



## Cowboy & Wills

*Monica Holloway*

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## **Cowboy & Wills** Monica Holloway

In this exceptionally touching memoir, critically acclaimed author Monica Holloway shares the extraordinary, deeply moving story of Cowboy, the golden retriever puppy who changed her son's life.

The day Monica learns that her lovable, brilliant three-year-old son, Wills, has autism spectrum disorder, she takes him to buy an aquarium. It's the first in a string of impulsive trips to the pet store to buy animals as a distraction from the uncontrollable, crushing reality of Wills's diagnosis. But while Wills diligently tends to the growing menagerie, what he really wants is a puppy. And one Christmas, when Wills is six, Cowboy Carol Lawrence joins their family.

Like all dynamic duos, Cowboy and Wills complement each other perfectly. Wills is cautious, fastidious, and irresistibly tenderhearted. Cowboy, a rambunctious golden retriever, is overeager, affectionate, and impulsive. And from the moment Cowboy enters their lives, Monica sees her son step a little farther into the world.

Soon, the boy who could barely say hello to his classmates in kindergarten is sharing stories of his new "sister" Cowboy during morning circle. Children crowd around them at the park, and instead of running away, Wills, holding Cowboy's leash in his sweaty fist, proudly answers all of their questions. With Cowboy, he finds the courage to invite kids over for playdates, overcomes his debilitating fear of water to swim along beside her in the family pool, and, after years of gentle coaxing, Wills finally sleeps in his own bed with Cowboy's paws draped across his small chest.

Through it all, Cowboy is there, dragging him toward other children, giving him the confidence to try new things and the courage to face his worst fears. And when Cowboy turns out to need her new family as much as they need her, they discover just how much she has taught them -- about devotion, about loyalty, and about never giving up.

Sometimes it's what you don't know to hope for that saves you. For Monica, her husband, Michael, and their son, Wills, salvation came in the form of a puppy with pale blond fur, chocolate brown eyes, a fondness for chewing the crotch out of underpants, and a limitless capacity for love.

## **Cowboy & Wills Details**

Date : Published October 6th 2009 by Gallery Books (first published September 14th 2009)

ISBN : 9781416595038

Author : Monica Holloway

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

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



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## From Reader Review Cowboy & Wills for online ebook

### Arianna Connal says

I did not think that this book was all that great.

I expected a heartwarming story about the love between an autistic boy and his dog, and I *did* get that, but the *main* thing I got was a story about a woman who (as she mentions several times throughout the book) is lucky enough to have the money stay home with her son until he was old enough to go to a private school, then hire a private helper at his private school, and buy him a million pets or pretty much anything else that he shows an interest in.

When it finally gets to the part about the dog, which she buys from a pet store, despite the fact that it (as she also mentions several times) probably came from a puppy mill, which is cruel.

But she promised her son a puppy right now!

The part in this book that I really "got" was when she and her husband prolong Cowboy's suffering by keeping her alive way longer than was humane because they didn't want to upset their son, despite the fact that (as she also mentions a million times) her son's therapist tells them not to hide stuff from him, because he is going to have to learn what the real world is like sometime.

And then it ends with them making a book with their son about getting their next purebred puppy...

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### Mindy says

Wills is a boy diagnosed with high functioning autism. His diagnosis came fairly early in life in regards to autism diagnosis. Wills mother, the author of the story, compensates for the autism by purchasing an animal each time she experiences something difficult. Although she begins with many small animals, she finally purchases a golden retriever puppy. The puppy allows Wills to make huge strides in terms of confidence, self-reliance, sociability, etc. As Cowboy (the puppy) grows, she begins to lose hair and the author notices several other problems. After numerous vet visits, Cowboy is finally diagnosed with canine lupus, a fatal disease. Cowboy is a fighter and lives for a while longer, assisting Wills to further mature and grow developmentally. However, as easily predicted, Cowboy eventually succumbs to the disease, a heart-breaking moment for the family as well as the reader.

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### Zinta says

To set the parameters of my review: I know next to nothing about autism. My knowledge of this disorder is limited to the anecdotal, the various news items and studies that pass across our daily consciousness, this and

that about autism being over diagnosed, that it may be caused by something in our food, or by various childhood vaccinations, and other such. I won't claim to hold strong opinions on any of this, as it has not been an area of research or particular interest to me. I have a couple of casual acquaintances with autistic children, both highly functional, and that's it—that's all I've got.

For this very reason—because I know so little about this diagnosis which children today alarmingly often seem to have attached to them—I took on reading Monica Holloway's *Cowboy & Wills: A Love Story* with particular interest. I wondered if autism might be something like ADHD, another diagnosis that seems difficult to make. Indeed, my own son was diagnosed with it at one point in his childhood and early teen years, only to have the next doctor cry "balderdash!" and the next one reverse that and the next one reverse that again. I eventually agreed with the balderdash opinion. He does not, never did, have ADHD. Nor did he have any other number of diagnoses that various doctors with an alphabet soup of credentials behind their names make. He was a teenager growing up without a father in a single-parent home, and so he acted out his anger and confusion and fear of abandonment. He grew up, gained maturity and understanding, and stopped acting out. End of story. So is this epidemic of autism anything like that? I don't know, don't claim to know, but my curiosity was piqued.

