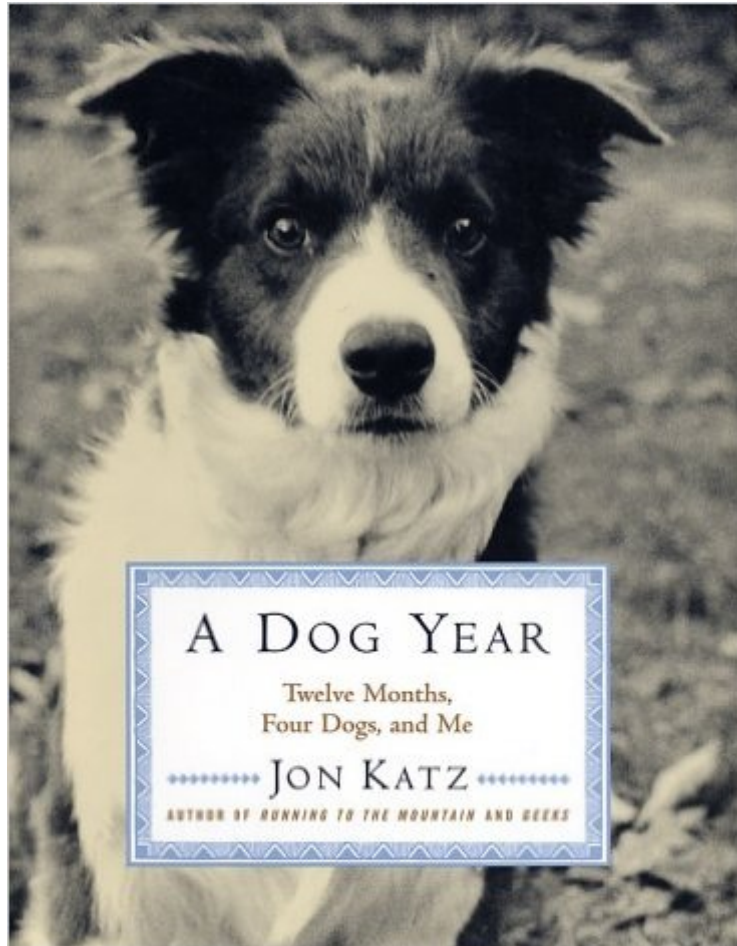


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A Dog Year: Twelve Months, Four Dogs, And Me



Synopsis

Change loves me, defines and stalks me like a laser-guided smart bomb. It comes at me in all forms, suddenly and with enormous impact, from making shifts in work to having and raising a kid to buying a cabin on a distant mountaintop. Sometimes, change comes on four legs. • In his popular and widely praised *Running to the Mountain*, Jon Katz wrote of the strength and support he found in the massive forms of his two yellow Labrador retrievers, Julius and Stanley. When the Labs were six and seven, a breeder who'd read his book contacted Katz to say she had a dog that was meant for him—a two-year-old border collie named Devon, well bred but high-strung and homeless. Katz already had a full canine complement, but instinct overruled reason, and soon thereafter he brought Devon home. *A Dog Year: Twelve Months, Four Dogs, and Me* is the story of how Devon and Jon and Julius and Stanley came to terms with each other. It shows how a man discovered a lot about himself through one dog (and then another) whose temperament seemed as different from his own as day is from night. It is a story of trust and understanding, of life and death, of continuity and change. It is by turns insightful, hilarious, and deeply moving.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you have not already read this book, I would recommend you read the reviews for the book which chronicles the end of Orson's life (the gorgeous dog on the front cover. In *A Dog Year* you are introduced to Katz's pet project - Orson. We are lead to believe that Orson (aka Devon) is Katz's soulmate and Katz is the person who can save the poor troubled and mis-handled Orson. Although I somewhat enjoyed *A Dog Year*, I was worried that Katz had taken on something he didn't

understand. Orson's final book - A Good Dog - proved me right. Katz cannot handle Orson and eventually euthanizes him. Katz made his money out of Orson by writing these books and then gave up on him. Considering the depth of feeling that Orson had for the author - I was left incensed and speechless at the end of A Good Dog. As an aside - the other border collie you are introduced to in a Dog Year is given to a new home because he doesn't fit with Katz either. So, before putting even more money into the coffers of a man who said that he could not justify spending money on Orson to find out what his issues were, I would refrain from spending money on this book.

Before you buy this book, you need to know that Devon, the Border Collie, is killed by Katz, as detailed in the later book "A Good Dog." Katz had his two yellow labs, Julius and Stanley, killed at the first sign of illness, before attempting any treatment. He tells Devon, on page 88, "I will never abandon you," playing up his promise to his dog as something solemn and sacred. Although I thought Katz did almost everything wrong in this book, I was willing to forgive it because he claimed he loved Devon and was dedicated to the best care of his "soulmate." Then I come to find out that Katz has written another book about having Devon killed, while the dog was young and in good health, for what Katz decided were insurmountable behavioral problems. This new book, A Good Dog, makes the argument that it is the moral responsibility of dog owners to kill their pets at the first sign of trouble instead of spending money on training or medical treatment. For Katz, you had better be young, healthy, and happy, or you get the ax. This is a disgusting person who should not be allowed to own animals. He most definitely should not be viewed as an animal lover or an expert on animals. Do not buy any books written by Jon Katz.

