



Dog Walks Man: A Six-Legged Odyssey

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Imagine if Annie Dillard had taken a dog along with her to Tinker Creek. Now imagine Tinker Creek was a New Jersey suburb, and you have an idea of the surprises that await in John Zeaman's book. Humorous, thought-provoking, and playful, Dog Walks Man might also be called Zen and the Art of Dog Walking. Zeaman takes us on a journey from a 'round-the-block fraternity of "dog-walking dupes"—suburban fathers who indulged their children's wish for a dog—to a strange and forbidden wonderland at the edge of town, the New Jersey Meadowlands. Along the way, he rediscovers childhood's forgotten "fringe places," investigates the mysteries of the natural world, and experiences moments of inexplicable joy.

Each chapter of Dog Walks Man is a bite-size meditation on the wisdom derived from dogs and dog walking. Woven into the narrative are musings on such familiar dog-walking issues as the war of nerves that precedes each walk (or "w-a-l-k" if your dog is in earshot), the problem of dog-walking monotony, and why dog walkers are always the ones to discover dead bodies. This is also the story of Pete, the prescient standard poodle who begins as the "family glue" and evolves into Zeaman's partner on a journey through an abandoned landscape as alive as any jungle.

Above all, Dog Walks Man is about a search for wholeness in an increasingly artificial world. It is about discovering what Thoreau meant when he wrote, in his seminal essay "Walking," "Life consists with wildness." Because the truth is, something as simple as walking the dog can open up unexpected worlds.

Dog Walks Man: A Six-Legged Odyssey Details

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From Reader Review Dog Walks Man: A Six-Legged Odyssey for online ebook

Wendy Bauer says

Didn't finish. Got tired of it.

Richard says

This review contains a spoiler, though I don't think it will be a spoiler to anyone who reads dog books, but - who knows.

I had a very strange reaction to this book. It's a collection of essays about the author, his poodle Pete, and their adventures out on the mandatory daily walk. I think it probably rates as a memoir in that it covers a period of about 10 years and focuses on one aspect of the author's life. Someone once said that going for a walk is the next best thing to doing nothing, and walking the dog would be about a step up from that. But, seeing as how the author mainly walks Pete off-leash it may only be a half step. Walking a dog off leash means you get to pay a lot more attention to your thoughts and surroundings than the dog. As a life long dog owner (read: walker) I know the pleasures of off-leash walks, and the high pleasure of watching a dog run. John Ford had it for horses, I've got it for dogs - pure poetry. So, though Pete figures in every chapter (or essay, as that's what they really are) it's Mr .Zeaman's musings that we're really getting with this book. Yes, about dogs, dogs and men, dog walking, but also about how civilization encroaches on wild areas, how wild areas still manage to exist - in this case the Meadowlands of NJ - how wonderfully eccentric dog-walkers can be, etc., etc.

For the most part Mr Zeaman is an interesting companion. Not particularly profound, but that's ok, and I enjoyed the book in chapter long pieces until I got to - !!!spoiler!!!- Pete's decline and demise. (Is that really a spoiler? Don't all dog books end with a dead dog?)

I recognized the care Mr. Zeaman took with his old dog: the lifting, the slow walks, the trials of incontinence. I was glad when he adopted a new dog before Pete was too far gone. And I knew there'd be an eventual visit to the vet, a sad goodbye, and a chemical cocktail to launch Pete to doggie-heaven. What I didn't expect -!!!spoiler!!!- was for Mr. Z., to wuss out, and not see Pete off - in fact, to get as far as the vet's waiting room, and then have his son accompany Pete into the exam room for the final ritual. I couldn't believe it! I tried over the next few pages to give Mr. Zeaman the benefit of his sorrow, but it kept coming back to, "that s.o.b. He's had this dog for over ten years and he can't even be there to pat its head while it slips away. Unbelievable."

And here's where the strange reaction comes in - I couldn't finish the book. The author let me down as a human being. Whatever bond I may have had with him through the preceding 260-some pages unravelled with that one act. I didn't care about his grief, I didn't care about his continuing search for a new dog walking spot, I didn't care about whatever philosophical summation he was going to come up with. He wasn't a mensch. End of story.

So, three stars - it's a pretty good dog book, and a fairly amusing memoir, and though I'm sure Mr. Z is a decent guy, he should of sucked it up.

