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All My Dogs: A Life

Bill Henderson
Leslie Moore, illustrator
David R. Godine (August 2011)
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It would be a mistake to dismiss *All My Dogs* by Bill Henderson as just another entry into the already inflated category of canine books, because this little memoir is masterful.

The author reminisces about the numerous dogs he has owned since childhood. They are, of course, main characters in the book, each with its own personality and its own story. Their antics bring joy to Henderson, and they will undoubtedly amuse readers, too. The dogs' short time on earth, however, and the manner in which some of them die, may well bring tears.

There are other memorable characters, of the non-canine variety, who make an appearance; for example, Edward Holyoke Snow, the junior high principal who was "obsessed" with dogs. Henderson writes, "Snow's favorite slogan, which the entire school—teachers included—was required to chant at pep rallies was, 'It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.'" Readers also get to eavesdrop on Henderson's occasionally stormy marriage to Annie, who is herself a richly drawn character.

What makes *All My Dogs* extraordinary is Henderson's skill at weaving together stories about dogs with the trials and tribulations of his personal life; especially moving is the author's account of his own bout with breast cancer that coincided with his dog Lulu's cancer diagnosis.

Bill Henderson's writing is simple yet eloquent, at times poetic and poignant. His descriptions of people, events, and scenes range from the humorous to the dramatic. Henderson well knows how to tell a story. He also knows he is lost without dogs. In a chapter entitled "Dogless Years," Henderson writes of his first, unsuccessful marriage, lamenting, "The idea of children, or dogs, never came up. Our lives were as empty as a bare ruined choir."

Indeed, Henderson is at his best when a dog is by his side. That's what *All My Dogs* is really about. Happily, this story reinforces what most dog lovers already believe—that a dog is the best companion a human could ever have.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (November 17, 2011)

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