

## A Spiritual Dog: "Bear"

**J. Wesley Porter**

LitFire (Oct 20, 2016)

Softcover \$10.99 (62pp)

978-1-63524-251-5

*Porter shows how much fun the give-and-take between a beloved pet and a family can be.*

*A Spiritual Dog: "Bear"* is J. Wesley Porter's tender story about a father with two young sons and the adorable, energetic puppy they adopt from their local animal shelter. A companion in good times and bad, the puppy they name Bear enriches their lives with unconditional love until his passing thirteen years later.

The story begins in 2003, as Porter and his sons, Daniel, eleven, and Joshua, six, visit an animal shelter, looking for a dog to adopt. Attracted to an eight-week-old shih tzu–poodle mix puppy with curly black fur and white markings on his neck and paws, they name him Bear and bring him home. Lively and playful, Bear loves being with people and can even tell when someone is having a bad day and needs comfort. Porter and the boys learn how much Bear loves to eat, play, explore, chase rabbits, and defend his territory. As Bear grows to his full size, his black fur becomes grayish white, something that's common in dark-colored poodles; this explains why his picture as an adult dog on the book's cover shows him as gray, though he was described as black-and-white as a puppy.

Porter brings up some important aspects of dog care, including the danger of extreme temperatures, the importance of paying attention to any changes in behavior or appetite, and the need for health care and regular grooming. He also notes the changes a dog might experience as part of the aging process. The family's sadness at Bear's passing is beautifully expressed in the illustration of their pet's empty dish, Porter's longing for the times when their house had been "lively and noisy," and his realization that, "In life, sometimes we don't realize what we have until it is gone."

The colorful illustrations are whimsical and fun; together with the pleasant interior design and layout and the large, bold font, they make for pleasurable reading out loud, or for a child's solitary reading. The story would be much livelier with more dialogue and greater inclusion of the children's point of view. The text, including the back cover copy, presents many errors in grammar, syntax, punctuation, and capitalization, as well as several missing or extra words, a few spacing errors, and the inclusion of some words that may be beyond the book's reading level.

Families considering adopting a dog will find that *A Spiritual Dog: "Bear"* offers many opportunities to talk about the joys and responsibilities of dog ownership. It also opens the door to questions children may have about a pet's passing. Porter has shown how much fun the give-and-take between a beloved pet and a family can be; above all, his book honors a dog's ability to give the thing most needed for a happy life: unconditional love.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March 19, 2017)

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