

IGTIMES

Dedicated to the Italian Greyhound

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Speaking for Spot is a great book. This book was written by Dr. Nancy Kay, who is a specialist in the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine. She obviously cares deeply about dogs, and has written this book not as a substitute for veterinary care, but to show you how to be an advocate for your dog in communicating with your veterinarian.

She advises that you must become your dog's medical advocate, and states that the day when clients simply followed the vet's advice and did what she said are over; that the veterinarian is now part of a team in which she provides the information needed for you, your pet's advocate, to make the proper decisions.

This book is both a resource book and a book to be read throughout for information. You will want to have it on hand to refer to in the event that your dog is diagnosed with something you never heard of before, but I also suggest reading it to absorb the contents. You can always skim those sections that you do not think will ever apply to your dog—or that you hope will never apply to any dog you ever have!

She starts before you even get your dog, suggesting that if at all possible you have your new pet checked before you get him, because, she says, it only takes “four minutes and 23 seconds” to fall in love. I am sure a scientific study was involved regarding that amount of time, and let me tell you, at least for me, it can be even faster. Right this minute, I am planning the addition to our little canine family of an English Shepherd, and I have only seen his picture, and I am already in love! (Let me assure you, in case you don't know me very well, that I am NOT getting this dog on line. I will be meeting his Mom and Dad, and we are taking the weekend to travel to get to know him and, presumably, to bring him home.) So I know how fast it can happen. I will never, *EVER*, forget the first time I looked in the crate at tiny Penny, and saw her little face looking out at me, and I loved her instantly, and she loved me, too, and, well, you understand. At least I hope you do.

In the beginning of the book is a valuable decision-making section, explaining the numerous factors that go into making good decisions for your dog, such as the dog's personality, age (both functional and chronological), job description, and also what is best for you, the client. I particularly enjoyed the little shaded areas that she includes,

with advice that she considers especially pertinent. In fact, you might, if you are short of time at present and wish to put off reading the entire book, go through and just read the little shaded areas. In you do, though, I would bet you will be seduced into reading the whole book, because she writes very well, and in a friendly, easy-to-understand format, scattered throughout with little quotations and interesting histories.

For my own information, as soon as I got the book, I looked up Penny's diagnosis: Inflammatory Bowel Disease. Now, I would have said that I know a LOT about IBD, and in fact, I do. I did not know anything about it before Penny was diagnosed, which was probably a good thing, because I didn't know what a rocky road we faced. I do now, though, and didn't really expect to find out anything that I didn't already know. To my surprise, what I found included a small list of pertinent questions to ask my veterinarian, and several of these questions were questions I had not thought of previously, and will provide useful insights into Penny's treatment, which I expect will be lifelong. My veterinarian is very forthcoming, but I am sure he avoids imparting so much information that I am overwhelmed.

There is also a very concise and specific description of IBD and although I did, at this point, know most of the information involved, it was helpful in ordering my thoughts.

I am very happy to note that there is an excellent chapter in the book about "Money Matters". Now *there* would be a government health care plan that I would happily support—one that would pay for all of my dogs' health needs! Until that day, we all need to plan to pay for our dogs' care, and it isn't always easy. Her chapter on financial concerns is thoughtful and compassionate and sensible. It is well worth reading.

There is also a kind and thoughtful chapter on euthanasia. I confess that I did not read it thoroughly, because I just went through this with my beloved little JoJo, and the subject is still painful to me. I will mention that she recommends doing exactly what my veterinarian did: creating a time for closure. In JoJo's case, my vet sent JoJo and John and me home with sufficient of pain pills for JoJo, giving her relief from pain, and giving us time to say goodbye to her.

There is an excellent appendix regarding questions that your vet will ask you, and this could be very helpful to read before you see your vet, in order to gather your thoughts.

In general, this is one of the best organized and most practical and constructive books I have seen on health care for dogs, and I recommend it highly.

I was quite delighted to hear Dr. Kay being interviewed by *Fresh Air* on NPR.

As summer runs down, I wish everyone a nice, cozy winter, and hope you will all be surrounded by your dogs and books during the cold months.

Catherine Fitch