

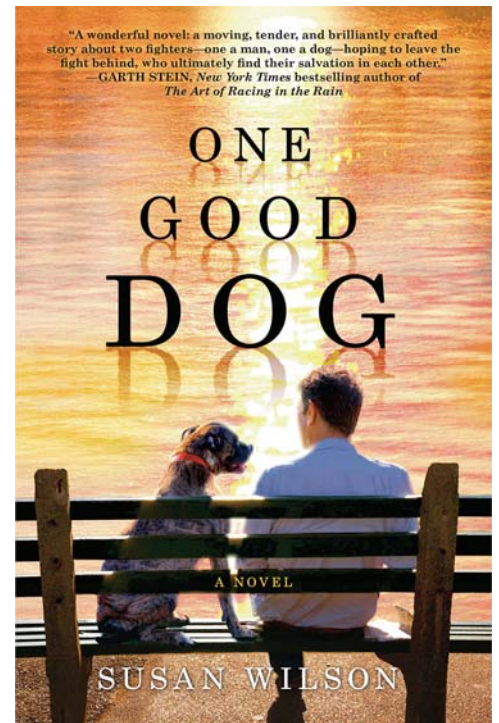


One Good Dog

by Susan Wilson

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *One Good Dog* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *One Good Dog*.

About the Book

Adam March is a self-made “Master of the Universe.” He has it all: the beautiful wife, the high-powered job, the glittering circle of friends. But there is a price to be paid for all these trappings, and the pressure is mounting—until the day Adam makes a fatal mistake. His assistant leaves him a message with three words: *your sister called*. What no one knows is that Adam’s sister has been missing for decades. That she represents the excruciatingly painful past he has left behind. And that her absence has secretly tormented him all these years. When his assistant brushes off his request for an explanation in favor of her more pressing personal call, Adam loses it. And all hell breaks loose.

Adam is escorted from the building. He loses his job. He loses his wife. He loses the life he’s worked so hard to achieve. He doesn’t believe it is possible to sink any lower when he is assigned to work in a soup kitchen as a form of community service. But unbeknownst to Adam, this is where his life will intersect with Chance.

Chance is a mixed breed Pit Bull. He's been born and raised to fight and seldom leaves the dirty basement where he is kept between fights. But Chance is not a victim or a monster. It is Chance's unique spirit that helps him escape and puts him in the path of Adam. What transpires is the story of one man, one dog, and how they save each other—in ways they never could have expected.

Praise for *One Good Dog*:

"One Good Dog is a wonderful novel: a moving, tender, and brilliantly crafted story about two fighters--one a man, one a dog--hoping to leave the fight behind, who ultimately find their salvation in each other. Susan Wilson's clear and unflinching style is perfectly suited for her story that strips away the trappings and toys we all hide behind, and exposes our essential need to give and accept love in order to thrive."

--Garth Stein, New York Times bestselling author of *The Art of Racing in the Rain*

"Working and writing with Cesar Millan has taught me that no dog is unredeemable, no matter how horrendous its past. Susan Wilson's evocative and deeply moving novel reminds us that even the most unlikely human can also find redemption, sometimes, with a little help from a canine friend."

--Melissa Jo Peltier, New York Times bestselling co-author of *Cesar's Way*

"One Good Dog will make you cry, will make you laugh, will make you feel things more than you thought possible--and it will make you believe in second chances."

--Augusten Burroughs

"One Good Dog is a wonderful novel of healing and redemption. Chance, the four-legged healer and redeemer, will linger in your mind long after the story is done."

--Spencer Quinn, New York Times bestselling author of *Dog On It*

"ONE GOOD DOG EQUALS ONE GREAT BOOK!"

--Rita Mae Brown

"Anybody who has ever loved a dog - or been "a pack of two," as Chance so aptly puts it - will love One Good Dog. This is the moving story of Adam March, a man who loses everything only to find something much greater, and it reminds us that it's animals that make us our most fully human. I hope Susan Wilson sits and stays - forever."

--Lisa Scottoline

"Nowhere can we see the potential for our own redemption more clearly than in the eyes of our dog. Susan Wilson illustrates this truth poignantly and beautifully in this story of second chances."

