



God Got a Dog

Cynthia Rylant , Marla Frazee (Illustrations)

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A sublime book for all ages, *God Got a Dog* celebrates the simple things in our world while taking a long, close look at what it means to be human. The soft, reflective, and often humorous words and pictures create a glimpse into everyday life through wide and wondering eyes that blends the familiar with the profoundly spiritual.

God Got a Dog Details

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Author : Cynthia Rylant , Marla Frazee (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review *God Got a Dog* for online ebook

Pinky says

God made spaghetti. She's dining alone at a table in a partial house up in the stars and lights a candle to set the mood.

God went to India. To see the elephants. He loves elephants best of all because they love their young and mourn their dead.

God got a dog. The dog was hanging out by the tracks all alone in the rain. Now God is never alone.

These little poems made me think and think and feel and feel.

Betsy says

I've been thinking a lot lately about whom children's books are really for. Kids, obviously. And parents that will have to (hopefully, potentially) read those books over and over again. Children's books are flexible objects, though. Their stated audience is in the 0-12 age range, but recently you've been seeing them used for other purposes. Graduates from high school get inspirational picture books to send them on their way. Psychiatrists keep picture books around for their patients, using them to work through various worries and anxieties. Adults gift them to one other because there's something about the simplicity of a children's book that can be infinitely comforting. So when we pick up a little book of poems like those in *God Got a Dog* we start by wondering who the intended audience is. Kids? Teens? Adults? The spiritual? The agnostic? After reading it through several times, I think my answer is, "Everybody". The God in this book is everything from a nine-year-old girl to a broken man on a swing. If He can be anyone then this book is for everyone.

In this book you will find sixteen poems culled from author Cynthia Rylant's 2003 YA title *God Went to Beauty School* and illustrated by the inestimable genius of Marla Frazee. Each poem relates a small attempt on God's part to do something human. Sometimes he is successful (he opens a nail salon, goes skating, and finds God, which is a bit confusing for Him). Sometimes he is a bit dejected (He catches a cold, gets arrested, and gets a desk job that She (the gender shifts abound) only gets through because She eats thirty-seven Snickers bars). We see God's highs and lows and He's this infinitely relatable, great person. The final poem is "God got a dog" which ends with, ". . . She saw this dog and She felt bad so She took it on home and named it Ernie and now God . . ." a turn of the page, "has somebody keeping Her feet warm at night."

You say the name "Cynthia Rylant" and you work in some capacity with children's literature then you might conjure up any number of titles she's written for kids over the years. Everything from the Henry and Mudge series to *Cat Heaven* to *Poppleton* and his friends, and on and on and on. What you may not immediately remember is her foray into the world of young adult literature. Normally when children's authors write YA books they release realistic novels about kids very much like themselves breaking up, growing up, and generally facing the unfairness of the world. Rylant took a different tactic. She decided to write about God. It's funny, but at its core the book was just as teen as anything by her kidlit fellows. But while those other teen characters were trying to figure out who they were, God is trying to figure out how our world works. He's pretty clear on Himself. Except when it comes to body image. He's still working on that.

The book does not include all the poems from the original collection. Just a small sampling really. I tried reading them to see if there was something infinitely more kid-friendly about these particular poems and was stumped. I think Rylant chose the ones in this book not because they would speak more to the prepubescent set but because they were the best ones from the previous book. Still and all the choice of which to use must have been fascinating. The order of the poems is also interesting, particularly when you consider that the titular poem is also the last one in the book. Mind you, it ends everything on a particularly hopeful note (I think the previous book ended with God getting killed), so you really wouldn't have it any other way. For my part, I found myself doing something with this book that I didn't remember doing with *God Went to Beauty School*. As I read I found myself wanting to learn the rules of this God. How do Jesus and Gabriel and Mother Teresa all fit into it? What does a disguise mean to him? Rylant just gives us the barest of outlines, but I already predict that a savvy young reader somewhere will work out all the tips and tricks and rules and ideas at work here. Things that Rylant never thought of. Things that can be extrapolated from the text.

