



What a Difference a Dog Makes: Big Lessons on Life, Love and Healing from a Small Pooch

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A must-read for every dog lover—a short, tender, and uplifting tale of a cancer survivor and the life lessons shared with him by his beloved family dog.

Our dogs come into our lives as “just the family pet,” but before we know it they become drinking buddies and fuzzy shrinks, playmates and Cheerios-munching vacuum cleaners, alarm clocks and sleeping partners. And, in their mysterious and muttish ways, our dogs become our teachers.

When Dana Jennings and his son were both seriously ill—Dana with prostate cancer and his son with liver failure—their twelve-year-old miniature poodle Bijou became even more than a pet and teacher. She became a healing presence in their lives. After all, when you’re recovering from radical surgery and your life is uncertain, there’s no better medicine than a twenty-three-pound pooch who lives by the motto that it’s always best to play, even when you’re old and creaky, even when you’re sick and frightened.

In telling Bijou’s tale in all of its funny, touching, and neurotic glory, Jennings is telling the story of every dog that has ever blessed our lives. The perfect gift for animal lovers, *What a Difference a Dog Makes* is a narrative ode to our canine guardian angels.

What a Difference a Dog Makes: Big Lessons on Life, Love and Healing from a Small Pooch Details

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AmandaLil says

This is a Goodreads First Reads book, thank you to Goodreads and Doubleday for the free review copy.

This was a quick, enjoyable read, more for dog lovers than cancer patients, about growing up and growing old with "mans best friend". I was expecting a biography about Jennings personal battle with cancer and recovery with his dog by his side type of thing but this book was more a collction of anecdotes than a cancer narrative. As another reviewer pointed out it reads like a blog, which is true, each chapter a "lesson" he has learned from Bijou and past pets (mostly dogs, a few cats, even a lizard or two). For the most part his stories focus on the adventures of his dog Bijou, and while there is nothing here really different from what most people experience with their dogs Jennings descriptions are usually funny and and endearing, especially in the words of wisdom from Bijou, the "canine zen master". He writes of growing to love his dog and how they battle illness together with wit and humor which make this book worth the read. 3.5 stars.

Shirley says

Bijou de Minuit, a miniature black poodle, definitely is a jewel of the night and her story is a treasure trove of gemstones that sparkle with an alluring aura.

Dana Jennings, the author, refers to Bijou as a canine Zen master. I relate the author to Eckhart Tolle when he professes that "Dogs are miracles in the moment-they teach us, in fact, that each moment is an absolute miracle-and they live in the eternal present. They don't fret over past mistakes, or dwell on past glories either. The future is always now." (xiii)

What a Difference a Dog Makes is a book about life. Despite the catastrophic health issues that Jennings and his son endure, this is not a dark read and gratefully neither Bijou nor any family members die in the end. Jennings writes, "Some dogs are Seeing Eye dogs, but Bijou has opened our eyes and she has become our Seeing Life dog." (ix)

Jennings describes his favorite season of autumn in these words. "I look forward to the low and slow mourning of the late crickets and the frenzied honeybees lured by the sweet fizz of Cokes and beers. The crisp copper light sharpens the woods and fields, and at dusk the old oaks stand as dark and stark as ancient kings. And, of course the leaves burst into flame, as incandescent as dragon scales, before crabbing into brown and arthritic fists. Soon, the thinnest skin of ice will membrane the frog ponds, and some night after an early owl-light it will be spitting snow." (145)

Through Bijou, Dana Jennings takes the reader on a journey into the essence of man's soul. It is a worthwhile trek.

Felonious says

This book isn't just about the lessons the writer, Dana Jennings, learned from his dog while battling cancer. The story reads more like a biography told through the pets of his life. Dana Jennings tells stories about many of the animals in his life. Bijou, a miniature poodle, is the dog that teaches him the (zen) lessons that helps him get through his cancer treatments.

Dana Jennings writes with humor and his writing is a perfect balance between being personal enough to make it uniquely his and yet broad enough that anyone can and will relate. Anyone that has ever owned (or been owned) by a pet will totally enjoy this book, and anyone that has ever had a serious illness while owning a dog will relate to the healing power of a dog.

