

THE ANIMAL'S COMPANION

People & Their Pets, a 26,000-Year Love Story

(Black Dog and Leventhal)

By Jacky Colliss Harvey

REVIEWED BY CLAUDIA KAWCZYNSKA

Who would've thought that our recommendation for the summer's best read would be a well-researched, deeply crafted, wry and witty compendium on the importance of pets in our lives? *The Animal's Companion* by Jacky Colliss Harvey, a Brit from rural Suffolk with a background in literature and art history and a long career in the museum world, is a cultural investigation that is erudite but accessible (I even enjoyed poring through its extensive bibliography).

With her curatorial eye and descriptive skill, Colliss Harvey successfully melds examples from a variety of fields — art, literature, history, biology — with personal reflections. It is a chatty book, easily drawing the reader in (this quality makes it an excellent audiobook choice for a summer road trip). While she doesn't focus on any one species, there is plenty of dog in it, enough to satisfy the most canine-centric reader.

The book's enthralling stories and tidbits about pets through the millennia are divided into nine chapters: Finding, Choosing, Fashioning, Naming, Communicating, Connecting, Caring, Losing and Imagining. A great example can be found in "Fashioning," in which we learn about the craze for



canaries, and how an otherwise dull greenish bird became yellow. While we knew that they were used by miners to detect noxious gases in coal mines, what this reader did not

know was that miners in Germany also bred and trained the birds as singers.

As the author notes, "[I]n the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a good living could be made by professional trainers of canaries, or *siffleurs*, who were employed by the most fashionable owners to expand their bird's repertoires with flutes and water-whistles." Some breeders turned yellow birds orange by feeding them red peppers, but got their comeuppance when it was

found that red ones couldn't sing "worth a damn."

She then segues neatly from canaries to dogs: "[E]verything we have done to the canary has been endured to the power of ten by the dog. ... there were just fifteen or so distinct breeds of dogs at the beginning of the nineteenth century; there are some 340 as I write." She goes on to tell the reader how, in 1689, King William III and his spouse Mary started the craze for Pugs in England. Those Pugs, however, looked nothing like today's; they had longer snouts, longer legs and were bigger overall.

Colliss Harvey has a marvelously philosophical way of making strong humane and sociological observations: "If we want that one special animal, the difference is made by the quality of our

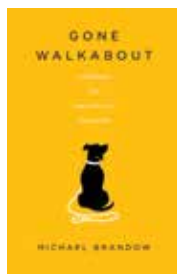
relationship with them, the depth of our comprehension of them, and the strength of our connection to them. Fashion has absolutely nothing to do with that.”

Her gem of a book offers a lot to chew on about our reasons for having and loving pets. Animals, and yes, even our dear dogs, are not human (thankfully), and their “otherness” is part of what compels us to love them. Our species’ fondness for pets seems to be the one clear distinction we can claim as our own—indeed, a case can be made for pets making us human. We urge you to read (or listen to) *The Animal’s Companion*. You will come away as enthralled and entertained as we were.

GONE WALKABOUT

By Michael Brandow

Reviewed by Claudia Kawczynska



Michael Brandow has been walking New York City pooches for a long time, more than 20 years and counting.

He has also been commenting on cultural matters during that time along with writing several books, including *A Matter of Breeding*, a takedown of the AKC, and *New York’s Poop Scoop Law* (a title that clearly defines its topic).

In his newest, with the charming, aptly phrased title *Gone Walkabout: Confessions of a New York City Dog Walker*, he muses on all things canine, sprinkling nuggets of self-reflection, especially about two decades of change in NYC.

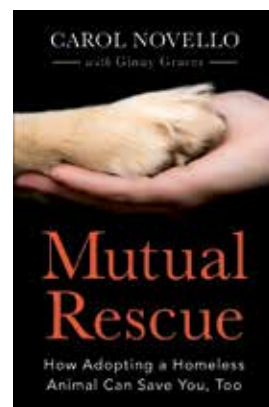
Brandow gave up a 16-year corporate gig because not only does he adore dogs and loves doting on and getting to know them, but also because he generally bonds well with their furless halves too. Besides that, shedding business suits gave him time and inspiration to follow his writing muse.

The author is not one of those “multiple walkers,” as he calls them, people who navigate with large numbers of dogs along the uptown avenues, and somehow keep all those leashes from tangling, and offer cut-rate prices that harm the more personalized dog-walking services such as he offers. He specializes in home care in his West Village studio and (as the excerpt on page 54 describes) in chaperoning his canine pals on long, out-of-city, woodsy explorations.

Being a dogsbody to dogs might have its drawbacks, but not as far as Brandow is concerned. Dog walking, he says, was the first paying job he took seriously; being “paid to be the good guy” to happy, grateful dogs has its own rewards.

In this hard-to-classify and hard-not-to-like book, we accompany him on his daily 15 hours of walking around the lower part of Manhattan with clients’ dogs as his, and our, trusty co-pilots. We stop for a few sniffs, get distracted by a chunk of something left along the curb, pick up more dogs, greet old friends, spot a few celebrities, give opinion-laced directions to tourists looking for “the village,” hobnob (almost) with the likes of Lou Reed, who turns out not to be quite the guy we had hoped for, but whose Rat Terrier, Lolabelle is a sweetie. How can it miss?

Read how adopting animals transforms human lives.



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— TEMPLE GRANDIN, PhD,
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& *Animals Make Us Human*

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