

Meet Ella: The Dog Who Saved My Life

by James Middleton with Frances Harvey

A Book Review by Nancy Kvorka

I picked this book because of the title, not because it is a celebrity autobiography. It is more about how living with dogs, one special one, Ella, enriches and transforms the author's life. It is also about mental health and the stigma there still is about it. Ella was with James at the low points and the high points. James talks in the book about how Ella's presence at a key point, saved his life.

Ella, a Cocker Spaniel, was with James for 15 years. She saw James through the highs and lows of his life and even helped him meet his wife. James grew up in a dog-loving family. Ella was with James almost 100% of her life.

The book also focuses on the special skills of working dogs, such as: tracking ivory poachers, detecting illegal drugs, sniffing out bombs and their ingredients, identifying cancer, even leprosy. Other types of support from dogs: search and rescue, rescue at sea and police work, the most familiar to all of us.

Ella would accompany James as a therapy dog to help children at a place called the [Mosaic Clubhouse](#) in Brixton, England. After a successful first visit James notes, "On the way home, I reflect that therapy dogs should be on prescription. The NHS [National Health Service] would save millions. Dogs help heal traumatized minds. They bring comfort to the lonely. They encourage tongue-tied children--like the little boy I once was--because they offer no judgement. They just listen." James and Ella went there "to help others with mental health problems."

The book also referred to a touching poem that James found meaningful and may be relatable to all dog-lovers alike.

What I learned about love, I learned from my dog (author unknown)

Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joy ride together.
Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.
When loved ones come home always run to greet them.
When you want treats, practice obedience.
Let others know when they've invaded your territory.
Take naps together and stretch before rising.
Run, romp and play daily.
Be loyal.
If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.
Thrive on the attention and let people touch you.
Avoid biting, when a simple growl will do.
When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.
No matter how often you're scolded, don't buy into the guilt thing and pout- Run right back and make friends.
Delight in the simple joy of a long walk together.
Love each other unconditionally.

As a confirmed lover and observer of GSD's for over three decades and all they can do for us and with us, I highly recommend this book. Dogs add so much to our lives and this book eloquently speaks to that.

I rate this book an enthusiastic five bones! Even though I cried at the end, Ella had a life well lived. Currently James lives with four Cocker Spaniels, two Golden Retrievers, his wife and child. You can find him on [Instagram](#).