

Good With Dogs and Cats: The Adventures of Healing Weintraub is about a man who helps dogs and cats resolve their difficulties with humans. Mystery and romance abound in this tale brimming with insights into dogs and cats and people.

Good With Dogs and Cats: The Adventures of Healing Weintraub

By Todd Walton

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*Good With
Dogs and Cats*



*The Adventures of
Healing Weintraub*

Todd Walton

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1. Tarzan

Healing Weintraub is very good with dogs and cats.

A lifelong resident of Mercy, a small town on the far north coast of California, Healing is not quite six-feet-tall and has short brown hair going gray. On weekdays he works at *Good Groceries* from eight in the morning until three in the afternoon. Most other times he may be found on his two-acre property on Nasturtium Road at the south end of town where he shares his little old house with two dogs, four cats, and two parrots. He also has twelve chickens, but they don't live in the house.

When not puttering in his big vegetable and flower garden and walking his dogs, Healing plays accordion in a jazzy quartet called Mercy Me, gives accordion lessons, reads copiously, takes twice weekly yoga classes at the rec center, and is currently courting Desdemona Garcia who works at the bookstore.

Another thing Healing does is help dogs and cats with their humans, and thereby hangs this tale.

*

When Healing was born fifty-seven years ago in the little old house on Nasturtium Road, his sister Jean was two, his British mother Naomi was twenty-two, and his British father Ezra was twenty-six. There were four other humans living in and around the house with them, along with five dogs, four cats, and several feral cats nesting in the jungle of brambles and vines beyond the vegetable garden.

One of the dogs, Miriam, a large four-year-old mutt of incalculable antecedents, took a special liking to baby Healing and devoted herself to helping take care of him. The other dogs and cats liked Healing, too, because he loved sharing his food with them and petting them

and making love sounds for them, all of which predisposed them to like him and communicate with him.

Healing walked at eleven months and began speaking English and Spanish at twelve months, his primary babysitter a Mexican woman named Nina. But long before Healing spoke a human language, he understood the facial expressions, postures, and vocalizations of dogs and cats.

When Healing was four, Chester, one of the resident dogs, disappeared. After two days of looking everywhere for Chester, Healing's parents gave up the search. So Healing asked Miriam if she knew where Chester had gone and she showed Healing where Chester's body was in the jungle of brambles and vines, the poor dog having choked to death on a chicken bone.

"How did you know to look here?" asked Ezra when Healing brought him to Chester's body.

"Miriam showed me," said Healing, gazing curiously at Chester. "When will he wake up?"

"He won't," said Ezra, picking up the corpse and carrying it to a clearing where they would one day dig a pond. "He's dead and he won't ever be alive again. Not in this body. His soul might be reborn in a different dog or in a person or in some other living thing. I don't know if that's true, but some people believe that."

"What's a soul, Papa?"

"Your soul is what makes you unique."

"What's you neek?"

"Unique means you are not like anybody else."

"Oh," said Healing, nodding without fully understanding. "Will Miriam die?"

"Someday," said Ezra, laying Chester's body on the ground. "Everything that lives eventually dies."

"Why?" asked Healing, alarmed to know that his parents and he were destined to die. "Why do things die if no one kills them?"

“Because if things didn’t die,” said Ezra, putting his arm around his son, “there would be no room for new things to be alive.”

“Oh,” said Healing, beginning to understand. “Like we dig up the potatoes so there will be room for new potatoes.”

“That’s right,” said Ezra, giving Healing a tender squeeze. “People who have dogs and cats must get used to their pets dying because dogs and cats don’t live as long as most humans. In your life you’ll have many dogs and cats who die before you do.”

So Healing grew up knowing that every puppy and kitten and dog and cat he adopted would probably die before him, and he accepted this as part of the life he wanted to have.

*

On a sunny Sunday morning in June a few days after his fifty-seventh birthday, Healing leashes his dogs Benito and Carla for a stroll around their neighborhood of little old houses and not-so-little newer homes.

Benito is a seven-year-old mongrel Chihuahua with pointy ears and light brown hair. Carla is a very large six-year-old Black Lab Dane with floppy ears and black and white fur. Both Benito and Carla are aware that Healing has a dog consultation later today because they were listening intently to Healing speaking on the phone yesterday with a woman who is bringing her dog to meet Healing, the phone conversation ending with Healing saying, “Wonderful. We’ll see you and Tarzan tomorrow.”

