Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Smudge The Wonder Dog: Inspired by True Events
Sheryl Fisher Acosta
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

One autumn several years ago, during a ferocious California storm, “a Great Pyrenees dog named Gigi welcomed eight squirmy little white puppies into the world. One of them was a female named Smudge, and Smudge was Gigi’s favorite from the beginning.”

The pampered pup, given her name due to the large ashy mark on her cheek, enjoys life with her siblings and cousins in their kennel home in the countryside. Smudge notices, however, that puppies are taken away and never come back. Then, at six months of age, it happens to her.

Based on real events, this is the story of Smudge’s first year of life as told by the dog’s owner, Sheryl Fisher-Acosta. This is the author’s first book.

The story unfolds in a unique way: An omniscient narrator begins each chapter with an episode in the puppy’s life, and then the same events are retold by Smudge herself (in “Smudge Says”), as a youngster would articulate them.

Readers are also introduced to Sherie and Donald, the couple who adopt Smudge and take her into their home—a home shared by Willie, a fun-loving Australian Shepherd, and Reba, a grouchy Basset Hound.

Smudge is called “Wonder Dog” because of the number of close calls she encounters. She initially believes that the couple is looking her over because “they’re sizing me up for a future dinner!” Willie becomes Smudge’s close friend and companion, giving her plenty of good advice for adjusting to life with her humans and to life in general. For example, Willie tells her, “You must never think you’re better than any other dog just because it looks different from you.”

Smudge starts out as a terribly homesick prima donna and drama queen. She goes on a hunger strike, thinking this will get her returned to her kennel home. Instead, her owners take her to the vet. Further adventures include getting burrs embedded in her coat and having to get shaved, finding her bark and getting into trouble for it with the animal control department,

hiding under the back porch, and making friends with neighborhood nocturnal animals.

Smudge's year concludes on a serious note: She is treated for a birth defect and also suffers near-fatal injuries when she's hit on a busy freeway.

Elementary school students will enjoy the way Smudge "voices" her own adventures; her tale is also written in a child-friendly font. Adding to the appeal are the illustrations depicting several of the story's incidents plus photos of Smudge, Willie, and Reba. A small glossary for terms such as "whelped" might have been helpful for the book's target age group.

Animal lovers will find an unforgettable story here and recognize the life lessons being promoted. When Smudge cries to Willie about how ugly she feels after being shaved, the wise, older dog replies: "You're not ugly, Smudge, you just look different. Besides, beauty isn't what you see on the outside, it's what comes from the inside."

Robin Farrell Edmunds