

Border Collies, A Gift of Love

Richard Wilson

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Ronald Reagan often repeated the aphorism, “There’s nothing so good for the inside of a man as the outside of a horse.”

Richard Wilson understands the wisdom behind the late president’s observation, but for Wilson, it is a border collie that is good for a man’s soul.

Wilson became a widower in his early middle-age, losing his wife, Patricia, to recurring breast cancer. That cataclysmic event altered his life in ways other than personal. He resigned from an executive position and began consultant work. In his travels, he met “a compassionate and loving lady, Rosemarie,” who became his second wife. But retirement loomed, a great challenge for a man who felt passion for his work, and his internal struggles continued. Wilson soon found himself fading into depression as the months passed following his retirement, a situation aggravated by lingering, unresolved grief for his first wife. Rosemarie kept patient; in fact, she suggested that Wilson acquire the dog that gave him a different view of life.

That dog was Rhett, a border collie. Wilson soon found himself immersed in the sport of “trailing,” a test in which the dog is sent to round up free-ranging sheep. Wilson’s book takes the reader through his initial work with Rhett, whose aptitude for fieldwork soon proved to be inferior to his work as a “therapy dog.” Rhett nevertheless remains the author’s faithful companion, even perhaps saving his life, “...Rhett came to my right side and would not move. Looking down I was startled to see a huge rattlesnake...”

But trailing remained a passion, and Wilson soon acquired a female border collie named Raygan, a dog “...with the genetic make-up of a true athlete.”

Wilson’s work is short, and about half of the sixty-eight pages are photographs of border collies and herding trials in the United States and Canada. Several of the photographs are superb in revealing the low-crouched stalking behavior domestic herding dogs have inherited from the wolf. Other photographs show the love between dog and handler. “With my photos, it is my wish that you will see the drive, tenacity, energy and the pure love to accomplish their work.”

Much of the narrative is taken up with the author’s trip, accompanied by Rhett and Raygan, to The Big One, a herding trial in Bowman, North Dakota. The superlative is necessary because, in the competition, dogs work at distances of up to 840 yards from their handlers. It is a significant test, and even though Raygan’s performance didn’t shine, readers will understand Wilson’s fascination.

The book concludes with a short glossary of herding commands and terminology, along with a diagram of a typical herding trial run.

Wilson offers an interesting book for dog lovers who might be considering a new avocation. *Border Collies, A Gift of Love* is also written at a level a youngster might appreciate, especially a young person who has received their first canine companion.

GARY PRESLEY (November 1, 2010)

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