When they reach the edge of the commercial district of Mercy, Healing and Benito and Carla turn around and head for home via a gravel track known to locals as Nameless Alley, a fabulous place to pick blackberries in August. And because Healing knows Benito and Carla are keenly interested in the upcoming consultation, he tells them everything he knows so far.

“His name is Tarzan,” says Healing, speaking with a mild British accent inherited from his parents. “A four-year-old Husky Shepherd Golden Lab. His primary human, a young man named Brian, went off to college a year ago and left Tarzan behind. Brian is the only child of Joan, an interior decorator, and Larry, a venture capitalist. They live in San Rafael. Now that Brian is gone they’ve hired someone to take Tarzan for a run every morning. Otherwise Tarzan has nothing to do all day except hang out in the backyard and wait to go running the next morning. Joan told me that Tarzan started growling at Larry after Brian left for college, and Larry is furious about the situation and wants to have Tarzan put to sleep.”

Benito frowns at Healing to say *We don't like Larry* and Carla makes a low moaning sound to agree with Benito.

*

Later that morning, Healing is waiting in front of his house when Joan and Larry arrive in a silver Mercedes station wagon. Joan is in her forties, a platinum blonde wearing dark glasses and a silky purple blouse and blue jeans. Larry is in his fifties, chubby and balding and wearing dark glasses and a crimson Harvard sweatshirt and black sweatpants.

“Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with us on such short notice,” says Joan, earnestly shaking hands with Healing.

“You’re very welcome,” says Healing, offering his hand to Larry. “Thanks for making the long drive.”

“Long is right,” says Larry, disdaining Healing’s hand. “Five hours to get to the middle of nowhere.”

“Having lived here all my life,” says Healing, laughing, “I think of Mercy as the center of the universe.”

Larry snorts. “You claim to know what dogs are thinking?”

“I purport to understand dogs,” says Healing, not the least surprised by Larry’s skepticism. “I was born into a family of four

humans, counting me, and five dogs with whom my mother and father and sister related to as their equals, so I've always related to dogs that way, too. If you know what I mean."

"I don't," says Larry, sneering. "We only got this one because our son was depressed and the psychologist thought a dog might help. Brian loved the puppy, but when he wasn't a puppy anymore the depression came back. Meds finally fixed it and now Brian's off having fun in college and we're stuck with the stupid dog."

"Angela said you helped her so much with... oh..." Joan grimaces. "I forget her dog's name. I'm so sorry."

"Bilko," says Healing, fondly remembering the affable pooch. "A delightful mix of Bull Terrier and Cocker Spaniel."

"He barked all the time," says Joan, smiling obsequiously at Larry. "After Healing worked with him he didn't bark so much."

"Barking is not the problem with this one," says Larry, going to the car. "He's vicious."

"Can't wait to meet him," says Healing, accompanying Larry to the back of the car. "Shall we?"

"He hates strangers," says Larry, lifting the rear door to reveal Tarzan, a large golden brown dog with pointed ears sequestered in a travel cage too small for him.

Tarzan growls ominously and Larry backs away.

"I'll get him out," says Joan, showing little fear of the dog. "We don't know why he started growling at Larry, but for some reason he did."

"He growls at *everybody*," says Larry, glaring at Joan. "Not just me."

Joan opens the cage door and clips a leash to Tarzan's collar, and Tarzan again bares his teeth at Larry.

"Look at him," says Larry, pointing at Tarzan and backing further away. "He's a psycho. We should just have him put him to sleep."

"Hello Tar," says Healing, speaking quietly to the big golden brown dog. "I'm Healing. Very glad to meet you."

Tarzan looks at Healing and his snarl subsides into a solemn gaze.

“Shall I bring him out now?” asks Joan, anxiously.

“I’ll do,” says Healing, taking the leash from her.

“I’m warning you,” says Larry, pointing at Healing. “He hates strangers, especially men.”

“Hey Tar,” says Healing, speaking soothingly. “What a beauty you are. Yes you are. Come on out now.”

Healing gives a light tug and Tarzan moves out of the cage and jumps to the ground where he gently takes a chewy treat from Healing’s hand.

“We’re good now,” says Healing, placing a hand on Tarzan’s head. “There’s a nice café five blocks from here. *Café Brava*. If you’ll leave Tarzan with me for an hour or so we’ll get things figured out.”

“How much is this gonna cost?” asks Larry, squinting at Healing.

“Nothing,” says Healing, affably. “I don’t do this for money.”

