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Not My Buddy: One Woman, A Dog, And Their Journey Toward Healing



Synopsis

How is it possible to love something that almost ends your life? Three days after the arrival of "Buddy," an adorable Golden Retriever puppy, Tracey Berkowitz's picture perfect life shatters. Almost overnight, she looks horrible, feels horrible and has no idea why. *Not My Buddy* is a love story between one woman and the dog who restores her spirit while she finds her way toward health. Over the course of five years, Tracey Berkowitz and her family spend more than \$80,000 on a team of 16 health care professionals and, at one point, 132 pills per day, while they seek a diagnosis and treatment for this mysterious illness. Taken to the brink of bankruptcy and divorce and incapacitated as a mother, Tracey removes the masks that contributed to her dis-ease, leaving her vulnerable, terrified, and headed on a collision course with her soul's true purpose: to help those suffering from chronic giardiasis-ironically "the gift" from the dog who teaches her self-love.

Book Information

Paperback: 246 pages

Publisher: Gemini Press (June 16, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0990735508

ISBN-13: 978-0990735502

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,246,514 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #37 in Books > Medical Books > Veterinary Medicine > Parasitology #357 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Thyroid Conditions #1530 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Infectious Disease

Customer Reviews

"In her debut book, *Not My Buddy*, Berkowitz invites readers to join her on a whodunit medical mystery, sharing her five-year journey of self-discovery as she fights her way back to health after contracting *Giardia* from her golden retriever, Buddy, for whom the book is titled." Berkowitz writes in a style so endearing that readers will feel as though they are one of her inner circle and candidly shares the intimate and escalating struggles she and her family encounter in the face of her rapidly declining health. Berkowitz's take-charge mentality when it comes to being her own advocate, both as a patient and in her family life, is nothing short of inspiring and *Not My*

Buddy is sure to positively impact the lives of all who read it, as it did my own." ~ Stacey Freeman of Middle-Aged Mania blog "An insightful, edifying tale of the toll that a parasitic disease can take...Berkowitz writes of this challenging situation with honesty, humility and even humor." ~ Kirkus Reviews "In her first memoir, author Tracey Berkowitz shares with abject and detailed frankness a battle for health and what it both cost her and brought her. But Not My Buddy is more than a person's personal battle with chronic illness; it's a journey shared with two - and four-legged - family, one filled with beautiful words that detailed the deep kinship she shares with other small souls." ~ LB Johnson, author of The Book of Barkley and Saving Grace "An inspiring tale of persistence and determination. If you suffer from chronic giardiasis or any mystery illness, you should read this book." ~ Leo Galland, MD, author of The Fat Resistance Diet

CHAPTER 1 In April 2009, I stood in front of a full-length mirror and stared at my distended belly. I'd given birth to twin girls eight years earlier but looked and felt as if I was about to go into labor, except I was not pregnant. What I was--was a mystery. My runner's body had vanished overnight. I struggled to stay balanced on my feet. My dark hair, once shiny, had turned dull and fell out in clumps. I was shedding as frequently as the Golden Retriever that sat at my feet. Something was very wrong and he knew it. Buddy stared up at me, yearning for attention and a chance to play, but any activity other than sleep was more than I could handle. He was barely a year old, but I swear he was trying to apologize. His big brown eyes asked, is it really my fault? ** My fraternal twin daughters, Abby and Jolie, begged me to get a dog after we read every tale of Biscuit the Puppy and watched all the "Air Bud" movies. By May 2008, my husband and I finally gave in and contacted the breeder that my sister used the prior year. We told the girls we were going to the "dog farm," the breeder's house, to play with purebred Golden Retrievers. I melted seeing the girls sitting on the kennel floor surrounded by a new litter. I didn't care that it was filthy--it was a kennel after all. Abby and Jolie were ecstatic. "What would you say if we told you that we can bring one of these puppies home soon?" A chorus of "OMGs" were followed by a round of "THANK YOUs!" Two weeks later, we returned to choose our puppy. Choosing a puppy required some preparation and a lot of reading. I had done my homework, determined to find just the right dog for our family. What exactly did that mean? I wanted a smart dog, an affectionate dog, a dog that behaved and was good with children and made bad people run like hell from our house. I wanted a dog that looked cute, that we loved very much and that loved us back unconditionally. I wanted a dog that the girls would learn to take care of. Like a 4-H project. We could do this, I kept telling myself. It might even

