



Penny Helps Portia Face Her Fears: Helper Hounds

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Penny Helps Portia Face Her Fears is a charming chapter book with friendship at its center.

Penny is an adorable pit bull who was abandoned by her original family. She's set free by a neighbor, but living on the streets, she's chased by the Grey Sisters, instilling in her a fear of other dogs. She begs for food before being picked up by Miguel.

Seeing the good in Penny, Miguel trains her, helps her overcome her fears, and enrolls her in Helper Hounds University, where she's taught to interact with and assist people in need. That's how she meets Portia, a young girl who isn't held back by her Down Syndrome—though she, too, is scared of dogs. Penny is the perfect pup to help Portia handle her fears. She may think she's doing the helping, but Penny, too, gets unexpected help.

Penny narrates, her voice strong, funny, and descriptive. She admits that her only award in school was for the best "settle," which means that she's quick to fall asleep. Miguel provides plenty of advice on dealing with dogs throughout the story and in the last section, which includes his "Never-Fear Dog Tips." His patience and understanding exemplify the book's themes.

Portia enters the story later on, but she's a force to be reckoned with, having exceeded most people's expectations by learning to read and to ride horses. Though she's scared of dogs, her bravery stands out, and her story resonates.

Penny Helps Portia Face Her Fears is a story whose characters display tenacity and love; it encourages acceptance of dogs and people alike.

REBECCA MONTERUSSO (January / February 2020)

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