I was quickly drawn into Monica Holloway's story about her young son, Wills.

"Wills Price is exceptional.

"If you happen to meet him walking down our street, you'd see a lanky boy in red baggy sweatpants. His thick black eyelashes frame enormous, cornflower blue eyes and he has freckles that march across the top of his tiny turned-up nose. When he lets loose with a belly laugh, his dimples deepen and he throws his head back while twisting the front of his shirt. He prefers wearing stripes—T-shirts, and turtlenecks mostly. He's very particular about this. There have to be stripes."

As a mother, I was already smiling. My son is a big man now, with great heart and great shoulders, carrying his own world upon them, but how well I remember that sweet little face then, those moments of shining brightness, the up-turned nose and freckles, the childish chortle that would remind me, in my adult world, how to laugh.

So Monica Holloway quickly became my friend. My distant alter ego, struggling with parenting and its myriad challenges. The particulars didn't matter. What mattered to me as a reader was that I recognized a mother who loves her child with every fiber of her being, and would do anything but anything for him, even the toughest task of all—step back and let him occasionally take a fall on his own. I won't say that all her parenting skills were perfect. Who am I to know? There is no manual, only heart required, lots of it and always open. Holloway has that. And in her self-effacing style of telling the story of Wills and his golden retriever pup, Cowboy, she was touchingly willing to put her own shortcomings out there for public scrutiny. Her writing style reminded me a little of the popular author Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat, Pray, Love* and *Committed*), juxtaposing serious medical concerns (in Gilbert's case, the seriousness of the pain of a marital breakup) with delicious moments of humor. After all, sometimes life hurts so much all you can do is laugh and get on with it.

Using animals as therapy may not have initially been Holloway's intent, but as most mothers do, she operates by instinct. When Wills has a particularly bad day—sobbing when his classroom of peers are too loud, too fast, too bustling with a confusion of activity, for instance—Holloway makes a detour to the pet store. She brings home guinea pigs, hamsters, fish, rabbits, hermit crabs, turtles, in short, a menagerie of critters to soothe and amuse her son. And it works. Any pet owner will tell you, and the medical profession,

too, that our pets can relax rattled nerves, lower blood pressure, and alleviate a sense of isolation. It is not unusual to hear about animals opening up humans to functionality when other humans fail to do so. Buying the boy a puppy seems a natural progression on the animal chain of pets.

While I may question Holloway's decision to be very close-mouthed with others about her son's autistic spectrum disorder, and by doing so isolating herself and her family from social support and no doubt other avenues of help and advice, I will not judge her for it. I have not raised her son; she has not raised mine. Every individual is different, and if I have learned to trust anything, it is a mother's loving instinct on raising her child. I trust that instinct even over medical professionals. I have had reason to do so. Perhaps she does, too. Wills, after all, is highly functioning, and really quite bright. The words that come out of this babe's mouth gave me quite a few occasions for my own belly laugh in reading about his young life. There is no quibble with the boy's high level of intelligence and wit!

So there is Cowboy, the other great personality in this story, the furry charmer. Cowboy is actually a girl dog, and she arrives with a medical issue of her own—canine lupus. Another thing I did not know: dogs, too, can get lupus. When Holloway first brought the puppy home from a pet store, even as she knew that buying dogs from pet stores isn't always a good idea (puppy mill sources), she did not know about the lupus, only that the pup seemed infected with something. Cowboy did live about two and a half years, and charmed years they were. The Holloway family falls in love with her and she with them, but no one more so than Wills. The photographs alone in the book are enough to make one's heart toasty warm: the boy and the dog curled up together in deep sleep, romping in play, snuggling. Where humans have fallen short in easing the boy's discomfort in adjusting to the world around him, the dog nudges him beyond his comfort zone and inspires him to go beyond his earlier limits.

The Holloways spend a great deal of time and money on their son, and it is a blessing that they apparently are able to do so—maxing out credit cards, dipping into and emptying accounts, while taking Wills to a laundry list of specialists and therapists, even hiring someone to “shadow” him in school while he adjusts, a school they actually hired a headhunter to locate after Wills was rejected at a dozen others because of his disability. Not all parents have such means, but lucky are those who have them to use. We all do whatever we can for our children, and then some. Nothing can carry us through like the unconditional love of a good mother.

Love carries us through even when we have to deal with a very painful loss: Cowboy eventually succumbs to his lupus. Still a young dog, she dies, and having gone through that, too—the loss of a much loved pet that stayed true when not all humans would or do—I understand the grief the entire Holloway family feels. Yet the wonders Cowboy was able to accomplish for Wills live on. He is much more social, much more comfortable in his daily routine, because of those two plus years with Cowboy as constant companion.