And so we return to the age-old debate of audience. One of my children's librarians recently commented to me that she will definitely be buying copies of this for her relatives come the Christmas season. Is this book then destined to be a thoughtful gift from one adult to another? Is it a graduation book to be given to high school seniors so that they can think about The Big Picture without having to get too "big"? Or is it actually for children after all? Kids raise questions about things that they don't understand. It's what they do and how they learn, so what better than to give them a book that feeds into that? Certainly the book is rife with adult jokes (God tells a doctor at one point that "you're pretty good at playing me." There are mentions of Jesus and circumcision and mourning. The best thing to say is that the book is for all ages, beginning with childhood. It's for the kid who wants to think about God in a fashion not found in most titles for kids. I've been wracking my brain trying to come up with a children's book that comes even a bit close to what Rylant and Frazee are doing here and I'm stumped. This is a book that trusts in the intelligence of its child readers, even as it attracts adults.

Here's how old I am. I remembered reading *God Went to Beauty School* back in 2004 but I wasn't sure if I'd reviewed it. So I headed over to Amazon to see and there, lo and behold, was my review. In it I wrote the following about the poems themselves, which I'll stand by. To quote: "I have heard that Bible study groups use the poems to study. That groups of people without religion will ponder the poems line by line . . . I have heard that people have read the book at funerals. That it encompasses something in all of us, touching us deeply, revealing the truth that everything changes from one thing into another. The book is small and it does not impose itself upon you. It invites you to read it and whether you love it or hate it, it will not attempt to convert you one way or another. It is a book to love." One thing I wish I'd mentioned at the time is Rylant's humor. The poems are doggone funny at times. Like in "God caught a cold" when it says, "It's hard to be authoritative with a cold. It's hard to thunder 'THOU SHALT NOT!' when it comes out 'THOU SHALT DOT!'" That's just good plain writing. In my original review I also mention that my favorite poem was "God went to India". I'm sticking by that, and they really know how to use it in the new collection. It's the most serious of the poems, and the saddest.

One change made from the original *God Went to Beauty School* to *God Got a Dog* is the personification of God as one gender or another. In the original book God was a He from start to finish. In this one, God has been broken into Hes and Shes, partly for the benefit of Ms. Marla Frazee, the illustrator. In terms of the art in this book, this collection could not have happened without her. I can't imagine a single artist out there quite as capable as she to capture each poem to such a heightened sense of detail.

Part of the lure of the images here come from the fact that Ms. Frazee fills her pictures with loads of tiny details. A dead plant in "God got a desk job". Stacked beer cans in "God got cable". And since she makes each appearance of God a different race, gender, and age, the order of the people is interesting. The very first

God you see is a middle aged guy with a receding hairline in red plaid pajamas sitting in a chair, coffee cup in hand. You look at it and assume that he's going to be your hero for the rest of the book, but turn the page and there you'll find that God now looks Samoan with a lovely tattoo on his right arm and a pair of Bermuda shorts. The amazing thing is that in spite of the changes to the God's body, you never for one moment assume that this is a book about a bunch of different Gods. Clearly it's the same guy, and I think kids are capable of picking up on that.

If I got to choose my favorite picture in the book it would be the image that accompanies "God wrote a book" in which God writes a book for a little boy and reads it to him because he couldn't sleep. The God in this particular poem is a woman in her late 40s, early 50s, wearing a loose comfortable yellow shirt, green leggings, and lots of rings and bracelets. There are glasses too. She's reading with an arm around the boy and her legs are angled sidewise in a rather pretty fashion. Sensible red and white striped shoes are on the ground. She looks like someone's aunt or librarian. If someone were to read me a story at night, I'd want it to be her. There is also an old-timey crown the kids used to wear in the 1940s hanging off of a chair. I adore those things. Gotta love the details.

One vaguely wonders if some will consider the book irreligious, and considering that you have God worrying about things and doubting things, that answer is going to be yes. Of course. But I consider it akin to something on par with *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It's interesting, maybe saying more about the human condition and our own relationship to God than God Him/Herself. Or maybe it's a way of humanizing something that feels distant for some people. For kids, it makes God relatable and infinitely likable. And while I think it's appropriate for children, I certainly don't think this book is solely for them. This is a title for all ages and all comers. Get it while it's hot people. Get it while it's hot.

