

## Miles Murphy: Who Rescued Whom?

**Philip Casale**

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*Sharp, self-aware honesty separates Miles Murphy from the pack.*

Philip Casale's *Miles Murphy* is a heartwarming story that treads the well-worn turf of dog memoirs, telling the tale of a veterinarian's friendship with his first, adopted dog.

The dog is Miles Murphy, a border collie who springs onto the page as a larger-than-life character. He is two when Casale picks him up at the animal shelter, and his presence in Casale's life is long overdue.

As a subject, Miles is so lively that he seems like several dogs in one—energetic, verbal, nosy, stinky, silly, and, well, a *dog*. Crate training goes out the window on Miles's first night home. The dog's presence changes every one of Casale's relationships, from that with his parents to those with his partner and neighbors. Yet despite the difficulties of raising a boisterous, adopted dog, Casale bonds with Miles at once. As he points out, Miles is a family member—one who is related by choice.

The book is a hard sales pitch for animal adoption. Casale disparages purebred dogs, praising the ease and good karma of adopting instead. In spite of this, Miles is not necessarily a poster puppy for the perfect adoption. Adjustment is anything but smooth: on a visit to Casale's parents' house, the dog nearly chokes on a corn cob that he noses out of the trash. He's slow to learn social graces, but, Casale reiterates, that's not really the point. The bond a person can have with a dog is special, and the love Casale feels for Miles covers a multitude of sins.

This "who rescued whom?" memoir hews close to clichés and common themes, from parents who just don't understand dogs to heartwarming one-sided conversations with the canine. Although Casale describes his bond with Miles as "unique," it's anything but.

The book describes the difficulty of training a hard-to-handle dog with plenty of humor. Casale's quick to laugh at himself: "When the time-out session and multiple verbal corrections failed to calm the beast, it was that famous bone-shaped Milkbone treat that did the trick." The narrator's learning curve is about the same speed as Miles's, which makes for plenty of laughs.

Casale injects a lot of humor into each chapter and is quick to poke fun at himself. The book's tone and quick pacing are excellent, as are the high-stakes episodes in each chapter. Hiking with his wife and dog, Casale worries, "What if Miles slipped and got hurt? And how would Sarah carry him down the mountain? Oh wait, that would be my job." His narrative adds a layer of sharp, self-aware honesty that separates *Miles Murphy* from the pack.

Although *Miles Murphy* touches on familiar, sentimental themes, the memoir is funny, smart, and touching. Good dog, Miles.

CLAIRE FOSTER (March 6, 2018)

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