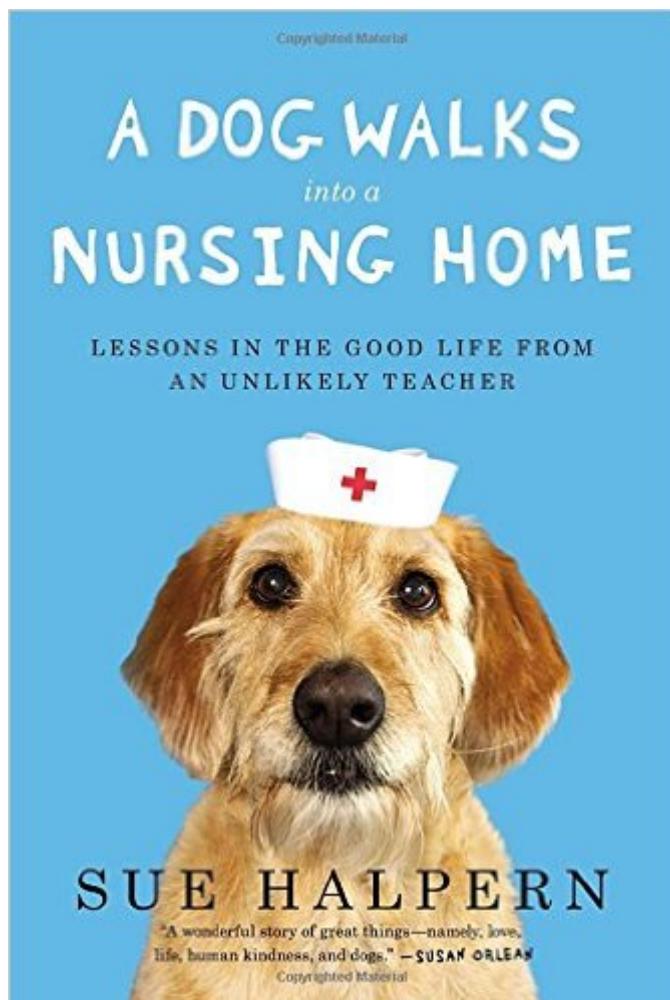


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# A Dog Walks Into A Nursing Home: Lessons In The Good Life From An Unlikely Teacher



## Synopsis

In late adolescence, Pransky was bored: she needed a job, and so Sue Halpern decided to give herself and her underoccupied Labradoodle a new leashâ "er, leaseâ "on life by getting the two of them certified as a therapy-dog team. Pransky proved to be not only a terrific therapist, smart and instinctively compassionate, but an unerring moral compass as well. In the unlikely-sounding arena of a public nursing home, she led her teammate into a series of encounters with the residents that revealed depths of warmth, humor, and insight Halpern hadnâ "t expected. Little by little, their adventures expanded and illuminated Halpernâ "s sense of what goodness is and doesâ "how acts of kindness transform the giver as well as the given-to. Funny, moving, and profound, *A Dog Walks into a Nursing Home* is the story of how one virtuousâ "that is to say, faithful, charitable, loving, and sometimes prudentâ "mutt showed great hope, fortitude, and restraint (the occasional begged or stolen treat notwithstanding) as she taught a well-meaning woman the essence and pleasures of the good life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a book that will appeal to many but I found myself struggling to finish it. From the description I thought this book would be about the adventures of a therapy dog working in a nursing home. This is actually a very small part of the book. The author, Sue Halpern, writes more about philosophy and religion than she does about her dog and the people they met. I was looking forward to learning the stories of the people that Pransky and Sue met and there was actually very little of that. I'm at the age where I don't care what others "think"... I care only about what they "do". There wasn't so much

doing in this book as thinking so for me it was not a pleasure to read. For others it will be more enjoyable.

This is not as much a dog story as it is a philosophical book mulling over life, death, and debility. The author, Sue Halpern, had a dog who was a mixed Poodle and Lab named Pransky. When Ms Halpern's husband (author and lecturer Bill McKibben) was away, their daughter was in college, and Ms Halpern was feeling the "empty nest," she decided to train her middle aged dog as a therapy dog. It was a good fit for her intelligent friendly dog. Once the dog was certified, they regularly visited the nearby county nursing home in their home state of Vermont. The author describes her learning as well as the dog's. The dog was wonderful. Ms Halpern waxes philosophical in the book about end of life problems. This is no great tome, but a small slice of life. It is a pleasant read, and the dog does not die in the end. (While I don't normally give away the end of books, I need to wait until I am feeling particularly strong before reading a book where the dog dies in the end. So I am inclined to warn people.)

Don't be misled by the cover and title, this is a book about serious subject matter. The author feels somewhat less needed by her 16yo daughter, who appears to be the typical teenager and a husband who is traveling much more on business, so she decides to train her then 6yo female Labradoodle named Pransky, but commonly referred to as Pranny to become a therapy dog to give both the author and her dog more purpose in life. The first part of the book is primarily about training the dog to be a therapy dog while the latter part is about trying to understand the seven so-called virtues four of which were espoused by Aristotle and Plato being PRUDENCE, JUSTICE, FORTITUDE, AND RESTRAINT to which some time later Saint Augustine later added the final three LOVE, HOPE, and FAITH. The author wonders at one point if old age isn't much like middle age but only happens later in life, but then decides that there are too many things that are different for that to be accurate. I liked some of the prose as it was simple by design yet poignant in feeling. Since I am reviewing from a pre-release book the page numbers may vary in the final edition. 1. "It's possible that death released her from a life of pain and that it was welcomed, but it is equally possible that death as a release was one of the stories that we tell ourselves to feel better when the alternative is feeling worse.' [p206] A point well put! 2. "When Fran lived there, Pranny knew it was Franny's room. Once Fran's clothes were emptied from the bureau and her pictures were removed from the wall all Pransky knew was that it wasn't" [p206] 3. In the chapter describing HOPE we learn that the nursing home had its own full time beauty parlor which helped to determine the female resident's mental

well being. "[P]eople without hope for today, let alone tomorrow, did not get there hair done."

Without any hope, why should they bother?4. In the chapter on Love and how and why people become attached to their animals, the author says, "">Read more

It's probably not the author's fault. The book cover shows an adorable dog wearing a volunteer hat, the kind that was popular a long time ago. The title sounds like the first line of a joke. So I expected light-heared stories about a dog who becomes a therapy dog. As other reviewers have observed, the book actually is quite serious. The author's style tends to be reflective, which some people will like and some will find a little slow. She begins to tell a story and then reflects on some philosophical point that takes her away. On pages 112-113 the author realizes she's given up some of her assumptions about old age and about nursing homes. There's a significant difference between old age and middle age, she says. People have acknowledged their dependence before they move in. Yet on page 171 the author says she has a hard time imagining herself as a resident of County, the home she visits, with all the horrors and indignities: stripped of all but a few possessions, dependent on other people for meals and care, sharing a room with a stranger.." Frankly it sounds like a prison to me, but the author commends the "fortitude" of the residents and drags out the cliche of "Old age is not for sissies." I'm afraid my reaction was to wish devoutly for legislation broadening the scope of legally assisted suicide. As other reviewers observed, it's not a dog book; it's a book about the author's response to a world of people struggling more or less successfully to maintain dignity in a place designed to destroy any pretense of respect for the elderly. When it comes to books on growing older, nobody's done a better job than Susan Jacoby. When it comes to books on dogs, I wish this one had been a stronger addition to the list.

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