



Buddy: How a Rooster Made Me a Family Man

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Award-winning journalist Brian McGrory goes head to beak in a battle royale with another male for a top-spot in his home, vying for dominance with the family's pet rooster.

Brian McGrory's life changed drastically after the death of his beloved dog, Harry: he fell in love with Pam, Harry's veterinarian. Though Brian's only responsibility used to be his adored Harry, Pam came with accessories that could not have been more exotic to the city-loving bachelor: a home in suburbia, two young daughters, two dogs, two cats, two rabbits, and a portly, snow white, red-crowned-and-wattled step-rooster named Buddy. While Buddy loves the women of the house, he takes Brian's presence as an affront, doing everything he can to drive out his rival. Initially resistant to elements of his new life and to the loud, aggressive rooster (who stares menacingly, pecks threateningly, and is constantly poised to attack), Brian eventually sees that Buddy shares the kind of extraordinary relationship with Pam and her two girls that he wants for himself. The rooster is what Brian needs to be – strong and content, devoted to what he has rather than what might be missing. As he learns how to live by living with animals, Buddy, Brian's nemesis, becomes Buddy, Brian's inspiration, in this inherently human story of love, acceptance, and change.

In the tradition of bestsellers like *Marley and Me*, *Dewey*, and *The Tender Bar* comes a heartwarming and wise tale of finding love in life's second chapter - and how it means all the more when you have to fight for it.

Buddy: How a Rooster Made Me a Family Man Details

Date : Published November 13th 2012 by Crown (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780307953063

Author : Brian McGrory

Format : Hardcover 336 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Animals, Humor, Biography



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Matt says

I received this book from Goodreads after winning one of their give aways. If not for that, I may not have finished it.

While the title of this book implies it is about a rooster, it really is more of mid-life autobiography of Brian McGrory. The first part of the book describes Brian's life with his dog after his divorce while living in Boston. The book continues, describing how Brian begins to date his veterinarian, Pam, who lives in the suburbs, and happens to become the owner of a rooster. The stories ends after Pam and Brian marry and purchase a suburban house which they share with various pets and part-time with Pam's kids.

I think my main issue with this book is that it is an autobiography about a man that you really never like throughout the book. It's hard to define what it is that is unlikeable about him, but I think he just comes off as a constant complainer who just can't deal with any change. He constantly and I mean just about every few pages, points out how he can't stand to be in the suburbs and how life in the city is just so much better. He goes to a restaurant and nobody knows who he is and he gets no special service! I also don't think that it necessarily is just him you don't like. Both he and his wife spoil his whiney step kids every step of the way. After Pam makes the kids a breakfast consisting of waffles, bacon, omlettes, and multiple other things, the kids and Pam make Brian go out to spend \$400 on dolls seven days after Christmas, and the kids can't even be bothered to go with Brian.

The other part that I didn't particularly like is that at first glance this appears to be a story about a man who loves animals and who the rooster changes in to this great family man. After the first third of the book or so, this doesn't seem to be the case. After the beginning of the book lovingly describes his first dog, he barely even introduces us to the dog he gets afterwards. Also, I don't see how the rooster makes Brian a family man. In the last few pages he grudgingly accepts that his new life will be in these horrible suburbs with a rooster who even in the last few pages he hopes will be taken by animal control. He only slightly shows characteristics consistent with a "family man" when after careful consideration of what the right steps would be after his step-daughter breaks his arm, he decides he should go to the hospital to be with her.

Lastly, this also appears to bill itself as a humorous story. It really wasn't. Not even slightly. It really became a story about a self-centered man and family you really didn't care about.

Dianne Fallon says

I knew that I wanted to read this book as soon as I saw a brief excerpt in the Boston Globe. I went to high school with the author, Brian McGrory, who is now the editor of the Globe. Brian always had a wry understated sense of humor and was a terrific writer. I was curious to read about his adult life and his conflicts with the rooster as he adapts from man-about-town city bachelor to suburban dweller with the love-of-his life, a veterinarian, and her two animal-crazed daughters (to whom Buddy belongs).