For ages 9 and up.

Connie says

I want to give this book a zero. I am a Christian and I work in a children's library where I came across a copy of this book. I can't believe how irreverent it is. If you look up phrases in the Bible that refer to God and fear, you will see that we are to fear and honor Him. I don't see where visualizing Him as a human with human circumstances is honoring Him at all. A good bit of the book is actually degrading to the One Who created us all.

I am listing a few of the many statements that alarm me: God has a bad rap for being pissed off; He went to beauty school and opened a nail shop; God got arrested; God took a bath with Her clothes on because She was self conscious; God got cable and played poker with Gabriel; and God sent a letter to a country music singer and was upset when she didn't write back.

Please don't buy this book for your children, and take the time read other books you may own by this author to make sure they would be what you want your children to read. We should not be feeding young minds with drivel like this.

Revelation 14:7 (NIV) He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Ruth Ann says

Funny, tender, insightful

My favorites:

God went to India

God wrote a book

God got cable and, yes, oh, yes,

God got a desk job!

God is a man. God is a woman. God is black, white, homeless, working, and more.

Holly Mueller says

First of all, the cover is stunning. I have to admit, though, at first I was a little disappointed that all the poems were "recycled" from God Went to Beauty School (which I LOVED) because I really wanted new ones. However, with Marla Frazee's illustrations and some of the poems slightly changed with "She" as God instead of "He" (which is not my preference, but I still appreciate the point of view), this collection seems brand new. And even though I've read them all before, multiple times, I still laughed out loud at some lines and sighed at the poignancy of others. These poems remind me a lot of Anne Lamott's view of God. My favorites are "God Went to Beauty School," "God Went to the Doctor," "God Made Spaghetti," and...wait! They're all my favorite!

Candice says

As a whimsical poetic tongue-in-cheek piece, I thought well of this book. As far as a spiritually-themed book regarding God and the Bible--I thought it was downright blasphemous or at least heretical. This book expresses new age ideas of everyone is God and God being He/She and being strictly human. So if your God is like that, good for you, you will enjoy this book. But my God is the God of the Bible and He is not represented by this book.

Cute title, but not my cup of tea.

Ursula says

A picture for adults that reminds us what it is rely important. So creative and thoughtful.

Zoe says

This book, let me warn you, is not for everyone. People who assume they exactly what God looks like,

exactly how we should worship him, and exactly what he is thinking will no doubt find this book irreverently offensive.

Now that we've weeded out those humorless people, let me say that this is one of the sweetest books I've come across in ages. While some of these one page...poems, shall we call them? are real head scratchers (Not sure God would own a nail boutique), the messages sent are ones that any believer should be pondering: It's hard to be God. He suffers, for us and with us. He has a sense of humor. He sees beauty in lots of the places we see beauty. He is hurt when people don't believe, but not wrathful. And maybe, he gets lonely sometimes.

So worth the 15 minutes of your time.

Mary Lee says

I love this book.

I love that God is a man or woman or child; black or white, fat or thin or bald.

I love that God has conversations with Budha and calls Mother Theresa when he gets a cold.

I want to give this book to all of my UU and UU-leaning friends because it will make them smile.

If you are offended by the very idea of this book, I apologize (for what, exactly, I'm not sure, but please accept my heartfelt apology.) If you are offended by the very idea of this book, please don't get your back up about it. It's not worth the energy you would spend on the outrage. It is a sweet book that will not harm a single reader. It will, in fact, cause readers to think about God. And that's not so bad, is it?

Terri says

I love Marla Frazee's illustrations... anything she does. But that is the only thing I liked about this book. Rylant's poem collection lacks a clear audience. It looks like a children's book, but it is not. Rylant invites readers to expand their image of God, to see him in the ordinary around us, an idea with which I have no quarrel. We so often erroneously put God in a box bounded by our conceptions, but He does not fit our expectations. God is bigger than our comprehension, but Rylant has made him smaller, reduced him to nothing more than "Just a slob like one of us (from Eric Bazilian's "What If God Was One of Us?")," and that is my problem with this book: Rylant has couched a philosophical work for adults in children's literature guise. Children will not understand or connect with the adult themes and questions posed in Rylant's poetry, though they may like some images and a few of the individual poems. Adult believers like me will find it irreverent, perhaps disturbing, and may well be offended by the volume, but it **will** make them think.

