



Will's Red Coat

Written by Tom Ryan

Book Review by admin

This is a book about a middle aged, overweight, crusading small town newspaper publisher and his miniature Schnauzer. Big deal: every year dozens of books are written about the relationship between owners and their pets. Most feature funny stories, a bit of heartbreak and then a happy ending.

But...this book is different. Way different.

First, Will is an elderly, grumpy, unwanted, partially blind dog at death's door. Likely he'd spent most of his life imprisoned in a tiny cage. Tom the writer already had a local celebrity of a dog of the same breed. So, armed with good intentions, he offers the neglected old fellow comfort. Crotchety old Will wants none of it. Humans are dangerous. Crates are prisons.

And the way to deal with human attention is simple. Attack! Repeat over and over.

Aghast at what he's gotten, Will's new human simply refuses to quit helping the dog learn how to trust him, bites, poop and all. In doing so, the author reflects often and deeply about his own difficult youth, trying family, faith and hope. That is where this book soars above the ordinary.

Book Review

As a grassroots civic reformer in Newburyport, New Hampshire, Tom had learned a bit about how to win over otherwise scared, isolated residents who felt helpless against their town's "powers that be." Since he didn't have much money or any formal training as a journalist, Tom just walked around town and talked with ordinary people. When he wrote about what he'd learned, he found that his feisty little newspaper "The Undertoad" (taken from a John Irving novel) inspired readers to believe that they had the power to change how their town worked.

On his own, Ryan found a very effective way to bring about change in relationships, one first identified by United Farmworkers organizer Marshall Ganz, who had honed his storytelling art during the 1960's as a civil rights worker in Mississippi.

Organizing people centers on telling three nested narratives: the story of self, the story of us and the story of now.

So, this time with a hurting, angry old dog, Tom started with what he had: an ability to observe, patience and trust that all creatures can receive and give in return love.

Along the way, Ryan and Will the Schnauzer endure dreadful illness and huge obstacles in climbing New Hampshire's forbidding White Mountain peaks in both summer and frightful winter storms.

As Ryan artfully weaves his story between specific, concrete events and timeless insights about the wonders of all creation, the story becomes so engaging that the book is truly hard to stop reading.

Above all, the writer helps readers to appreciate it is never too late to start what you were destined to do. That is a message that is always welcome, always true and in this book, is told beautifully.



A Following Atticus Photograph

photo courtesy of
[https://www.facebook.com/FollowingAtticus](https://www.facebook.com/FollowingAtticusBook/)
Book/