



The \$60,000 Dog: My Life with Animals

Lauren Slater

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A stunning new book about the role of animals in our lives, by a popular and acclaimed writer

From the time she is nine years old, biking to the farmland outside her suburban home, where she discovers a disquieting world of sleeping cows and a “Private Way” full of the wondrous and creepy creatures of the wild—spiders, deer, moles, chipmunks, and foxes—Lauren Slater finds in animals a refuge from her troubled life. As she matures, her attraction to animals strengthens and grows more complex and compelling even as her family is falling to pieces around her. Slater spends a summer at horse camp, where she witnesses the alternating horrific and loving behavior of her instructor toward the animals in her charge and comes to question the bond that so often develops between females and their equines. Slater’s questions follow her to a foster family, her own parents no longer able to care for her. A pet raccoon, rescued from a hole in the wall, teaches her how to feel at home away from home. The two Shiba Inu puppies Slater adopts years later, against her husband’s will, grow increasingly important to her as she ages and her family begins to grow.

Slater’s husband is a born skeptic and possesses a sternly scientific view of animals as unconscious, primitive creatures, one who insists “that an animal’s worth is roughly equivalent to its edibility.” As one of her dogs, Lila, goes blind and the medical bills and monthly expenses begin to pour in, he calculates the financial burden of their canine family member and finds that Lila has cost them about \$60,000, not to mention the approximately 400 pounds of feces she has deposited in their yard. But when Benjamin begins to suffer from chronic pain, Lauren is convinced it is Lila’s resilience and the dog’s quick adaptation to her blindness that draws her husband out of his own misery and motivates him to try to adjust to his situation. Ben never becomes a true believer or a die-hard animal lover, but his story and the stories Lauren tells of her own bond with animals convince her that our connections with the furry, the four-legged, the exoskeleton-ed, or the winged may be just as priceless as our human relationships.

The \$60,000 Dog is Lauren Slater’s intimate manifesto on the unique, invaluable, and often essential contributions animals make to our lives. As a psychologist, a reporter, an amateur naturalist, and above all an enormously gifted writer, she draws us into the stories of her passion for animals that are so much more than pets. She describes her intense love for the animals in her life without apology and argues, finally, that the works of Darwin and other evolutionary biologists prove that, when it comes to worth, animals are equal, and in some senses even superior, to human beings.

From the Hardcover edition.

The \$60,000 Dog: My Life with Animals Details

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Shelley says

I tried. I really tried to like this book. I put it down any number of times hoping I'd like the next part better. Gritted my teeth and slogged through the multiple errors in the section about her horse experience. A horse's brain is the size of a walnut? (Wrong. Horse brains are typically the size of a large potato.) Then later in the book when she is supposedly a veterinary technician and works with an injured swan cygnet, she says it has a brain the size of a kiwi. Maybe where she's from swans are vastly larger and/or kiwis smaller than where I live, but it's this kind of stuff that irritates me when reading.

Marie Fouhey says

The subtitle of the book, My Life With Animals, made me think this was the type of book usually described as heartwarming, especially since the reviews said her writing was poetic. It must be the least heartwarming book ever written. The chapter in which she goes to horse riding camp includes a riding instructor who beats a horse so badly that his back is scarred. Her chapter on the wasp invasion of her house has her drinking the blood of a wasp she stepped on. I thought the poetic musings were more tedious than poetic. I will say that the book kept me reading to see what horrible thing would happen next.

Michelle says

Well I have to admit I mainly picked this book to read because of my love for animals of all kinds and especially because of my love for dogs. I don't know why but I was expecting a happy story revolving around the author's love for and life with animals but I was left feeling slightly disappointed as to how depressed the book actually made me feel in the end.

So much of it was just sad and very bleak and I really had to bribe myself to push on and continue reading to the end. There was also a lot of overly descriptive writing that did have a tendency to go a little overboard and drag on quite a bit. This also made it extremely hard to keep on reading without wanting to skip several pages ahead just to get to the point or see what was going to happen next.

There are some good points made in this book about animals not just being stupid creatures that are incapable of feelings like human beings which I admit I was pleased about as this is something that I have always tried to get across to friends and family who don't share the same love for animals that I do. I just felt like I was reading more an extract from a diary rather than being told a story which I wasn't really a big fan of.

I don't know what else to say except that I'm sure this book will appeal to a specific audience that love to read these types of stories, but unfortunately it just wasn't for me. I prefer to read happier books these days that allow me to escape from reality and feel good while I'm reading rather than read those that make me ponder on how bad things could really get in life. This probably sounds like I'm a bit blinded to some but it works for me.

Caylina says

First read winner.

