book right now given my own emotions about the life of my dog and how close to death he really is everyday. My review easily may be colored by these emotions.

The book deals with the parade of dalmatians that Sexton had in her life, from the time she was a little girl to the time she was an older woman, having raised children of her own. Sexton introduces us to the world of

dog shows, where the spots matter - how the dog looks is key.

I had hoped that the book would go more into the world of dog shows though. Having no experience with them myself, except for what I've seen briefly on TV, it would have been more interesting if the book had focused on this world (I mean... Is it like Dance Moms but for dog lovers? Dog Moms? Hell, Lifetime - I think this could make a good TV show!) I felt like this book assumed I knew more than I did. Because of its breadth, it was also brief. I felt like this book did not delve deeply into emotions or events, but rather skimmed right along the surface, trying to cover as much as possible without really examining any of it. In my humble opinion, the book would have been better had it been more focused.

While this may be the book for dog lovers, Sexton is not the typical dog owner. She breeds them and shows them, an experience many pet owners don't have with their animals. She also makes many decisions with her pets that I can't help but be judgmental about. While some of that is directly related to the world of dog shows and AKC requirements, I couldn't help but think some of it felt like bad rearing of the animal.

sigh

Perhaps I shouldn't read memoirs. I'm always so judgmental about them and people's choices. I enjoy reading them, but it's hard to write a review when you're judging more than just the author's grammar, but also her personal choices along the way. Whereas with fiction, judging the story line is a lot less personal. Needless to say, I like reading about other people and their lives and choices.

In end, this is not a bad book. I would have liked it more had it been more detailed about dog shows. And I really do think Lifetime should start a TV show about it.