I loved this book -- it is a fast, light read and I often found myself laughing out loud at Brian's many wry observations about suburbia vs the city, modern parenting, and the "lifestyles" of today's suburban children.

The writing is honest and true and I enjoyed learning about Brian's life in the many years since I knew him at Weymouth North High School and about his perceptions of growing up in Weymouth.

In a couple of reader reviews, I have seen the author characterized as "arrogant", but I think that characterization is a huge misread. Brian writes in a very subtle self-effacing style and both pokes fun at himself and at the culture around him. Again, this book is great fun and I highly recommend it!

Cheryl says

I have had this book on my to be read pile for a while. This is one book where I was really looking forward to reading this book. I used to raise chickens and turkeys. For a brief time we even had a rooster. Yet he went to a good home as living close to neighbors is not always a good mix. Plus, my dad did not enjoy being woken up by the crowing of the rooster. I loved my chickens. In addition, it has been a long while since I have read a good chicken story.

Sadly, this book was not what I was looking for. There was one brief moment early on where Buddy and Brian had "guy" battle to see just who was boss. Buddy won. As I read this, I had a smile on my face and even had to read this to my husband. Yet, this was the last time that Buddy would make an appearance in a long time. I can't tell you when he appears again as I got to chapter nine and put the book down. Not to take anything away from Mr. McGrory but I really was only intrigued in Buddy and his encounters with him and not so much about his life. Which if it had been more interesting then maybe I would have been more invested.

Erin says

Disappointing. I expected to be rooting for Brian and his new family based on the premise of the book - a city-dwelling bachelor becoming a suburban family man via his vet and her two daughters. But honestly while I enjoyed and related to Brian's relationship with his dog Harry at the beginning of the book, after that part I felt it was lacking in substance as well as any likable characters. Brian had continued angst about moving from Boston to the suburbs. Living in the city on his own clearly suited him. So he constantly questioned the move. After many many many pages of this, I felt like saying to him, "Either get over this and commit or move back to the city already." Add to that the seeming obliviousness of his fiancée and her daughters to his plight. They alternately excluded him or seemingly emotionally manipulated him. The daughters were not endearing (as they were portrayed) and seemed to pull on his heart strings - pulling him in emotionally when they needed or wanted something and pushing him away otherwise. The worst of this being sending him on his own on New Years to American Girl to spend hundreds of dollars on dolls and outfits, a week after Christmas, but they couldn't come because they wanted to be home with their mom.... At other times he sacrifices outings with friends in an effort to come home to the girls only to find that they've already eaten and basically ignore him while he eats alone at the counter. But yet he never seems to communicate to his fiancée about any of this.

And then there are the various pets including the rooster of the title.... I don't understand who would possibly want to live in that house with all those animals who took clear precedence over Brian. But I just honestly did not care at all about this bird despite the pages upon pages of describing his behavior. The concept that the rooster was supposed to be teaching Brian major life lessons just seemed forced and hollow.

Kassandra says

The best part of this book is actually about the author's first dog, Harry. That part made me feel all warm and squishy inside, and then made me cry. The rest of it? Not badly written, but no amount of clever writing shores up his assertion that giving up an independent city life for the suburbs and married step-parenthood (and living with a crazy, loud rooster) was worth it. The excesses of spending on suburban kids and their parties is detailed here in all its disgusting glory. I ended this book feeling like McGrory was had. His wife sounds great, and I'm sure her kids are sweet, but this story will become quickly cloying to anyone who doesn't like or want children, who doesn't enjoy spending time around them, and who loathes the suburbs and their particular brand of hell. I'm not sure the rooster "made" McGrory a family man, so much as aging did, along with choosing a partner who already had children and pets. What choice did he have, since he loves her? The rooster was just along for the ride. And he gets his very own rooster house out of the bargain, also kind of disgusting when you think about the money spent on it. Overall, this left me with a strong sense of distaste. McGrory can certainly write, but this just wasn't my cup of tea.

