



## Shorts That Fit Well: A Collection of Inspirational Short Stories

**Wayne E. Beyea**

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*The stories of Shorts That Fit Well highlight the spiritual elements present in ordinary life.*

Wayne E. Beyea's *Shorts That Fit Well* is a lighthearted, folksy book that focuses on country life, humor, and family matters. From dog tales to fish stories, the collection shares a smattering of humorous anecdotes.

At its best, this book includes honest, everyday scenes. A retiree contemplates the birdlife outside his cabin; a Vietnam veteran trades barbs with an anti-war activist. Most of the book's jokes are situational, and there are few "gotcha" moments. The collection leans on one liners and silly, you-had-to-be-there scenes.

Each story is told from a different perspective, but the pieces feel linked, as though they are set in the same neighborhood. Characters speak in a distinct, Northeastern vernacular and use old-fashioned slang, evoking a specific place and time. Luscious descriptions of landscapes include "a pink glow gradually surrounded the ridge of mountains that served as sentinels on the eastern horizon, and the sky became a juxtaposition of variable hues of pink, gray, orange and blue." Such passages mirror characters' inner monologues and add dimension to stories that otherwise veer into pure exposition.

Although described as "inspirational," the book's tone tends toward knee-slapping humor over soul-warming stories. In the first entry, "Samantha," a large family adopts a pregnant dog. Subsequent adventures include the usual comedies of naughty puppies and tragedies, as when the children see one of the puppies run over by a car. Danger is ever-present, manifest in dog wardens, hunters, dismemberment, illness, and every imaginable type of accident.

In other pieces, characters ruminate on soul-crushing losses. Spiritual aphorisms are offered as a palliative for grief, including "God works in mysterious ways." However, such platitudes act as a *deus ex machina*, interrupting character development and upending narrative tension. In "Guardian Angel," a child believes her prayers heal her aunt's cancer, but the subplot distracts from the main story, which is compelling without the vague specter of a magical cure hanging over it. Stories that stick close to their characters are stronger, especially those that share the inner reflections of their diverse, entertaining narrators. Zesty language combines with direct plots that unroll at a leisurely pace.

The stories of *Shorts That Fit Well* mix conversational narrations with realistic characters, highlighting the spiritual elements present in ordinary life. Faith is a seasoning, not the collection's main dish—which is hearty, funny, and satisfying.

CLAIRE FOSTER (April 15, 2020)

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