be fun. I did not have a dog growing up and hadn't considered myself a dog person until I spent time at my first boyfriend's house in junior high school. Stephen owned a beautiful blonde Golden Retriever with a seemingly submissive personality. He made it look like taking care of a dog was easy. I thought so, too, until his dog pinned me against the door in Stephen's laundry room, where he stayed when people visited. All he wanted was to play with someone and receive some attention. I knew he wouldn't hurt me but I panicked and screamed for help. Later in college, I had another chance to become a dog lover when my roommate agreed to keep her boyfriend's new litter of Bulldog puppies at our apartment. Their hairless bodies fit into the palms of our hands and I found myself racing home from class every day to play with them. Once they were sold, our apartment seemed empty. I was startled by how quickly I had bonded with those puppies and I missed them very much. When my daughters fell in love with the storybook character "Biscuit," it didn't take much time for me to start dreaming about our new lives together. I could imagine myself in our local dog park, chatting with my new dog lover friends, tossing Frisbees and balls, comparing dog foods and obedience training. Adding a dog to our family would complete us, I believed. The picture was almost perfect. I wanted 'the perfect dog,' but every puppy squirmed right out of my arms before I could complete the four personality tests recommended in *Good Owners, Great Dogs*; *What All Good Dogs Should Know*; *Children with their Dogs* and *Golden Retrievers for Dummies*. "You think those tests will work completely?" my husband, Jeff, asked dubiously. I continued petting the puppy between my legs, aware of my husband's smirking. I refused to let his healthy skepticism alter my plans. He nudged me a few times in the arm, then flashed his goofy, dimpled grin and raised his eyebrows until they disappeared under the lid of his baseball hat. He raised his hat in one hand, pushed back his brown hair with the other and winked--as if to emphasize his teasing. I elbowed him and rolled my eyes. The breeder helped narrow the selection for us, removing the puppies we didn't want, leaving us with three males whose fur wouldn't get thick like a wolf. We didn't want to ruin the carpets for God's sake. Abby insisted we take the runt. "He is so calm and not biting my shoelaces like the other ones. He's small and cute like me," she said and smiled. "No way I'm taking the runt!" I declared. I wanted a healthy dog. Maybe even a show dog. A dog we could rally behind, the centerpiece of holiday cards. Abby flipped me a look. "How about this one," Jolie asked. "He's cute and sort of calm." She laughed when he jumped right out of her arms and looked at us. "I guess. It's so hard to choose." Jeff held one of the puppies for a while. The puppy seemed calm. Jeff turned the puppy on his back to cradle him--using the personality test he had mocked. "Trace, he's really sweet and he's been hanging out in my arms the longest. We're never going to know what any of these pups will be like in a few