“*What?*” says Larry, grimacing at Joan. “You didn’t tell me that.”

“I didn’t know,” she says, fearfully. “I’m sorry, dear. I honestly didn’t know.”

*

When Larry and Joan are gone, Healing leads Tarzan through a gate into the backyard where Benito and Carla are waiting.

“The big girl is Carla, the little fellow Benito,” says Healing, stroking Tarzan’s back before unleashing him. “They’re both very nice and eager to meet you.”

Tarzan bristles as Carla approaches, for she is much larger than he. Carla wags her tail and smiles, and Tarzan ceases to bristle.

Benito trots up to Tarzan, they rub noses, and after a bit more sniffing, Tarzan understands that Benito and Carla own this place and are glad he came to visit.

“Let’s show Tar the pond,” says Healing, gesturing for the dogs to follow him.

Benito trots ahead, as is his custom, while Carla walks sedately on Healing's right and Tarzan walks on Healing's left.

They traverse the vegetable garden and enter a grove of Japanese maples surrounding a large pond from which Carla and Benito drink.

Tarzan walks to the water's edge and gazes at his reflection in the sparkling pool before tasting the delicious water.

Healing sits on the rough-hewn wooden bench near the water's edge and holds out his hand to Tarzan. "Tell us about your life, Tar. We want to know all about you."

Tarzan comes to Healing and gazes forlornly at him.

Healing rests his hand on Tarzan's head and opens himself to the good dog's anguish and exhaustion from years of living in fear of Larry.

"Lonely without Brian?" asks Healing, stroking Tarzan's back.

Tarzan barely reacts to the name *Brian*, which tells Healing that Tarzan was neglected and afraid long before Brian went to college.

Now Carla approaches Tarzan and caresses his snout with hers.

Tarzan makes a low moaning sound in response to Carla's caress, and that is how Tarzan begins to tell the story of his life with a woman who doesn't like him and a man who hates him and hurts him.

*

When Larry and Joan return they find Healing waiting for them on his front porch without Tarzan.

"Where's the dog?" asks Larry, grimly.

"He's in the backyard with my dogs," says Healing, coming down the stairs. "I think he's a fine dog and I would like to have him if you will give him to me. I don't think he can be happy with you in the absence of your son or another dog, and I don't imagine you want another dog."

"He's so lonely," says Joan, her eyes filling with tears.

"Yes," says Healing, knowing she is speaking of herself, too.

"You *want* him?" asks Larry, gaping at Healing.

“I do,” says Healing, nodding. “Very much.”

“Great,” says Larry, clenching his fists in celebration. “Now *that* was unexpected.” He beams at Healing. “What a relief. Thank you! You know I didn’t really want to put him down, but things were getting out of hand. This is so good of you. I insist on giving you some money. He costs a small fortune to feed.”

*

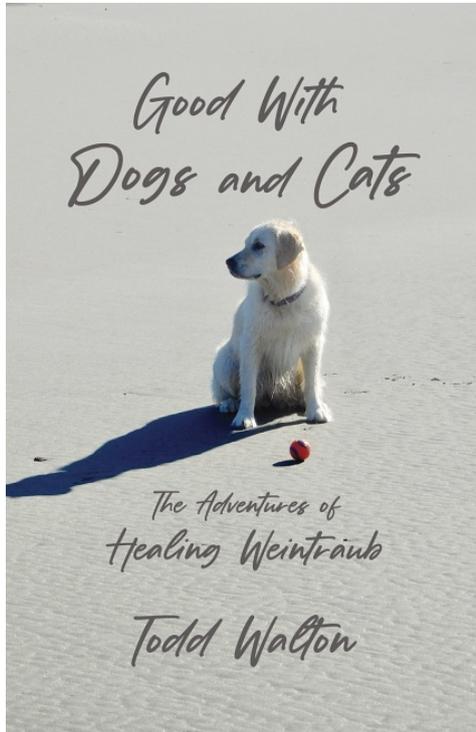
And that is how Tarzan came to live with Healing and Carla and Benito and the cats and the parrots in the little old house on Nasturtium Road.

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About the Author

Todd Walton is the author of many novels and short story collections including: *Inside Moves*, *Forgotten Impulses*, *Ruby & Spear*, *Buddha In A Teacup*, *Under the Table Books*, *Little Movies*, and *Why You Are Here*. His many albums of songs include *Through the Fire*, *Lounge Act In Heaven*, *Dream of You*, *Mystery Inventions*, and 43 short piano improvisations.

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