Carol Royce Owen says

I'll be honest. I bought this book on recommendation only, not knowing anything about it, but also because it paired a favorite author (Cynthia Rylant) and favorite illustrator (Marla Frazee). What I thought it would be is nothing at all like what I expected, so I'm a little disappointed.

What it is, is a collection of poems about God trying out human activities, e.g., God woke up, God makes

dinner, God found God, God goes to India, God Got a Boat. In each accompanying illustration God is portrayed differently, white, black, man, woman, child, teenager, thug, lonely, happy. sad. In the book, concerns and disappointments of God are shared, for example in one of the poems he is at the doctors and the doctor says his heart skips a beat, but God already knows that, it's from those who don't believe in Him. In other poems God grapples with suffering and death or with those who speak ill of His Son, Jesus Christ. In that poem, God even gets arrested for starting a fight. In another He writes a book, but not THE Book, and in that poem there seems to be dismay on God's part that the writers of THAT Book said that they wrote it in the name of God. Hmmm..

I'll admit, I take issue with this book because of my upbringing and belief that God is omnipotent and all-knowing. The idea of the first poem, that God Woke Up, right away went against my belief that God never slumbers or sleeps. Sorry, that's not a belief I want to question and I do not want to put a book out there that would make a child believe that there are times when God is not fully aware of everything going on in this world. And God starting a fight? Don't even get me started on that one.

I can only imagine that the author is portraying God as God in all of us, and trying to show that we all question the things around us, and have feelings of loneliness and sorrow, but also other times of great contentment and happiness. But that's stretching it. I just couldn't match my beliefs with those, and so sorry, this one won't be one I'll be promoting. i know many will disagree, because I see many 5 star ratings of this book. I just hope we can agree to disagree.

Oh, and what did I think it was about? I thought it was going to be about a child losing a favorite dog (to old age, sickness, an accident), and sending instructions to God about how to take care of him. Maybe that's one I'll have to write.

Donalyn says

A beautiful picture book for adults as much as kids.

Kris Patrick says

I always had a feeling that Cynthia Rylant has a wicked sense of humor. yes she does... yes she does.
Favorite poem- God got cable

Tracy says

The poems alternate in between a male and female God. Strangely, the two poems that I liked the best were in the female God's point of view.

God Made Spaghetti

"(She didn't like eating alone), but most people think God lives on air (apparently they've not noticed all the food She's created), so nobody ever invites her over unless it's Communion and that's always such a letdown"

God Got a Dog

"She'd made that dog somehow, somehow She was responsible though She knew logically that She had only set the world on its course. She couldn't be blamed for everything. But She saw this dog and She felt bad so She took it on home and named it Ernie and now God has somebody keeping Her feet warm at night"

paula says

How often do I read poetry? I never read poetry. How often do I read about God? After rather a binge in high school, I almost never read about a Judeochristian god.

But oh how I love this. This I am sending to my cousin, who had a wonderful relationship with his god and his church until his church didn't like that he was gay, and I feel terrible that this important part of his life has been ripped away.

Cynthia Rylant's God would be happy that my cousin had found a way to be open with himself and to maybe find love. Cynthia Rylant's God would maybe be a little jealous. Cynthia Rylant's God knows how it feels to be lonely and misunderstood. I think it's safe to say, given the wide range of convictions that people have about god, if there is a God, it is statistically unavoidable that he/she is desperately, gravely misunderstood.

So this is terrific. God gets to relax, play cards, read a book to a kid. God goes to beauty school and learns to give manicures because He really likes looking at hands.

You know what I like looking at? I like looking at Marla Frazee's art. Whether it's a balding Latino God admiring his nail salon or a black teenage boy God suffering through a head cold on a plaid couch, her images reinforce the poet's efforts to bring God closer to us. Cynthia Rylant's God, anyway.
