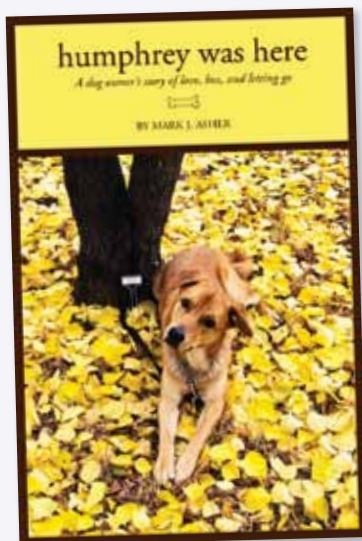


Recent and recommended

By Sally Rosenthal



***Humphrey Was Here: A Dog Owner's Story of Love, Loss, and Letting Go* by Mark J. Asher. CreateSpace, 2009. Softcover, 132 pages, \$10.20.**

Ask anyone who has loved and lost a dog: The pain is universal, but each story of bereavement is personal. Sometimes, in the best memoirs of beloved canines, the universal and the personal meet and tell a tale of healing that speaks to all who need it. In *Humphrey Was Here*, Mark Asher has written such a book.

Unlike the many dogs who pass into old age before crossing the Rainbow Bridge, Humphrey died unexpectedly and tragically from bloat in a boarding kennel. The pain Asher experienced initially was similar to that of anyone faced with a sudden horror. However, his grief becomes complicated by guilt over having boarded Humphrey.

As with all of us who share our lives with animals, though, much of the author's real grief lay buried in how Humphrey had helped him through difficult times such as divorce and career uncertainty. This compounded sadness led Asher eventually to a respite at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, where he worked through his grief by volunteering with dogs and writing this book.

How the author handled Humphrey's death and the subsequent bereavement is unique to his situation, but the honesty and wisdom that grace this book will serve as a balm for others coping with their own pain.

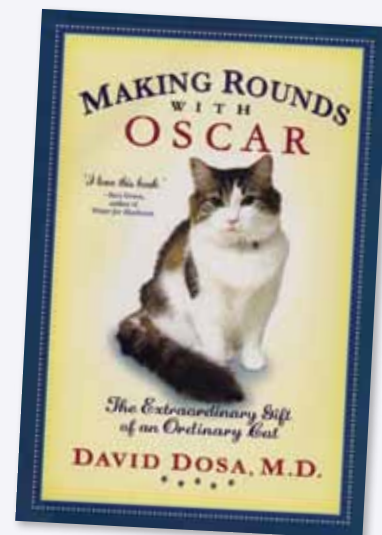
***Making Rounds with Oscar: The Extraordinary Gift of an Ordinary Cat* by David Dosa. Hyperion, 2010. Hardcover, 225 pages, \$23.99.**

Cats might be creatures of comfort, but, as any cat lover will attest, our feline friends can also be supremely comforting during difficult times. Oscar, one of the resident cats in a Rhode Island nursing home, just might be the champion comforter.

In *Making Rounds with Oscar*, David Dosa, a physician at the facility, offers insight into Oscar's extraordinary means of providing love and companionship at life's end. Were it not for Oscar's uncanny ability to sense when a resident is near death and curl up next to him or her to keep vigil, many of the patients, most of whom have some form of dementia, might leave this world unattended.

Although initially afraid of cats, Dosa came to recognize what Oscar was doing and was drawn to the cat who unflinchingly took care of patients as they died. For this book, an outgrowth of an article in a medical journal, the author looked more closely and discovered that Oscar also offered love and support to spouses and families as they coped with the unbearable ravages of dementia in their loved ones.

When not reviewing books, I am a pet therapy and hospice volunteer with my guide dog and am very familiar with the people and facilities Dosa so poignantly describes in one of the most uplifting animal tales I have read in years.



***Healing Companions: Ordinary Dogs and Their Extraordinary Power to Transform Lives* by Jane Miller. New Page Books, 2010. Softcover, 256 pages, \$16.99.**

Before giving my opinion of *Healing Companions* by Jane Miller, I feel some disclosure is in order. My family proudly counts my guide dog and my husband's service dog among its members, and, for many years, I worked as a psychiatric occupational therapist with the same types of clients that social worker Miller profiles in this comprehensive overview of psychiatric service dogs (PSDs). So, I didn't approach this book with a purely objective mind; I hoped Miller would do justice to the often-misunderstood subject of PSDs in this first work devoted to canines who assist individuals who have mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and dissociative disorders.

Not only did Miller not disappoint me, she made me want to stand up and cheer. *Healing Companions* is an excellent introduction to PSDs and the various ways they can assist their handlers with performing daily tasks and functioning as productive members of society. In addition to sharing several of her clients' stories, Miller offers advice on many aspects of partnering with a PSD, such as obtaining an appropriate dog, responsible training and dog guardianship.

In *Healing Companions*, Miller proves beyond doubt that PSDs serve to enrich their handlers' lives as much as the more familiar guide and service dogs do. 🐾

