

The Mutt for Me: A Beautiful Transformation from Project Dog to Man's Best Friend

Don Hughes

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*Covering a consequential canine adoption, the hopeful pet memoir *The Mutt for Me* is about the transformative power of loving animals.*

Don Hughes's touching memoir *The Mutt for Me* is about rescuing a dog and finding salvation in the process.

Hughes volunteered at his local dog shelter as an adoption counselor, helping people find the perfect dogs to take home. He saw many scared animals because of his volunteering work, including abused dogs, dogs who had been abandoned in awful circumstances, and dogs who had been surrendered by their owners. When he met Barbie, he decided to take her in himself.

From its beginning, the book asks a fundamental question—whether humans save dogs or if it's the other way around. Its answer is “not as obvious” as expected, and arriving at it requires sifting through a multitude of moving accounts from Hughes's volunteer work. There's coverage of working with project dogs like Barbie, but there are also recollections of people who cried from happiness as they were adopting the dogs they always wanted. Hughes also recalls a teenage girl who was distraught because she could not save all of the animals at the shelter.

But the book isn't just a memoir; it also gets into commentary on animal-related subjects. Heavy topics, including animal abuse in the era of social media, are covered in the course of Hughes's work as well. He argues that society has become accustomed to violence when it involves animals. And he discusses the controversies around animal euthanasia with care, including the idea of public shelters euthanizing dogs deemed unadoptable, touching on both sides of the argument.

But the book is most compelling when it sticks to Hughes's particular experiences with Barbie. With work and patience, he suggests, dogs like Barbie can not only become adoptable but can also find their forever homes. Barbie herself is memorialized as a project dog; her behavioral issues were difficult to correct, and her adoption was unlikely. But instead of being put down, Barbie was saved by Hughes, and her story becomes an example of what's possible if people remain open to creatures in need. For Hughes, adopting Barbie led to renewed passion for his own life; from her, he relearned the will to live life to its fullest.

The hopeful pet memoir *The Mutt for Me* is about the transformative power of loving animals—and of learning how to live with loss.

ANNA MARIA COLIVICCHI (August 17, 2023)

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