--Tami Hoag

"One Good Dog shows how animals teach us everything about hope, healing, and unconditional love. One Good Dog is a terrific book that held me from beginning to end!"

--Iris Johansen

About the Author

SUSAN WILSON is the author of *Beauty*—a modern retelling of *Beauty And The Beast* which was made into a CBS TV movie—as well as four other novels. She lives on Martha's Vineyard. Visit Susan's website at <http://www.susanwilsonwrites.com>.



Discussion Questions

1. What explains Adam March's outrageous attack on Sophie?
2. Why do you think the author used the first person in telling Chance's story?
3. There are two protagonists in this story. Are they equal? Are they believable?
4. What is Adam's initial attitude toward the Chance?
5. How does that attitude reflect his attitude in general and the situation he's in?
6. When Adam breaks down, what motivates Chance to approach him?
7. What does Chance think of his 'career' as a fighter?
8. Should Adam forgive his father?
9. What role does Gina play in Adam's personal growth?
10. Describe Adam's relationship with his daughter Ariel. How does his childhood impact this relationship, or does it?
11. Does Adam relate at all to the boys he encounters on the street? How so?
12. What are Adam's three sins and does he overcome them?
13. In this story men are living on the streets as well as dogs. Are you more likely to support animal shelters or homeless shelters?
14. Conventional wisdom believes that fighting pit bulls cannot be rehabilitated. In many cities, a dog that has been known to fight is automatically put down. Do you think that a character like Chance is realistic? Does he change your mind about pit bulls?
15. In the end, has Adam been redeemed?

A Conversation with Susan Wilson - from Bookreporter.com

What was your inspiration for ONE GOOD DOG?

SW: Some books suggest themselves, others are suggested. ONE GOOD DOG was a little of both. I knew I wanted to write a story about a man hitting bottom and finding his way back to his humanity; my beloved agent noted to me that stories about dogs are very popular. I love dogs. I loved the idea of having a dog central to my story. To be given a pass to write about that which I love was golden. And OGD is the result, a man and a dog both in need of a new life.

Why did you decide to write Adam's story in third person and Chance's story in first person? As you were writing the book, did you write both points of view in order, concurrently, or did you write Adam's story first and then go back and write Chance's story (or vice-versa)?

SW: Long before Chance opened his mouth and became a narrator, I had been working on Adam's very bad day. One of the hardest decisions to make when I begin writing is what tense to use. Once Chance got involved, the structure suggested itself: alternating POV: Chance, Adam, Chance, first person and third, which is how I wrote it, each character alternately picking up the baton in the relay. Writing that way is great because the energy expended in third person/present tense, is relaxed with first person/past tense. Like biking up a hill in second gear and then coasting downhill.

As we read ONE GOOD DOG, we learn Adam and Chance both had intense back stories. We see how Adam's experiences in foster homes and his reaction to his sister's absence shaped his adult life. With Chance, we see how being raised to fight shaped his attitude towards humans and other pets. Whose story was more difficult to bring to life? Why?

SW: That's a hard question, with an equivocal answer, neither was hard, and both were hard. I needed to make Adam's early years difficult, but not slide into melodrama; of Chance's early years, I needed to make the physical conditions sordid, but keep his outlook positive.

Why did you decide to make Chance a pit bull? Have you personally had pit bulls as a pet, or known people who did?

SW: I've never owned a pit bull and will confess that I had about as much prejudice against the breed as anyone else who doesn't understand that the dog is a product of its environment. The story required a dog in a bad situation—one that might not be given a second chance. As Chance says: he's not all that cute. If you watch Animal Cops, you see that these dogs are feared, maligned and chances of adoption are slim. At the same time, the program features dogs of the pit bull type which have encountered heinous circumstances, and yet have the capacity to adjust to a safer life and become good pets. I had the great good fortune to be guided by a devoted pit bull rescue advocate as well as an animal behaviorist, both of whom enlightened me on the breed.

When Chance gets taken from Adam, Adam is worried that there's no way he'll survive: "His breed will be his demise. The prejudice toward his type: the automatic death sentence for animals like him in some cities." Pit bulls do have a bad rap, yet I know a Pitt who is one of the kindest, most loyal dogs I've known in my life. Do you think their reputation is deserved?