I don't know, maybe it's just me but I don't understand all the negative reviews. If the book description and critic reviews were read before you started reading this book then you knew what you were in for. I don't think it's very fair to downgrade the book just because it wasn't what you expected because you may not have read the description. I thought this was a very interesting book and had some difficult parts to read in it because of the content. This is not your "everything's rainbows and glitter" animal book, it touches on some deep issues. So take that into consideration if you think this is going to be something like Marley & Me, because it's not. I liked the cover art as well and for what this book was clearly described at being about, I think it was pretty good. I would have maybe had a different title since the dog did come up so late in the book and there were other animals mentioned as well.

Amanda says

Boooooo. I don't think I have ever been so disappointed in a book. I always thought of "don't judge a book by its cover" as more of a "give ugly books a chance" thing but now I will remember that even a super cute cover can be on one of the worst books I have ever read. The writing was overly poetic for a memoir and too stream-of-consciousness to even have much of a plot. Also, some of her beliefs and decisions were upsetting to me. I only read the chapter about the shiba dogs and it was that bad. I would still give the cover five stars though for having such a cute puppy.

Kathleen Peloquin says

I really didn't like this book. It wasn't what I expected at all. It starts off really well and I liked her voice and her writing. However the \$60,000 dog doesn't show up until the last 1/4 of the book. And in between the good beginning and the interesting story about the dog the author really gets bogged down in trying to make all of these philosophical connections between people (and especially women) and their pets and what it all means blah, blah, blah blah. I skipped whole passages because I wasn't reading this book to learn something I was reading to be entertained by her story. I'd have to say skip this one.

therese says

Anyone who knows me knows how much I love books about animals. This was not the case with regard to this book. I can stand a certain amount of neuroticism and family dysfunction if a book is well written but I ended up bagging this book around page 65. It just went on endlessly about things that did not seem to have any relation to one another or that were heading in any direction such as toward the actual plot. I never figured out what the plot was but life is short and since I still didn't know why the title was "The \$60,000 Dog" by page 65 I decided I would probably have to live with that reality and move on.

Ryan says

Man, I don't understand the Goodreads hate directed at this book. I could hardly put it down. It's funny how much I love books about dogs, considering I'm not a dog person, but this would make an excellent companion piece to *Dog Years* by Mark Doty. Only one chapter is about Slater's dog, but it is heartrending, and anyone that has beloved pets can relate. Humans' relationship to animals is something I've become a lot more interested in over the past couple of years, and Slater makes some excellent points, and has some fascinating, but kind of wacky, insights about the symbiotic nature of that relationship. Nonetheless, anyone who reads this book and doesn't feel their heart squeezed by the essay about the swan getting its beak torn off by a turtle and her subsequent attempts to save the swan's life, and the chapter about the extreme lengths she goes to to provide her dog a happy old-age, has a cold soul, indeed. This is the 3rd or 4th book by her that I've read, and I have immensely enjoyed them all. They are all so different, and she seems to have had such a fascinating life. I recommend this to anyone who feels that extra connection to another non-human sentient being, and feels enriched by that relationship.

Kari Jean says

Painful. Took 2 years to force myself through it.

Rose says

This book was very interesting.

I especially love the sections devoted to the author's youth, and the beautiful way the author renders the scenes she writes about. Some of the words were so sharp and emotionally laden as to take my breath away.

It is interesting to me that as the author talks about her older self, I start to get more irritated or annoyed with her, to feel like her sensitivity is almost too sentimental, and aggravated that someone that sees such beauty is paralyzed by such fear.

I think this book has the potential to touch many of those who read it, especially those that like trippy and philosophical thought patterns described in detail from another's perspective. The author really does have a way with words if the reader is so inclined.

The author is also very opinionated one what different people's perspective of animals says about them, or how domesticated animals (specifically dogs) might have been part of human evolution. Some of it is backed up by things she has read from scientists or other people. Some of it seems a little less grounded in anything tangible.

This book probably will not appeal to hyper-logical types, much more to the Feeling Myers-Briggs types than the Thinking ones, more the Intuitives, than the Sensing types. I enjoyed it, but I can see where the author might be a little grating to others.

Jessica says

I won my copy from Goodreads Giveaways!

I really enjoyed this, but I have to caution people from being misled by the title. As intriguing as the title "The \$60,000 Dog" sounds, Slater's writing is far from centered around dogs, or any sort of in-depth analysis of the cost of "pets" on our society. That kind of article would be better suited for an interest magazine piece or research paper assignment at your local university. And the subtitle "My Life with Animals," although broad, does not truly convey what the reader is picking up when they delve into Slater's pages.

