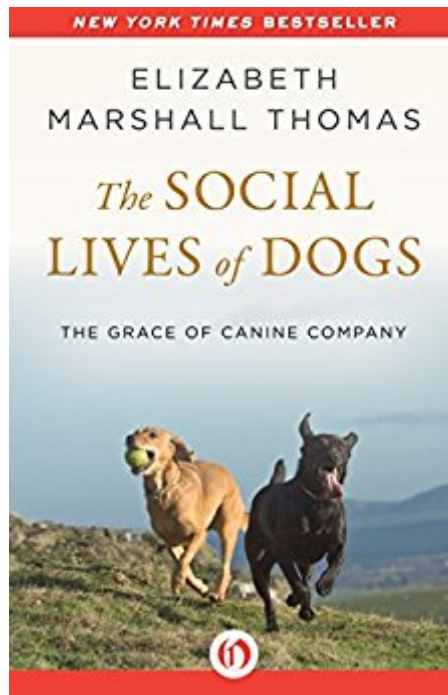


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The Social Lives Of Dogs: The Grace Of Canine Company



Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *The Hidden Life of Dogs* and *The Tribe of Tiger* comes a groundbreaking work on canine consciousness and how dogs become family. Moving from Virginia to New Hampshire is a change not only for Elizabeth Marshall Thomas and her husband, but also for their three elderly dogs. A classically trained anthropologist, Thomas observes the way in which Suessi, Fatima, and Inookshook acclimate to a new house and new adventure. Over the years, as the dogs grow older and new ones are taken in, Thomas analyzes their behavior and personalities. What makes dogs react uniformly to certain situations? To what extent do they comprehend human dialogue? With every sniff of the dogs' noses and every wag of their tails, Thomas builds an impressive understanding of canine reaction and affection, and of the ways dogs support those they regard as one of their own.

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Customer Reviews

A savvy TV producer once invited New Hampshire author Elizabeth Marshall Thomas to host a local cable show for the Humane Society. Her job was to introduce four animals in need of homes; an unruly dog with an incontinence problem, two feral kittens and one normal cat. Thomas adopted all

four of them. Anthropologist, novelist, and animal lover, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas writes of dog behavior with sympathy, insight and considerable humor. Following her bestseller, "The Hidden Life of Dogs" (which explored dog-with-dog culture), "The Social Life of Dogs," examines dog adaptation to human households, or, in the Thomas case, a multiple-species household. At the time the book opens, Thomas and her husband, Steve, had three old dogs left from "The Hidden Life of Dogs" pack and didn't want any more. Steve "didn't want another animal of any description" and Elizabeth, while "always open to another dog," plans to wait until the old dogs died before getting an adult dog she can learn from, an Indian dog from Northern Canada, say, or a pariah dog from a Third World village. What she doesn't want is the white dog who quietly appears and won't leave - an American purebred cross. Thomas does not approve of purebreds. "The important features of a dog are his brains and his persona," not looks. Still, unable to find the dog's owners, after a few days Thomas begins to ask herself, "what, after all, is really so wrong with a few purebred strains?" And so begins her relationship with Sundog, the animal whose ashes will someday be mingled with her and Steve's.

Who could be better qualified to write about the hearts, minds and souls of dogs than Elizabeth Marshall Thomas? Not only is she the celebrated anthropologist who was the first to chronicle the lives of the Bushmen; not only has she studied and published scientific and popular articles on animals from African elephants to Arctic wolves; but she quite literally grew up among dogs. As we learn in the first captivating sentences of this splendid, surprising book, one of her most attentive caretakers as a child was a Newfoundland dog, whose job, as the dog saw it, was to keep the helpless human child from drowning in the sea while the dog's group, her family, lived at the beach. The dog was actually her nanny, writes Thomas--the sort of insight that at once makes perfect sense and yet takes one's breath away, and the sort of insight that characterizes this book. *The Social Lives of Dogs* is as wide-ranging and as deep as Thomas' best-selling *The Hidden Life of Dogs*. That book asked the simple and profound question: What do dogs want? The answer: other dogs. But the social grace of dogs is such that they are capable of forming deep, lasting, complex and highly individualized relationships with many species other than their own (including birds, who are, as Thomas points out, more closely related to dinosaurs than to dogs), and this is the fertile ground explored in this riveting new book. In it, we meet a great new cast of characters: brave, stoic, soldierly Sundog, a former stray; Misty, a victim of AKC breeding who grew up in a crate and didn't understand grass; curly-tailed Pearl, who made an art of barking. The Thomas household is, as she writes, a "churning cauldron" of (at its high point) five dogs, a dozen cats, five parrots and a varying

number of people.

For those who are already fans of Elizabeth Marshall Thomas and her fine anthropologist's approach to studying animal culture, *THE SOCIAL LIVES OF DOGS* may be the finest jewel in her crown of works. This book chronicles an approximate fifteen-year study which included, in the order that they came to live in the Thomas household, Sundog, Misty, Pearl, Ruby, and Sheilah--dogs of varying breeds and mixes. Thomas tells, in her own beautiful and compassionate way, the story of each dog's incorporation into the lives of the other dogs, people, cats, and birds in her home. She succeeds beautifully in her sincere effort always to explain her animal observations and then to try to understand and interpret from the animal's point of view. What more could one ask of an anthropologist/ethologist? For me, Thomas taps into something very deep and important--something that's difficult to find words for. But I know that it has to do with a message that says it's okay to feel deep emotions about your animals, to talk to them and hear their answers, and to sense and acknowledge their deep feelings. Even though many of us have known and felt this intuitively, it is neither the message that our Judeo/Christian tradition nor our Linnean *scala natura* science of classification has wanted to deliver to us. In the introduction she poses the questions: "Can we understand the mind of an animal? . . . [do] animals have consciousness?" and then proceeds to say that for some scientists . . . "the view that animals are incapable of conscious thought, or even of emotion, has acquired an aura of scientific correctness, and at the moment is the prevailing dogma, as if some very compelling evidence to the contrary was not a problem.

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