SW: I don't, but let me qualify that. If a dog is raised in a loving home and is a pet, he is a different animal than he would be raised to fight, living his life in isolation or on the end of

chain. Anecdotal evidence suggests that even dogs which have lived this evil, have the capacity to be re-trained, essentially socialized; that the inherent nature of a dog like this is to be loyal, and to respond to good treatment. Can they all be redeemed? I don't know. Some are more damaged than others. But it is a testament to the soul of a dog that so many can be.

ONE GOOD DOG is a book about second chances. Chance (aptly named) gets a second lease on life when Adam “rescues” him from the animal shelter. Adam gets a second chance when he’s assigned to community service at the Fort Street Center homeless shelter, and also in his relationships with Ariel, Gina and ultimately, his father. Do you believe in second chances? What do you think the criteria are for such a situation?

SW: ONE GOOD DOG is my second chance. It's been seven years since the publication of my last book and the long dry spell made me wonder if I should just give up the idea and be grateful that I was fortunate enough to have five novels under my belt. I think that second chances aren't like do-overs; it's new ground, a new attitude, and best of all loyal support from friends and friendly strangers. Best of all, the folks at St. Martin's Press are taking a chance on me!

In your opinion, what does humility have to do with getting a second chance? Did this influence how you shaped Adam's growth as a character?

SW: Adam needed to grow up. He had the wrong goals: money, power, status. He'd lost his humanity along the way. My working title for the book was Becoming Human, because that's what I saw Adam doing. He'd not overcome his tough childhood, he'd become it, and his reaction to Sophie's error is Adam reverting to his roots. The judge sees this in him, this nattily dressed power-broker needing to be taken down a peg. Adam as an adult has always been in charge, and now he needs to learn the lesson of letting go and letting his innate decency rise to the surface.

Is Fort Street Center a real place? If not, how much research was involved with creating this shelter?

SW: It's wholly imagined, with influence from the Pine Street Inn in Boston and stories about the people who care for the homeless.

We loved the supporting characters at the shelter. Which character was your favorite, and why? (We are partial to Rafe.)

SW: Me too! Almost like Chance, Rafe just showed up and became a lovely strong character. Big Bob is a guy I'd like to know, caring, tough and gentle at the same time. I love writing secondary characters, they don't have the weight of the story on them so I can play a little. My Ruby from The Fortune-teller's Daughter was like that, I had to make sure she didn't steal the show.

After everything that happens, Adam gets his chance to apologize to Sophie. Why did you decide to add this element to the plot?

SW: I literally woke up in the middle of the night and realized that Adam needed to apologize. It was the missing piece from making him a whole man. This is a redemption story, and if all you do is adopt a dog and learn how to be nicer to people, but don't suck it up and ask for forgiveness...without expecting it...can you really succeed?

We think we know the answer to this one, but who are Bonnie, Hunter and Sprout? Did they have any influence on how you shaped this book?

SW: Well, Sprout chewed the cover off my ARC of the book. Really. She's a dickens, that one. Bonnie is our beloved terrier/hound cross we adopted from a rescue seven years ago. She's one of the lucky ones, a puppy brought north from a kill-shelter down south. She's never know a moment's worry. She's also the smartest dog I've ever known who knows how to play tricks on people. Hunter is our daughter and son-in-law's rescue. An adult beagle-ish dog, he was so quiet the day they brought him home they didn't think they needed to crate him. He ate their couch. Over the years they've helped him enormously with his anxieties: separation and stranger, and he's one good dog. Their new baby climbs all over him and he's so patient. Sprout, the aforementioned dickens, is a ten pound bundle of don't-mess-with me. My younger daughter rescued her from the streets of Holyoke MA after the dog was brought by animal control to the vet clinic where she was working. She'd been hit by a car. Interesting story: recently my daughter was walking the dog when she was approached by a man who got too close. Sprout bit him. I'm not an advocate for biting dogs, but this little girl knows a threat when she sees one. As for influencing this story, of course they did. As did so many of the dogs in my life from long-gone pets to the pups at the dog park.

Can you tell us about the ONE GOOD DOG Facebook promotion? How did this idea evolve? What can our readers do to participate?

