

The Wonder of Lost Causes

by Nick Trout



About the Book

In this unforgettable novel, perfect for fans of AN UNEXPECTED GRACE and A DOG'S WAY HOME, a single mom and her chronically ill child receive a valuable lesson from an unlikely source --- a very special dog who unexpectedly enters their lives and shows them that one person's lost cause can be another's greatest gift.

Dr. Kate Blunt will do anything for her son, Jasper. Well, almost anything. Since Jasper has the incurable lung disease cystic fibrosis, Kate's always told him he couldn't get a dog. It's a tough call, but she's a single mom taking care of a kid who fights for every breath he takes. The daily medical routine that keeps Jasper alive is complicated enough. Worse still, Kate's personal resolve runs contrary to her work as the veterinarian in charge of a Cape Cod animal shelter, where she is on a mission to find forever homes for dogs in desperate need.

The scarred, mistreated wreck of a dog that turns up doesn't stand a chance. Named Whistler, he's too old, too ugly. But the dog forms an instantaneous bond with Jasper. Whistler never makes a sound, yet he speaks to Jasper in a myriad of mysterious ways. The clock's ticking, the dog's future hangs in the balance, and Jasper would do anything to find him a home. But Whistler has chosen them --- for a reason.

Discussion Guide

1. Kate quotes data from an American Animal Hospital Association Survey that asked, "What percentage of pet owners believe they know what their pet is saying?" Does the answer 97 percent come as a surprise? Why do you think almost all of us believe we share some form of unspoken communication with our pets?
2. Over the past two decades, there has been an explosion in the growth of pet rescue groups. What do you think has changed in our society to make adopting a shelter dog feel so right?

3. How do you feel about Kate's argument against having a family dog? Would you take your pet to a veterinarian who does not own a cat or a dog?
4. Before reading THE WONDER OF LOST CAUSES, had you ever heard of cystic fibrosis? Were you surprised that an estimated 10 million Americans are unknowing, asymptomatic carriers?
5. Kate gets frustrated at always playing the bad cop when it comes to tough parenting decisions and, in the eyes of her family, not having a partner to back her up. Does this perspective on raising a child as a single parent ring true?
6. Does Kate's illicit use of Adderall make you think less of her or, given her circumstances, would you, like her, do whatever it takes to survive as a mom of a sick child?
7. Have you ever attended a school sporting event, watched the other parents, and noted the various cliques and parenting styles of those around you? If you are being honest, into which category would you put yourself? The Gossips? The Blasé? The Revered? Or a totally different one?
8. How do you feel about Kate's perception of what it is to be "normal"? Do you have friends caring for sick or aging parents, kids with disabilities, with autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome? If so, how do you engage them? How do you relate to the challenges they face as parents?
9. Fake service dogs have become a thorny issue, not least for the commercial airlines. How do you feel about pet owners claiming their pet to be a therapy dog to ensure a seat next to them in the cabin? Do you feel there should be greater regulation/accountability of service dogs?
10. Family gatherings can be stressful at the best of times. Does your extended family back off or rally around in times of need?
11. When Gwen calls in the night, trying to set her sister up on a blind date, she says, "I just want my sister to have what I have." Do you experience sibling rivalry? Is competition harmful or helpful to such relationships?
12. Mr. Crabtree, the so-called Apartment Nazi, claims to love dogs, but can't think about having a dog in his life. He worries about who will look after a dog if he dies. This is a real concern for so many older pet owners who desperately need the companionship but fear for the animal's future in their aftermath. A whole new area of adoption has sprung up in the United Kingdom, where loving homes are guaranteed for older animals if their owner dies. How do you feel about this program?
13. When Kate meets another CF mom in the hospital, this stranger discusses the moment her life changed --- the diagnosis of her child with cystic fibrosis. How did her description make you feel?
14. Cystic fibrosis, epilepsy, PTSD and various forms of autism can be thought of as "hidden" disabilities, the disease having its effect on the inside, creating the appearance of "normal" on the outside. Have you ever found yourself wondering why a completely normal-looking individual parked in a handicap spot, or didn't give up a seat on a bus or a train?

15. Kate's sister, Gwen, talks about the challenge of offering long-term family support with a disease like CF given the decades of care involved. To Kate's disapproval, Gwen compares and contrasts CF with cancer. What did you think about her conclusions?

16. Jasper loves the way that Whistler, through his actions, wants to squeeze everything he can out of life. How do you feel about this canine philosophy?

17. Service dogs can prove to be incredibly popular and helpful in elderly care facilities, hospitals and schools. Have you ever witnessed what they can do and, if so, do you believe in the "power of dog"?

18. In the scene where Kate's rental car breaks down, a knight in shining armor in the form of a grungy biker proves that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation, being judgmental and regretting it?

19. If you have ever picked up a dog from a shelter, a pet store or a breeder, did you notice the way specific creatures grab your attention? Do you think Jasper is correct in stating, "Dogs choose us, not the other way around"?

20. Social media can be both a blessing and a curse for those with CF. Because the disease creates so much isolation it can provide an invaluable source of connectivity to other CF patients, yet it can also be a direct window into everything they are missing out on in life. How do you feel about social media in this context?

Author Bio

Dr. Nick Trout works full-time as a staff surgeon at the prestigious Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston. He is the author of five previous books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *TELL ME WHERE IT HURTS*, and his writing has been translated into 16 different languages. He lives in Massachusetts with his wife, Kathy; their daughter, Emily; their adopted labradoodle, Thai; and Emily's service dog, a black Labrador named Bella.

Critical Praise

"*THE WONDER OF LOST CAUSES* is equal parts heart wrenching and heartwarming as Trout pulls you onto an emotional rollercoaster that is sure to leave your heart filled to the brim. A true testament to the power of love in its purest and most absolute form."

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