As a previous dog owner and a current cat owner, this book was a hit and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The only chapter that was a slight miss for me was the "Cat Chapter" it wasn't much of a nod to cats, but then again it's a book about the difference a dog makes.

I would recommend this book to anyone with or without a dog (or cancer).

Benni says

Thanks to the publisher and goodreads for the free review copy.

I was particularly interested in this book because my mother-in-law is a cancer survivor, and her great dane-mastiff helped her through the treatment. (Also, I have always wanted a dog, though my allergies have prevented me from getting one. I am a sucker for dog books.)

This book was an enjoyable and fast Saturday morning read, but I think this book is more for dog lovers than dog lovers *and* recovering patients. If you're looking for guidance through a serious illness, this book isn't deep or thorough enough.

I loved the author's writing style, but keep in mind that this book is more like a string of well-written blog entries paying tribute to Bijou (the pooch) than a cohesive work with a clear direction. If you're looking for a book for a friend or relative making it through tough medical times, I would suggest referring them to the author's NY Times Well Blog instead:

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/jen...>

Or buy them a dog!

Anne Gustke says

In this book Jennings describes the wisdom and lessons he learned from his prize winning poodle, Bijou. I think anyone who has ever loved a pet will enjoy this touching and humorous book. When Jennings and his

son Owen become seriously ill – with prostate cancer and liver failure, respectively, their dog helps them heal and find joy despite their problems. Through watching their dog's enjoyment of simple things they begin to appreciate what they have. When I describe it that sounds trite and corny, but Jennings is an excellent writer and he takes material that could have been trite and makes it meaningful. I have a very low tolerance for corniness, and I really enjoyed reading this book. It is a pretty quick read, and includes a lot more humor than I expected. Here are some bits of wisdom from Bijou, Canine Zen Master:

- * Nap in the sun whenever possible
 - * Good things come to she who waits – especially in the kitchen
 - * A long walk is more calming than a glass of fine cabernet
 - * Never pass up the chance to pounce on a sock
-

Jamie HB says

I decided to read this book to give me a few ideas about a blog post I'm writing based on the influence a dog has on a human's wellbeing. One concept the author talks about is "living in the moment" - how, for the most part, dogs embrace every moment, not worrying about the future or stressing about the past. For my purposes of reading this book, it was just what I needed. I didn't read this book expecting to learn something new, but instead as a resource to support what I already know. For this reason, I can understand other reviewers lower ratings.

Anne says

This book is short and sweet. It shares what every dog owner knows, consciously or not, that dogs give us as much if not more than we ever give them. They contribute to our well-being, both mental and physical and ground us to the present in ways that other loved ones can't. The book isn't a revelation, it is an affirmation.

Linda says

I recently received this book from Goodreads. It was a quick read and very good. Whether you are a dog lover or not there are some wonderful life lessons in this book. Thanks Goodreads, I really enjoyed this book!

Shana says

This is a great fast moving memoir about how a man's dog (in this case a feisty poodle named Bijou) taught him by example how to live each day of life to the fullest. When the author Dana Jennings is diagnosed with prostate cancer Bijou kept him from giving up and from going insane even throughout the worst of his cancer treatment. After all as the author ponders even when you have cancer the dog still needs walked, fed and petted. In essence Bijou gave him something to live for & to laugh at when he didn't want to get out of bed. By keeping his sense of humor Bijou helped him and his family find the way to recovery.

I absolutely loved the quick, witty way the author writes in. I also loved the short chapters. This book was quite comical yet, very deep and at times spiritual. I had to admire the way Dana Jennings kept his bright outlook during his cancer treatment and his sense of humor with Bijou's help. In this book the author successfully shares the humor in even the mundanest of doggy actions.

I'd recommend this to any dog lover or animal lover. It's a fun, fast, yet deep read.

Lou Chambers says

The author tells the story of a father and son and a poodle named Bijou. The father and son are very ill. The father's relationship with his dog helps him recover from surgery and meet the ups and downs we face during our life. The dog's playful outlook on life gives the family strength to face each challenge. This is a must read for all dog lovers!!!

