

Dog Love Stories: The Canines Who Changed Me

Patricia Eagle

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Memorializing the pets who shaped her with humor and keen affection, Dog Love Stories is a moving memoir.

Patricia Eagle's affecting memoir *Dog Love Stories* celebrates the unique personalities of various dogs who had an integral impact on her life.

Ten dogs are focal here, including Eagle's first puppy and the small, adventurous "part cattle dog" Mercy, her latest companion. Pencil sketches of the dogs appear at the beginning of each chapter, and the stories are linked to Eagle's life events. There's coverage of childhood trauma, marriage, moves, and divorce, as well as of her education and career. Beyond being sustained by her dogs' loyalty, Eagle discusses "how to trust and be trusted, how to be willing to listen and learn, and how to nurture another species."

Though the subject is affecting, the book avoids sentimentality. The sustained commitment of dog ownership is stressed, including providing regular attention and exercise, correcting troubled behavior patterns, and respecting each dog's individual personality and "pack-like instincts." With candor, Eagle admits to early mistakes in caring for her dogs; she also conveys the anguish of euthanizing an ailing pet and details touching burial rituals, like sprinkling "sage, rosemary, and dried pink bougainvillea petals" over the body of her pug, Goodness. Her rat-terrier mix, Rusty, was found abandoned and abused on the streets of Denver, where he'd developed a tendency to bite. Renamed Gavroche after the "sassy street orphan" of *Les Misérables*, his behavior soon changed to one of feisty devotion. Dancer, a spirited miniature pinscher terrier, looked like "a tiny deer"; the "graceful princess" Amber prompted a pair of Russian passersby to insist that she resembled the dogs that had once lived with the czar.

Amber also acted as a comforting "muse" while Eagle wrote a memoir about surviving sexual abuse—a subject that is just alluded to in this volume, and in a somewhat disconnected manner. Alongside recollections of Dabb, her girlhood puppy, comes a disturbing memory of childhood molestation; internally, this is ill reconciled to the "challenging" work of caring for the culprit as an adult. These hazy spaces reflect a "making nice" agreement with Eagle's elders but also sacrifice a sense of closure on the topic. Further, because most of Eagle's dogs lived in pairs, their stories often overlap, causing some repetitiveness.

Still, with each memory of a tugged leash, plumed tail, and welcoming bark and flap of the dog door, the book memorializes the pets with humor and keen affection. Eagle writes that they are "ingrained at a cellular level with who I have become and who I am becoming still."

A heartfelt memoir, *Dog Love Stories* entwines the joys and challenges of canine companionship with a story of personal evolution.

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