Undreya says

This is the first time I have reviewed a book on this site, however, I was inspired to do so because this book is wise and delightful. The language is evocative and inspired. While I do not own a dog, it is obvious that the writer knows and understands his dog all too well. There are some wonderful descriptions, for example: "I have a cousin, an engineer, who was always trying to keep his golden retrievers from shedding in the car. Once, for a long trip to Vermont, he put pantyhose on them to protect his upholstery. He used two pairs for each. They looked like sock monkeys." One would have thought that subject matter of this book could not maintain your interest but it does, because of the quality of the writing.

Jim Patterson says

This is a touching, witty and thought-provoking exploration of the metaphysical aspects of the simple dog walk. Walking Pete (a standard poodle named after a Ghostbuster) opens the author up to different ways of looking at the world. As he discovers more about his neighborhood - its wild fringes, its natural wonders and the characters within it - so he becomes more aware of man's connections to his environment. Each chapter is a meditation on the wisdom derived from dogs and dog walking. I loved this book. I am going to look into another one of Zeaman's books about dogs.

Leilani says

The way Zeaman weaves together his repeated daily observations of the wild spots in his New Jersey suburb, his meditations on art and human responses to nature, and colorful characters (dog & human both) that he encounters on the way, are consistently engaging and charming. He captures the view of a citified person dismayed over the way his fringe spots are disappearing, replaced by ball fields and manicured parks, and brings to life the way stopping to observe the world around you will enrich your life in ways big and small.

I'm an on-the-leash walker myself, so the portrait of the overly cautious woman who knows all the dangers that might be encountered felt a bit too close to home, but this book encourages me to venture further off the path sometimes.

Shaz Goodwin says

Dog Walks Man – A Six-Legged Odyssey

John Zeaman

Thank you to Octopus Books for providing me with a copy of this fabulous book.

The blurb on the back cover is exactly what you get. I enjoyed reading every chapter in this book, not only because it relates to me as a dog owner and therefore walker but also because of the insights Zeaman shares. This is not a book just about the dog walk – there are also art snippets, other interesting facts about a multitude of things and the community in which the adventures take place. It should appeal to quite a broad spectrum of people and ages.

I found Zeaman's journeying an accurate reflection of my own experience. The way he describes dogs, their personalities and what they get up to is so true. How he starts off close to home, walking round the block - and then starts to explore other possibilities/areas is also a reflection of how it is. Noticing nature and the changes in seasons is also another large part of being outdoors and something everyone can identify with if they take time to stop and notice the world we are living in.

At no point did I become bored with the narrative or rush my reading. The writing flows and cascades you along in a timeline of events, which is clear and logical. The descriptions and sharing are such that you feel an emotional connection to Pete and even to the area and community where the story unfolds. There is humour sprinkled throughout and one particular part of the story had me laughing so hard and for so long my family was becoming concerned about me Another part of the story had me shedding tears in sorrow and feeling totally wrung out. I could feel the desolation as if it was mine.

I don't think anything I can write would do 'Dog Walks Man' total justice. My husband (a reluctant reader) has now started reading it and thoroughly enjoying it which speaks volumes!

I would urge you to buy the book otherwise you will be missing out on the 'touching, witty and thought-provoking tale of how one man found meaning in the humble dog walk'.

Mary says

Utterly charming book about something that many people would find prosaic. A dog walk is such a simple thing yet it has the potential to really broaden one's horizons.

Pam says

At first glance, a book about walking the dog might not sound very exciting. But, as a person who has written about dogs extensively and who has blogged about dog walking, I was intrigued. I picked up a copy, started reading, and was entranced.

Dog Walks Man: A Six-Legged Odyssey, by John Zeaman, is delightful! A collection of essays that is part memoir, part philosophy, and part social commentary, it has something to appeal to everyone. Zeaman, an art critic, has a warm writing style and a wry humor that makes a topic as ordinary as dog-walking almost

poetic. I found myself nodding in agreement frequently and laughing out loud more than once. Though he initially regarded the daily walks with his young standard poodle, Pete, as a chore, Zeaman describes the evolution of his attitude toward their nightly outings. I am sure that many dog owners can identify with his descriptions, and, I hope, with his ultimate realization that dog-walking provides access to pleasures that the dog-deprived miss. While there are certainly times that "having to" walk the dog feels burdensome, I find Jana's and my morning walk-and-greet (I live in a neighborhood with many regular morning walkers, some accompanied by dogs, others there to admire my dog — that's her take on it, anyhow) a genuine pleasure.

The fact that I agree with Zeaman's view that dog-walkers should be in the moment, focused on the dog and the walk — not talking on their cell phones, shepherding children, and doing their errands at the same time — naturally added to my enjoyment of the book. But Zeaman's philosophizing extends beyond a description of the ways that a daily walk enhances his relationship with his dog — he touches on people's connections with nature, community relations, solitude and friendship, family dynamics, and the joys and responsibilities of dog ownership.