months. We'll train him and he'll be great. Take him." I grabbed onto the six-pound bundle of fur. He was sweet and looked directly into my eyes. I turned him over, rubbing my hand around his little bald belly, feeling the warmth and softness. It struck me, here's my chance to have a third child--despite his performance on those personality tests. Suddenly, I forgot about the books. My future pulsed with possibility. It was as if I'd finally get to experience what caring for a newborn "baby" would be like without the constant worry of splitting my attention equally like I had always done with the twins. I paused with my hand over his heart and scratched under his chin. He hardly moved, clearly relishing this connection. Cradled on his back, he didn't squirm much, and he nipped only playfully. Clearly, this was a gentle soul wrapped in just the right amount of soft blond fur. He passed all four tests. I glanced at my family. "I can't believe I am going to say this, but I like him. I think he's the one! I think we found our Buddy guys!" At ten weeks old, Buddy would be ready to leave his mother and siblings and start a new life with us. We gave the breeder a deposit and returned Memorial Day Weekend to pick up Buddy. While I filled out the last of the paperwork, the breeder told us that Buddy had a parasite. I paused and looked up at him. "A parasite?" The breeder shrugged and nodded. "Yeah, giardia. It's very common among puppies. Nothing that this won't cure," he said and handed me a Ziploc bag with tubes of liquid antibiotics, instructing us to inject them into his mouth every day for a week. His relaxed manner eliminated the need to inquire further. I figured parasites, especially in puppies, were no big deal, like my girls having the stomach flu. "Easy, right?" he asked. I nodded, recalling the times I gave Jolie acid reflux medicine when she was an infant, and within a few days her stomach got better. I could handle this. We took more pictures and headed home while my daughters bickered over who got to have Buddy on her lap. I refused to let anything ruin our beautiful day and sat in the back seat between them while Buddy laid on my lap, completing the perfect picture. **

She did everything right. Before completing the picture-perfect life she had always envisioned with the addition of a new puppy to her young family of four, author, and soon-to-be divorced mom, Tracey Berkowitz, did her homework. But what she ended up learning was a powerful life lesson no amount of research could have ever prepared her for. In her debut book, 'Not My Buddy,' Berkowitz invites readers to join her on a whodunit medical mystery, sharing her five-year journey of self-discovery as she fights her way back to health after contracting Giardia, a parasite commonly responsible for causing waterborne illness, from her golden retriever, Buddy, for whom the book is titled. Berkowitz, who writes in a style so endearing that readers will feel as though they are one of her inner circle, candidly shares the intimate and escalating struggles she and her

family encounter in the face of her rapidly declining health. As we envision Berkowitz's steadfast attempts to balance life as a wife, mother, part-time preschool teacher, and caretaker of a rambunctious new puppy while trying for more than a year to systematically uncover the cause of her illness, readers will find themselves wondering how they, too, would function if similarly confronted with such a personal crisis. Berkowitz brings unexpected life and heart to an illness that is far more deserving of the limited awareness it presently garners. The attention Berkowitz gives throughout her five-year ordeal to her constant medical care, the needs of her family, and the dog she continues to love unconditionally is a testament to the unfaltering strength of the human spirit. Berkowitz's take-charge mentality when it comes to being her own advocate, both as a patient and in her family life, is nothing short of inspiring and 'Not My Buddy' is sure to positively impact the lives of all who read it, as it did my own.

I thoroughly was very impressed reading how Tracey searched with determination on what her chronic ailment was. It was a long journey, but glad she is on the mend. By writing her story, Tracey can help others with chronic Giardiasis. H.F.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Would recommend it to anyone who wants to read about a woman and her struggle to get herself well. Tracey Berkowitz has a wonderful easy way of writing and I could not put this book down. Phyllis PA

I finished the book. I was so intrigued with the details of your journey I couldn't put it down. I have known the story line but am beyond impressed at the person you have become. The medical terms, the vitamins, the holistic methods, the meditational awareness, the food sensitivity, the positivity, and the strength you have shown in this book is beyond admirable. There is so much that I can relate but yet there is so much that I can't. Your journey is not publicized or marketed like breast cancer and chemo. My wish for you is that this book becomes national and parasites become as well known as cancer. There needs to be an awareness about this. I always had an extremely high admiration for you, but this book has raised the bar. You are one smart cookie, one devoted mother, and one strong person. Like I said, this is only the beginning for you. THE BEST IS YET TO COME!!

I took this book with me on vacation on my Nook . . . and I could not put it down. It is not a story of perfection; it is an inspiring story of one courageous woman's struggle, journey of medical and

self-discovery and ultimate success in her battle and ultimate victory over her exasperatingly impossible-to-diagnose condition and her own pre-conceived (ill-conceived?) self-image, made possible by her own courage, her husband and amazing daughters, and yes, Buddy, the dog that started it all.

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