SW: My amazing marketing maven at SMP is young enough to understand and embrace the whole on-line/cyber/digital concept and has, as this on-line interview suggests, capitalized on the new way the word is getting out. In one of my columns I talk about how authors sometimes slip into bookstores and 'face out' their books. Facebook is facing out ONE GOOD DOG in a vastly more effective way than one bookstore at a time. Everyone has their own story about how their pet has transformed them and influenced their lives, and we wanted to give people a chance and place to share their stories. On my [fan page](#) readers can post pictures and stories of pets and other animals. I'm loving the instant communication and making lots of new friends with dogs, cats, and other creatures.

In addition to writing novels, you also write a monthly column about writing for *The Martha's Vineyard Times*. What has this experience been like for you?

SW: When the editor of the MV Times approached me I was a little skeptical, first of all, how could I find enough to write about and, second of all, if I'm writing about writing, when do I write? I think it's been four years, maybe five, and I still find things to write about and having a monthly deadline is good for me. What I love about the column is that it's instant gratification. People read it, see me in the grocery store and comment on what I've said. I don't need to wait 18 months for a book to come out.

What are you working on now? Is there a "chance" we'll see Adam, Gina and/or Chance in another story?

SW: I've never written a real sequel to any of my books, although I've used the same setting and allowed a cameo appearance of a former character, so who's to say. Right now I'm working on a novel that is just evolving so I'll say little about its content except that it, too, has a strong dog at its center—along with some humans who need healing.

Essay

From the time I was a little girl, the word "writer" held a special significance to me. I loved the word, and its kindred word, author. I loved the idea of making up stories. When I was about twelve, I bought a used Olivetti manual typewriter from a little hole in the wall office machine place in Middletown, CT called Peter's Typewriters. It weighed about twenty pounds and was probably thirty years old even then. I pounded out the worst kind of adolescent drivel, imposing my imaginary self on television heroes of the time: Bonanza, Man from U.N.C.L.E. and Star Trek.

Those are my earliest memories of my secret life of writing. For reasons I cannot really fathom, I never pursued writing as a vocation. Although I majored in English, I didn't focus on writing and it wasn't really until I was first married that I hauled out my old Olivetti and began to thump away at a novel. This was, as I recall, an amorphous thinly plotted exercise in putting sentences together and has mercifully disappeared in some move or another. I didn't try anything more adventurous than some short stories and a lot of newsletters for various organizations I either belonged to or worked for until we moved to Martha's Vineyard and I bought my first computer. My little "Collegiate 2" IBM computer was about as advanced as the Olivetti was in its heyday but it got me writing again and this time with some previously untapped inner determination that I was going to succeed at this avocation. I tapped out two novels on this machine with its fussy little printer. Like the first one, these were wonderful absorbing exercises in learning how to write.

What happened then is the stuff of day time soap opera. Writing is a highly personal activity and for all of my life I'd kept it secret from everyone but my husband. I had discovered that here on the Vineyard nearly everyone has some avocation in the arts. From jewelry-making to music-making; painting, sculpture and stained glass, the maintenance guy at the local school has a band, the retired priest teaches ball room dance. Much to my delight, I discovered a fellow closet-writer in the mom of my daughter's best friend. Somehow two shy writers found each other over a cup of coffee and for the very first time in my life I could share the struggle with another person. I know now that writers' groups are a dime a dozen and I highly recommend the experience, but with my friend Carole, a serendipitous introduction to a "real writer," Holly Nadler, resulted in my association with my agent. Holly read a bit of my "novel" and liked what she read, suggested I might use her name and write to her former agent. I did and the rest, as they say, is history.

Not that it was an overnight success. The novel I'd shown Holly never even got sent to my agent, but a third, shorter, more evolved work was what eventually grew into Beauty with the guidance of Andrea and her associates at the Jane Rotrosen Agency.

The moral of the story: keep at it. Keep writing the bad novels to learn how to write the good ones. And, yes, it does help to know someone; however, Holly may have greased the wheels with the introduction, but Andrea liked my work and was willing to take a chance on an unknown, unpublished writer.

To have Susan Wilson visit your reading group or call-in for discussion visit:

<http://www.susanwilsonwrites.com/readinggroups.php>.



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