Anyone who has ever walked a dog will find something in this book that evokes a smile and a warm memory. And for readers who don't have dogs? You'll find out what you're missing!

Tom Quinn says

I hesitate to say I'm a dog "owner."

"My" dog is a miniature pinscher named Rizzo, after the rat muppet and not the girl from Grease. I guess I "own" him legally, but deep down I don't believe it. He is wild and free at heart, and walks with him are a pain in the ass.

He'll strain and pull at the leash to drag me forward, only to stop and spend 6 or 7 minutes sniffing a single square inch of dirt beneath a shrub. Dumb dog. If he weighed more than 15 pounds I might break him of this habit. As it stands, no min pin yet has found the strength to yank me too far off balance. And besides, he puts up with my bad behaviors without complaining.

So I'm a dog person. So I'm biased. But John Zeaman's memoir shines as proof that there's more than one way to see the world around us.

This is a good book and Zeaman is a gifted writer. He shares his experiences and thoughts with warmth and dignity, opining on nature, life, art, and philosophy, all framed in relation to his daily dog walking routine. It's cute and sweet, and sweet and cute.

4 stars out of 5.

Michael says

This book demonstrates why serendipity with physical books on shelves is a problem for eBooks - I would never have looked at an eversion of this but since it was sitting there on the new books shelf at the library, I picked it up - and read it.

The book is small, but eventually I realized it runs 300+ pages. I wonder if that was deliberate. I don't think I would have picked up some regular size tome on this topic!

Jena Gardner says

I always enjoy a book that seems to "get" how some of us feel about our canine companions. I think many a profound idea or realization has occurred on a dog walk. The act of being owned by a dog can bring you into contact with a marvelous variety of humans and canines.

Bridget says

My dog Reese is one of my best friends. She's been there for me through my husband being in Afghanistan, through losing loved ones and she's right there every single day. I absolutely adore her and because of this, I am addicted to books about that have to do with the love of animals. Reading John's book reminds me of how everyday can be an adventure when you let yourself go and follow your four-legged friend. I really enjoyed Dog Walks Man and I think that every dog-lover should read it. It's loads of fun and very entertaining.

Bibliomama says

I loved this book. It took a while to read it because I paced myself. Each short chapter was the equivalent of one or two dog walks, and that's all I needed each night. It is a great settling down book.

I learned so much from my grandpuppies during the six months they lived with me. We had many great adventures, near and far. Even the dumpster behind the school was an adventure for them. They force you to see the world from a new perspective, if you are open.

Pete and Luke were great dogs. John Zeaman was very lucky to be let into their pack. And I thank him for sharing their adventures with me.

Robin says

A very enjoyable read, full of great personal stories, history, humor, and of course a love of our four legged friends.

Maya Panika says

A delightful, touching and funny account of the author's experiences of walking his Poodles, at first with Pete, and later (after Pete's inevitable decline into old age and decrepitude), new puppy Luke. There are many clever, amusing, heart-warmingly familiar observations on dogs and their ways, but this is not really a

book about walking the dog, more a meditation on life, a tale of characters (human, canine and Other) in a landscape; a stream of consciousness about the changing-unchanging landscape.

Whether you travel through life with a dog or whether you walk alone, if you simply love to walk, you'll probably identify with John Zeaman's travels through the varied worlds he finds hidden behind his manicured suburban landscape. There's a child-like sense of wonder in Zeaman's need to map and mythologise his neighbourhood, to find magic in the most unlikely places - the baby doll graveyard, ladybug land, the reedbeds, the spooky, gothic dankness of the Back Alley, the feral Meadowlands - as he documents the treasured sense of space he feels, being apart from his domesticated neighbours, at one with his poodle and human companions as they traipse their doorstep wilderness, and learning all the time; Zeaman often makes a sidetrip to the library to research some aspect of natural science, mythology, religion, history, literature - touching on the many things he would never have known if his curiosity hadn't been sparked by something encountered while walking his dogs.

Thoreau's *Walden* is frequently referenced and parallels drawn between the experience of the author and his dog in his treasured Meadowlands, and it's one such reference that sums up this book for me:

"Dogs can usually be counted on to find that surviving scrap of wildness out on the fringe, which really, was all that Thoreau had or needed--a bit of wild fringe amid railroads, villages and farms. The dog is four-legged *Walden*. It points us in the right direction and brings us back to the same place again and again until, like children in front of a diorama, we finally learn to see."

This is a beautiful meditation on the finer things of life, highly recommended to anyone who just loves life, as well as dogs.