Amy says

I did have a very hard time believing that a vet wouldn't be able to tell the difference between a hen and a rooster without a blood test. Especially beings the rooster in question was a White Plymouth Rock.

Rebecca Pierzchala says

McGrory is so in love with himself, it's a wonder he got not one, but two women to marry him. While his dog Harry adored him, Buddy the rooster had the better sense to see him for who he really was. Unimpressed with this book, or at least with McGrory himself. If I could give this one and a half stars, I would.

Michael Stockinger says

Overall, I enjoyed it. The author was funny and it stirred my own feelings about wanting pets throughout my life. McGrory is one hell of a smart ass with his clever and hilarious writing style. I got many a laugh out of this one.

Beth says

Maybe I'm a bit prejudiced, having grown up on James Herriot, but **Buddy: How a Rooster Made Me a Family Man** was a let down. I went into this book with high hopes for humor and heartwarming stories. What I got was a hodge-podge of information, not necessarily in chronological order, that was only slightly

touching and humorous, but more often irritating.

Personally, I feel that the best part of this book was the part that had nothing to do with the rooster. The first fourth of the book is about a Golden Retriever that McGrory owned for a decade. I would have much rather read about this seemingly perfect dog than the awkward scenes that come after. Perhaps it's another prejudice of mine, being a farm girl from rural Kentucky, but I found this whole family's treatment and reactions to the rooster Buddy annoying and unrealistic. I've owned plenty of roosters, and I've had a chicken or two that was tame enough to carry around, but the over-exaggerated bullying that McGrory describes seems odd to me. Have roosters been known to go after people, especially children? Yes. But usually the slightest display of dominance will make them back down. McGrory's running terror of this bird is ridiculous, and makes me feel a little ashamed for him. There were plenty of times while reading this book I just wanted to shake him and yell "Man up! It's a bird, for crying out loud, show some self-respect!"

Which leads me to another complaint I had: Pam and her kids. Now, granted, I am not a mother nor a product of divorce, so I can hardly criticize the familial aspect of the story. I have no basis to say if the behavior that McGrory talks about is normal or not -- even if I find it grating (such as his rush on New Year's Day to buy two identical American Girl dolls and four outfits for a few hundred dollars to curry his stepdaughters' favor... and I have a few American Girl dolls myself!) However I found the girls bratty and his wife manipulative. If he was hoping to endear his new family to audiences I'm afraid he fell violently short. I'm married, and I'm an animal lover, and I admit to sometimes wheedling my husband into allowing me to bring home pets he might not be crazy about, but if I saw an animal of mine getting along so poorly with my husband - to the degree that McGrory describes - and if he felt truly unsafe and uncomfortable with it, I would find it a home as quickly as possible. Instead, Pam blatantly manipulates, lies, and tricks McGrory into allowing this rooster to stay. She spends an exorbitant amount of money to build him an absurd coop (what ever happened to chickens roosting in trees, or in barn rafters?) and a safety fence. Her utter lack of sympathy for her husband astounds me. Especially after the rooster, as McGrory accounts, attacked a "sitter" so badly that it knicked a vein in the man's leg forcing him to use a tourniquet to slow the bleeding.

All in all I would not recommend this book to another person. The beginning was almost totally out of sync with the rest of the book, the middle was irritating, and the end was shockingly weak. Read some James Herriot, or even Susan Chernak McElroy, if you're looking for a touching animal memoir.

Deidre says

By now we are well-accustomed to charming animal-centered memoirs featuring a troublesome pup or a winsome feline. The rooster, however, is an unlikely candidate for this sort of pet as life-lesson instructor story. But with the rise in urban farming perhaps more roosters will be making their way into family units. For those who might be thinking about welcoming a rooster into their brood, Buddy is both an inspiration and a cautionary tale.