Slater's work is a new kind of autobiography. The kind that manages to convey events both through a child's eyes and with adult meaning and sensitivity. If I had to describe the book in one word it would be just that: sensitive. Although others may find it neurotic, I believe that opinion would come from a reader who has not experienced depression that can take you down the rabbit hole of your own mind and leave you shaking in the darkness. Slater's writing is so nuanced you can taste smoke on your tongue and see the living AND dying cells within the network of your own skin, and yet she still manages to appreciate what she still does not know, and quite possibly, what she will never know. I applaud Slater for opening herself up in such a truthful way; admitting to her fears, questions, and acknowledging her pain.

So where are the animals? - you might be wondering. Animals are tools, teachers, and conduits through Slater's life, but I would not consider them the main focus of the book. At the center of everything is Slater (as we each are the principal of our own story). And her prose is filled with "quotable quotes" that question humanity's purpose and very existence.

I would recommend this book for those interested in exploring the philosophical side of life and considering how animals help us better understand ourselves and the world around us. Not everyone can appreciate the lessons animals provide to us, and not everyone respects the nature of Slater's musings. But for me, her style of writing, her sensitivity to her surroundings and other beings who occupy the same space, all were considerations I enjoyed hearing articulated.

Happy Reading!

Carla Law says

I can't wait to start reading this book, I love animal stories so I'm sure I will love this book. I won this book in the Goodreads First Reads and haven't gotten it in the mail yet, but when I do I will let you know how the book is!!

I've got to admit that this book took me forever to read. I'm an animal lover and have worked in animal hospitals for 13 years so I was excited to read this.

I lost interest in the story early on, I was expecting something much different in this book. The writing was good but at times I felt it was a bit too much. It was difficult for me to keep up with the stories also, mainly because I kept putting the book down. Once I knew that the book wasn't going to be exactly what I expected

it was easier for me to finish. I was really hoping for a book that grabbed my attention and want to finish it in one weekend.

It was a good story and I found myself emotional over a few parts also. I can understand why someone would want to write a book like this, but I thought it would be written different.

Shazza Maddog says

The title of this novel is somewhat deceiving, to me - I expected it to be more about the titular dog. Instead, it is a series of chapters throughout the author's life, dealing with a dog her mother brought home, horses, wild animals, a raccoon, wasps, and, eventually, the titular dog.

I loved this book for the rich, descriptive words Ms. Slater uses to describe everything. I particularly got lost in one of the earlier chapters, when she described in great detail a pond she used to visit as a child. Sometimes, though, the descriptions grew overwhelming, and I wound up skimming my way through some of the passages.

Pain is very evident in this book, the pain of the author in trying to fit in to various parts of her life, and how she turned to animals to help her cope.

Nicki says

This book was given to me as a gift as I love dogs and have a Shiba Inu. With a title like "The \$60,000 dog", had to be right up my alley, right? Well, not exactly...

With 80 pages left in the book and still no appearance by the Shiba Inu, I was getting slightly confused at how the author arrived at the title.

Instead, we get chapter after chapter about the authors childhood and other animals she had/met in her past. Some of it is hard reading, for example the chapter about her childhood horse riding instructor who is a sadistic b* who abuses her horse and the poor swan who gets her beak ripped off.

By the time the Shiba is introduced in the final chapters, she is already about 10 years old and her health is failing.

Then there's a few more chapters which aren't really about her either, and the book is over.

There's a lot of the author musing about animals in our life and a lot of rambling in general. Though I appreciated her views and could relate to her love and care of Lila, having a 16 year old poodle myself who's health is failing, but pay a lot each month for her medications so she can be with us, I really found this book goes off track and though the author definitely has a story to tell, it's told in a very long winded way, and to me personally, does not really work. I do applaud her honesty on motherhood, though.

If she had called it by it's smaller title of "my life with animals", I think I would have been a little kinder on my rating. I still would have found it rambling, and most likely wouldn't have finished it, but at least the title would have been a bit more true.

This book really isn't about Lila the Shiba Inu, so if you've picked it up for that reason, you're likely in for a let down.

Gayle Gordon says

Really interesting read about the author's experiences with animals throughout her life. I tried to find out more about the swan with the prosthetic beak, but couldn't find anything about that particular swan. I found information about other animals, including a different swan, with prosthetic parts. It seems that Dr. Brumberg and Dr. Soth were ahead of their time by creating a prosthetic part for an animal. Now it's not considered all that strange.

I enjoyed the parts about the author's horse camp days, but very disturbed about the cruelty going on at the ranch and the weird behavior of the family that ran it. They didn't seem to be fit to run a horse camp for kids, but I guess it was a way to make some money.
