

Book Reviews – For the Love of a Dingo

I had no knowledge of context on dingoes before reading this book and found this a very interesting, informative, and easy read. The book is divided into three sections, each covering the life of a specific dingo and their relationship with Berenice Walters, their caretaker. The book starts with the life of Dora, Berenice's very first dingo. Dora's story is quite interesting as it describes in good details the learning curve that Berenice had with acclimating to a dingo from the cattle dogs she was familiar with. The "heart" of this book seems to be the middle section about Napoleon, Dora's son. You can read in the words how close the bond was between Berenice and Napoleon (or "Nap"). There is a profound love that shines through the pages and it is evident that Nap changed Berenice's life and became an ambassador for wild dingoes in Australia. The final section is about Snowgoose, an alpine dingo (who even knew there were different types of dingoes?). Snowgoose was more challenging and there are some interesting stories about her antics (including being chased around by a pig on a farm).

The book is very well-written and is neatly broken down into 3 chapters with individual sections within each that mark the progression of Berenice's relationship with the dingoes. Pamela King does an excellent job of weaving together information that is both informative and entertaining. The language is plain and clear and the book is not complicated or "heavy" to read despite being on a topic that was unfamiliar and could have easily gotten bogged down with complexities on animal biology or Australian regulations. The descriptions of Berenice's home and property allow you to visualize her life with Dora, Nap, and Snowgoose. I particularly enjoyed the anecdotes of Nap's chair in the house. Also noteworthy are the pictures which were invaluable in adding to the story.

As someone who has spent many years advocating for pit bulls, I found many parallels in this book as it relates to how dingoes are viewed in Australia. The story of Berenice's determination and perseverance to change perceptions on these animals are viewed and treated resonated strongly. I very much enjoyed this book and thank Pamela for providing a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Will Lowrey, Author ★★★★★

A lovely little read. Not a work of literature, but rather an appreciative biography of a woman who dedicated her life to improving the image of Australia's native dog. Just the tonic to balance out some of the heavier stuff I've been reading of late.

Great to learn more about dingoes, but also about dingo-human interaction beyond traps, guns, and poisons. The dingo has had so much bad press; it's practically an evil icon.

Of course, there's always another side to most stories. I commend the authors for their work in dingo conservation and for bringing the brighter side of these animals' personalities to life!

So now, I'm off to read the Pamela King's next book - The Merigal Dingoes! :)

Karina McRoberts, Author ★★★★★

The first thing you need to be aware of is: this book is a combination of memoir and biographical information and observations. A combination that in this case works well. Not only did I find it interesting and informative but also discovered a delightful read that I readily recommend.

There are three distinct parts to the book. Though the authorship is shown as Berenice Walters and Pamela Jean King they in fact contributed different aspects to the tale and therefore there are distinct characteristics in some of the writing. This does not detract from the read but is something a reader should take into account. The first account, 'Dora the Adorable Dingo' was fundamentally written by Berenice. The second, 'Napoleon (Chair) Dingo' was principally written by Berenice with some input and editing by Pamela King. The third, 'Snowgoose Obedience Champion & Dingo' has been biographically authored by Pamela. The final parts, that provide a roundup, have also been authored by Pamela. Pamela King also undertook responsibility for editing and publishing the whole book.

As the synopsis makes clear, Berenice Walters, now deceased, and her dingoes are the primary topic of this account. I think that should be the other way round; Berenice's dingoes are really the primary protagonists.

In Berenice's writing you feel the unity and affinity that existed between her and her dingo companions. It really has been written very personally and draws you in. Not unpleasantly I must add. You feel, and empathise with, her continuous joy, frustration, at times, and sorrow when something happens to her beloved dogs. Berenice already trained cattle dogs before adopting a dingo who she proved could and would respond as any dog to appropriate training techniques. It may have needed to be a little more intense, taken a little longer and required a bit more patience but in the end proved more than successful. In the midst of the joy, frustration, fear and sorrow there is also humour, especially with Napoleon. The accounts of how each of Berenice's dingoes behaved are really very interesting and enlightening.

It is clear, from a few aside comments, that there is a tale to Berenice's own life. However, and I would suggest wisely, she avoided going into a lot of detail about it. After all her accounts were an attempt to show fellow Australians the dingo is not a dog to be feared. Her main exception regards the death of Napoleon, the possible underlying causes of which are unpleasant. Pamela King (Ferrari) is seeking funding to enable her to research Berenice's life further enabling her to eventually write a full biography. I very much look forward to reading that.

A few observations:

- Early on Berenice Walter's makes clear, at the time, it was illegal for anyone to own a dingo. Nevertheless, there is no explanation as to why the government had implemented such a law. She implies how people considered dingoes to be unpredictable and violent. A concept she was attempting to prove as unfounded. But it is not until the final stages of the book that we have any clear statements '.... but I knew they must be ferocious, sharp-fanged, snarling animals.' 'Haven't they been branded as vicious killers to be shot on sight?'. From the start there is an implication the reader would be fully aware of the underlying issues surrounding attitudes toward the dingo. However, I suggest this is not necessarily the case. It would help us non-Australians and I suspect younger Australians if an explanation was included up front, perhaps in the preface. We would then be able to understand more clearly the roots of Berenice's fears for her companions as well as her own being.

- As with most of us under resourced self-publishing authors the book would benefit from a little further proof-reading. Nevertheless, such oversights as there are do not detract from this enjoyable read.
- Currently the book is only available in paperback format. There is an implication that it is only of primary interest to fellow Australians. I disagree. It is relevant and of interest to other nationalities and to the general reading public. The dingo may be native to Australia but each nation has its own feral misunderstood 'wildlife'. Without hesitation I encourage Pamela King to also make the book available in electronic format from as many sites as possible.

This is not a long read, only consisting 136 pages. In addition, it has been written in such an easy style that you will find yourself gliding through it. Again I must recommend it to anyone interested in a heartfelt account of an unusual life experience; memoir, biography and general readers alike.

T R Robinson ★★★★★

'For the Love of a Dingo' is a book straight from the heart. Eloquently woven through the lives of both Berenice Walters and Pamela King the book is a window into the world of living with dingoes. At a time when keeping dingoes was not only shunned, it was illegal, Berenice had a connection and a respect with the animal that defied any of those considerations.

Through the beautifully penned interactions of Berenice, her family and her friends with her dingoes, the book presents the many facets of dingo behaviour, as well as the incredible bonds formed between this animal and its chosen family group.

Pamela shares her love of the animal through stories of her connection with Berenice and her experiences with her and the dingoes at Bargo Dingo Sanctuary. It reveals the mutual respect these ladies shared. A respect that would eventually lead Pamela to delve into the archives of Berenice's work after her passing. Realising the importance of Berenice's work, Pamela set about sharing the life of this amazing women through the pages of this book. A book that would have otherwise never seen the light of day.

For the Love of a Dingo is educational, it is entertaining and well worth the read. It is a truly unique view into the world of the original and only Dingo Lady.

Kane Guy, West Australian Dingo Association ★★★★★