This book made me very uncomfortable in many ways. I wanted to like the book and I wanted it to be heart-warming, but everything this author did caused more heartburn than warm fuzzies. He was perfectly happy with two yellow labs and a routine that suited them all but he couldn't help but adopt a border collie and ship him to his home in...suburban New Jersey!? My stomach turned. His "education" of the dog was a tad rough by his own admission, throwing metal choke chains and physically striking the what, 30 or 40 pound dog? I was a bit embarrassed for him for admitting it publicly. He put his yellow lab down when he still had many good days of playing and companionship ahead of him and was not in pain. His choice, but I felt a bit queasy. He caved in and brought a second border collie into the house against his better judgement. I wanted to scream. This must be a man who can't say no to all of those telemarketers. I am very happy things worked out for him in the end, but I still need antacids to get over the angst this book has given me.

I rarely write book reviews but felt compelled to do so with this book. From the beginning, I could not connect with this author. He describes an idyllic and mellow life with his two labs - writing, walking, treats and regular forays to his cabin in the woods - and yet I could not feel that he had any personal insight into these two middle-aged dogs. At one point, he describes a hike with Julius in the Provincetown dunes where the dog ended up with cracked and bleeding paws, probably, the "sneering" vet told him, he was allergic to the beach sand. When the vet "smirkingly" suggested booties, Mr. Katz felt that both his and his dog's dignity would be injured. This is just one example where the needs and ego of Mr. Katz outweigh the real needs and desires of his dogs. And then he gets a call from a Border Collie breeder with a two-year-old emotionally damaged BC who needs to be rehomed. The breeder had read one of his books and knew that Mr. Katz was the perfect person for this dog. She actually pesters him until he agrees to take the dog. Then the terrorized dog is put on a plane as opposed to being quietly driven to its new home. When it arrives at the airport it is spinning crazily in its crate and yet Mr Katz opens the crate door and surprise, the dog escapes. Then ensues a chase of seemingly immense, and to the dog, terrorizing proportion. It is eventually captured and taken to Mr. Katz home where it begins its training with Mr Katz yelling commands that the dog is incapable of following, and then having "throwing" chains and pooper scoopers thrown at it along with corporal punishment. Mr Katz finds that the best way to exercise this needy dog is put a fence between it and the road and encourage the dog to chase large vehicles. With the arrival of the new dog, the lab's needs are put on the back burner. This is where I actually became emotionally involved in the book. I felt a great sense of sorrow for all three dogs. The emotional upheaval of the lab's lives meant that their golden years were sadly disrupted and little did I know as I was reading that they would shortly be "put down". As I read, my continual thoughts for the Border Collie was that if ever a dog needed a person familiar with operant conditioning (clicker training), it was this misunderstood dog. Next the younger lab is diagnosed with hip dysplasia and a heart condition. Mr Katz takes the dog to the cabin where they spend a day happily playing ball and then Stanley is euthanized. Mr. Katz writes that "Several friends and neighbors pleaded with me to collect more opinions, consider surgery, try holistic healing, get on the Web, or explore radical new diets. One even suggested adoption: I could seek a quieter home, where Stanley could live peacefully and perhaps longer." Mr. Katz states that he would rather have "died himself than give him away, break our extraordinary bond". I couldn't help but wondering how euthanasia fit into that scenario. And when one thought things couldn't get any worse, the breeder calls again and once more, pesters Mr. Katz until he agrees to bring another Border Collie into this dysfunctional home and once more the

dogs lives are in upheaval. And now it's Julius turn to become ill. He is diagnosed with colon cancer and quickly dispatched. I found it interesting when Mr. Katz finds that he has collapsing bones in his ankles and has to wear two braces, it is Julius that he credits with saving his life twice when he fell and could have frozen to death. Of his own injuries Mr. Katz writes, "It hurts. But I keep walking and hiking, and when I fall, I hear Julius's mournful cry." I wonder that Mr. Katz doesn't dispatch himself quickly as he did his dogs. Mr Katz also speaks cavalierly about animal caretakers who he feels go too far in trying to give their animals the best and longest lives possible. I couldn't help but feel as I read that he was trying to justify his own rash actions. It would appear that when Mr. Katz tires of a dog, he is quick to euthanize. And sadly, I see that in a free sample of Mr Katz next book, I read that the Border Collie, after five years with Mr. Katz, is euthanized for biting three people. Why would Mr. Katz allow a dog who has bitten once an opportunity to bite two more people. This is a management problem and not an excuse to euthanize. I will never buy one of Mr. Katz books again. Please don't support this author or he will get yet another dog to use as a subject for his next book.

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