Brian McGrory was a Boston-based dog owner when he fell for Pam, his dog's veterinarian. The dog, a beloved retriever named Harry, succumbed to illness but McGrory found himself a new family with Pam, her two daughters, dogs, rabbits, and Buddy, a very territorial rooster. Buddy, a pampered fluffy chick who was expected to turn into a quiet broody hen instead became a large white and red monster with an ear-piercing cry and McGrory's nemesis.

The book isn't just about the rooster, it's more about a single writer's evolution into a family man. It's a

similar tale to the popular Marley & Me except in this case the protagonist has a few more miles on him. But shaggy, friendly dogs are angels compared to a rooster with a vendetta. McGrory finds himself at war with the rooster that the women in his family adore and call Boo-Boo. Eventually of course the author learns to make peace both with the rooster and with his new role as suburban stepdad in this sweet little family tale.

Kath McStay says

Anyone who knows anything about me knows that I do not, I absolutely do not read books about animals. Am I an animal hater? Far From it. I love animals. Pretty much all animals are on my favorites list. Currently there are four cats and a dog in my home. My fur kids are always rescues. I adore them all. I have had other dogs, other cats, a few rabbits, and the poor chameleon and ill fated mouse. I have been known to dress down folks I see mistreating animals or allowing them to be in harms way. I have badgered neighbors until they finally learned that keeping their pets indoors was much better for the cats, and kept the safe, and healthier for longer.

My reading friends know to warn me off of books that might upset me, when there are animals involved. I accept their kind advice and pass by books about cats in libraries or dogs on journeys and so forth. Dangerous ground, that. Where there are animals, there are people who lose animals to their inevitable death. I can't endure their pain, it reminds me too much of my own. Anyone who has had animals has felt that pain. The loss of a friend who loves you unconditionally and with complete abandon is pretty hard to ignore. Impossible in fact.

So why did I choose to read this book? Buddy, the rambunctious and sometimes obnoxious rooster seemed safe. I thought it would be okay. Also, I didn't pay attention. I saw that it was about a man, his journey to becoming a a family man and of course the family that brought him to that point in his life. I somehow missed the perfectly and completely obvious comment in the book description that Harry, a wonderful, loving, cheerful and loyal dog dies in this book. This is not a spoiler.. go ahead and read the book description. There it is for all to see. All except me. So be warned.

Brian sounds like a good man, a kind man and one who just wants to do the right thing, and to do it while having a happy life. Of course, he doesn't know how to make his life happy any more than the rest of us, but Harry helps him to find his way. It isn't unusual for a dog to make us happy. It's fairly common really. But Harry doesn't work alone. There are various animals, various people and many little bumps along the road. But in the end Brian learns something from Buddy. And what he learns is just possibly one of the secrets of the universe. So, go ahead and read it, don't be afraid. This is a story that will make you cry. This is also a story that will make you smile, hold your breath and sigh with relief. It's well worth the cry

Michelle Boyer says

If you've never fully loved an animal (any animal) then it is going to be hard for you to understand this book, considering at its core it is indeed about how animals shape and change our lives. As an avid chicken lover (and breeder working with the American Poultry Association and American Bantam Association, alongside other breed clubs) I had to pick this book up when I saw it on a shelf at the library. How can you resist a book about a rooster (which in my profession is a cockerel if it is under a year old, and a cock once it reaches

a year or older).

This autobiography begins with McGrory discussing his dog, Harry, thus leading some previous reviewers to feel a bit betrayed since they thought they were only getting a story about Buddy the Rooster. But let me assure you, it is important to understand how Harry shaped McGrory's life and changed it. Later, he will indeed compare Harry to Buddy, and for those that have lived with dogs and chickens--you'll know that his comparisons have some truth to them. The way your dog loves you and a way a chicken behaves/loves you is very different, and the same can be said for how we love them.