Luann says

I might be unfairly judging this book since I just recently read a couple of dog books by Gary Paulsen. Sorry to say that this pales in comparison. I especially had a hard time getting past the writing style. I found it very tedious to read more than a chapter or two at a time. There were just too many similes, metaphors and witty statements inserted throughout the text - many of them right in the middle of sentences. I believe this book would win the prize for the most dots, dashes, and parentheses breaking the flow of sentences in any book I've ever read - and it isn't all that long! I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have finished this except I received it through the Goodreads First Reads program and felt obligated.

There were a couple of chapters I liked, specifically when he talked about how his poodle Bijou helped in his recovery from cancer. Sadly, there weren't many chapters that focused on that topic - despite what you might think from the cover and summary information. I found that his writing style tended to calm down and felt more readable during those few chapters.

I didn't hate this book! Two stars means "it was okay." I can tell that the author set out to write a tribute to a much-loved dog who helped him through a difficult period in his life. And it seems like Bijou is quite the dog and deserves to have her own book! I just feel that it could have been greatly improved with a better focus and some serious editing to tone down the writing style. I do plan to see if some of my dog-loving friends would like to read this.

A favorite quote from one of those better chapters:

Funny stuff happens when you have cancer. Seriously. The classic family one-liner that stems from me having cancer is this: "You take the dog out. I have cancer." ... As I recovered from cancer surgery, treatment, and its aftermath, it was important to me to try to see the absurd plaid lining in a difficult situation. Just because the stakes with cancer are dark and mortal that doesn't mean there aren't moments of high hilarity. You have to laugh when you have cancer, or you'll end up being devoured. Being able to laugh (and walk the dog) in the face of cancer lets you continue to own yourself, as hard as that might be, rather than ceding ownership to the disease. A good laugh and a good dog remind you that you are not your cancer.

Jenni says

I enjoyed this little book about life, love, healing and dogs!

Melissa Lee-Tammeus says

Well, I thought I was being hard on this book until I read some of the other reviews and realized I wasn't. If you are a dog lover, you will appreciate this book - well, maybe that's a stretch. It will not, positively, make you sad, happy, overly thrilled to have a dog, make you want to get a dog, or make you care about this dog or author in particular. The potential for this book was huge - a man survives cancer with the help of his dog. You would think it will be brilliant and uplifting. It's so not. It is complete surface fluff and the author never takes us anywhere except through a 30 second commercial about what looks like a good movie, but in essence is not. Yes, dogs drool and bark. They "bark, bark bark!" as the author indicates time and again. Good grief. Really? And things that should be endearing are just gross - a dog licking in between your toes for an inordinate amount of time is not cute, it's gross. And dogs barking in symphony through the neighborhood is not sweet, it's annoying as hell. This could have been something, but it simply wasn't. Read about Marley instead, if you want a book about a dog you can't resist

Jenny Smith says

Most dog books get an at least four-star review from me. I'm a sucker for dog books. This book received only three stars from me because it wasn't anything special, and it wasn't even about dogs in many ways. It was about a man's relationship with his dog, and how his dog helped him recover from cancer treatment.

Saying that a book deserves only three stars because it is about a man recovering from cancer sounds harsh, but it isn't. What emotion Jennings put into his analysis of how dogs help humans was extremely repetitive. He tried this at routine intervals in the book—the magic of dogs—but each passage sounded eerily familiar to the last. While I agree with Jennings, his writing or analyses were not very profound. My dogs have helped me cope through some very personal and terrible situations, so I thought that I would identify more with Jennings. It's not that I didn't...perhaps he just didn't go far enough to touch my heart.

All in all, a nice read. There were funny stories and almost sad stories (even the cancer or his son's illness stories were not that gut-wrenching). You probably won't cry, but that actually might be a nice change for a dog book.

Then again, if a dog book makes me cry, I know that it got to me...and isn't that the point of a truly good book? That on some level (whether good or bad), it got to you?

Jana says

This book was weak at best. The writer was not really sympathetic in spite of having cancer and the book

didn't flow at all. It didn't do the dog justice and wasn't really funny or sweet.