Buddy is a Cornish Broiler Cross (a cross of a Cornish and a Plymouth Rock that results in a fast-growing broiler breed, designed to be butchered and eaten at 6-weeks-old) that enters McGrory's life when his step-daughter brings a chick home. The chick was part of a science fair experiment and of course, the chick has to find a home somewhere. McGrory's wife, Pam, is a vet and ends up letting the family keep the bird. This is much to McGrory's distress, and he becomes even more stressed when Buddy ends up becoming a rooster that attacks him.

My two initial problems here:

- 1) The bird pictured on the cover is actually a white Wyandotte--a very different breed in comparison to a Cornish Broiler, just for the record.
- 2) I have no idea how a vet isn't able to sex a chicken. You can vent sex them when they're born. You can feel for pelvic variances (males have narrow pelvic bones because they don't need to pass an egg). Their entire facial structure is different compared to a hen. Males have pointed hackle and saddle (neck and lower back) feathers. This bird could have been easily identified long before the family did.

These small issues aside, Buddy teaches McGrory about family and love. Even though McGrory really doesn't like the rooster and would rather Buddy go to a farm, Pam and her daughters do not want to part with him.

Many other reviewers believe that McGrory is spineless and lets the women of this book walk all over him. I agree when it comes to instances where the children demand expensive toys (American Girl Dolls that they're too lazy to even go get with him at the store), or when they cut into his personal time (don't let him watch sports on the main television), etc. Yet... that is part of having a family.

The one area where I think McGrory really learns about commitment is regarding Pam and the girls' desire to keep Buddy. They do jump through hurdles and go through leaps and bend over backwards to keep Buddy with them. But through this, McGrory begins to understand that one of the reasons Buddy is so content is because he knows his place in the family. And through this, he helps McGrory understand his place in the world and in his new family.

There are some very sad moments here--if you've ever lost any pet, you know that their deaths can really mess you up. At the same time, you also know that for all the time they're with us, they change our lives. They make our lives worth living.

Overall, I really enjoyed this piece. It isn't a 'perfect' memoir and it certainly isn't all about the rooster--be prepared to learn about McGrory. Yet I wasn't disappointed because in the end, Buddy did his job.

Lisa says

I must confess, my favorite sections of the book dealt with Harry the late golden retriever - Buddy the rooster, not so much.

Brian obviously loved living in the city, but moved to accomodate his new family. He seemed like he was trying to convince himself that he'd done the right thing. (I'm thinking he should have kept his condo)

The whole "American Girl" incident just made me mad - the girls want to stay home with their mother, so he had to go to the mall days after Christmas, and purchase hundreded of dollars in new toys. Then the kids say "thank you Mommy" - I don't know, maybe he wanted to portray them as spoiled brats? (earlier they don't want to go on vacation, so they all stay home) - not a flattering portrait of life in the suburbs, but probably close to real life these days - mom falling asleep tucking in the kids - hubby not noticing until the next morning...

Jason says

I am thoroughly surprised by the relatively high average rating that has been given to what basically amounts to a self-indulgent, narcissistic rant that uses the novel concept of a chicken pet to bait the hook. It's pretty evident that McGrory loved his dog, and his dog loved him (and according to him, everyone else for that matter – children, other dogs, his co-workers, his dry cleaner...you get the idea); it is equally evident that he really just wanted to write about said dog and to a much greater extent, himself. It would not be hard to imagine the publisher telling him, "Look, man loves dog, dog is his rock, dog dies. We've read all this before. Any curve balls in there? How about a llama? Oh, a chicken! Brilliant!" By now, it is summarily evident that I could have used a little more chicken and a little less McGrory in this book (and yes, I do get the irony that this is a memoir).

Mary says

An engaging tale of a blended family ruled by a cantankerous rooster. Although Brian can be a bit self-involved, I am very interested in knowing how things turned out. Is the family still together? So many questions!