This is a tender love story—between mother and son, between boy and dog. It tugs at the heart in all the right ways and by all the right strings, with laughter and tears, surprise and delight, frustration and grief. Whatever the particulars of how any one family chooses to deal with their problems, one thing rings true. Everyone needs a safe place in life in order to thrive. A place where we know ourselves loved for who we are, and are always encouraged to be more.

~Zinta Aistars for The Smoking Poet, Spring 2010 Issue

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### **Jolene Dretzka says**

This was a fabulous true story about a mother with an autistic child & her unconditional love for him. It is also about the healing power of animals. Monica Holloway is a great writer whose writing style is smooth & easy to read, I didn't want to stop reading once I started. She tells her son's story with love & sincerity. I felt like I was there with her, feeling & experiencing the emotional rollercoaster that is her family's day-to-day life. This is a must read for anyone who has an autistic child or has ever known one. Even if you've never known an autistic person, this book can still be read & enjoyed because it is about so much more than a child with autism. It's about a child & the love he shared with his first dog & how that dog peeled him out of his emotional shell. It shows you just how important an animal can be in a child's life, particularly one with special needs. I laughed, worried & cried with Ms. Holloway. She has a true talent for story telling & deserves a mother of the century award as well. There is so much to learn from her family, animals included, that I recommend any adult with a heart should read this book. By the end of the story I felt like I was a part of the family & didn't want it to end, I wanted to continue to watch Wills grow with the love & support of family, friends & animals. Though I doubt the author could write a continuation to this story, on the off chance she does, I would love to read it & see how Wills continues to grow while dealing with the difficult world of autism & whether his new dog Buddy helps him like Cowboy did. Buddy can never replace Cowboy, but I hope that she continues to help Wills in the same manner that Cowboy did. This is definitely a book I can reread & will reread whenever I need to remind myself how precious & fragile life is & how much animals can positively affect our lives, regardless how short their time on earth may be.

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### **ShelbyLibrary says**

“Mr. and Mrs. Holloway, I have some news concerning about your son.” When a parent hears this from their doctor, they know right away something is wrong. At first you don’t want to hear it. You don’t want to accept that there could possibly be anything wrong with your child. Yes, he may show some signs of being too clingy, he’s terrified of strangers, won’t look you in the eye, and a simple bubble bath is an excruciating experience, but there can’t be anything seriously wrong with him, it’s just....HIM. But when the Doctor confirms that your son has Autism, and that it is a “lifetime affliction” that there is no cure, it changes your life forever. The first thing that usually pops into a mother’s head is “How am I going to do this? What can I do to help my child? Will he ever know how much I love him?” Monica Holloway is lost in trying to find these answers for herself, but because of her unconditional love to her son she wants to make his transition to life smooth.

Many readers know that I love to read books and when it’s my turn at the Recommended Reading section, I like to read a “themed” book. This month is Autism Awareness Month and in honor of those that have Autism or a family member that has Autism I read the book “Cowboy & Wills”. It is a memoir of an unconditional love of a mother whose son has autism. Monica Holloway has read all the books; she read all the forums on the internet; she knew that some way, somehow her son was going to be alright, was going to be able to see the world for what it is and not be afraid of it. Monica didn’t realize that with all the doctors in the world, it was the love from a puppy that would change her sons’ outlook on life.

The moment that her son was diagnosed, she went out to buy some fish to get Will interested in something. He seemed to be interested in the fish, in the hermit crab...a rabbit...a hamster and a sea turtle. Animals seem to keep her son stay in tune with life, and not crawl into his own shell. But with all those animals, Monica never imagined how much one Golden Retriever puppy would transform her son’s life....and hers. Because of her love for her son Wills, she bought him a Golden Retriever which Wills named her Cowboy. Cowboy is a female. She has blonde fur. While Wills not be able to look you in the eye, Cowboy would lick

anybody close to her. Wills is in love. Where ever the dog went, Wills was sure to follow and vice versa. Wills wouldn't leave the dog side for anything. And in turn, Cowboy showed that the big world that Wills is so afraid of isn't so bad after all.

A memoir so rich, so unforgettable that had me reaching for tissues, that I know you all will love and cherish. (I would like to dedicate this book to my cousin who has Autism.)

-Miss Kelsey's Review

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### **Carla Ford says**

The cover calls this a love story, and this book is two hundred and seventy six pages of the purest love imaginable. Monica Holloway must have a heart the size of Texas. I teared up reading the prologue, and knew then that this book was going to be a very emotional read. I started the book on Thursday, and read every spare minute I could find, finishing it on Friday. During that time I wept gently, laughed so hard I woke my husband up at night, and finally sobbed so hard I could hardly see the pages. The touching story of Wills, a beautiful little boy with autism, his mother Monica, who loves Wills intensely, and will do anything it takes to help him function in the world, and Cowboy, the golden retriever who must have been put on this earth just for Wills. Oh yes, there is also Wills' father Michael, who should be voted husband and father of the century, and a whole support cast of fish, amphibians and animals. Monica instinctively knew that animals would help her son to bridge the gap between his world of autism and the world outside. She started by bringing home fish, and eventually got Wills a puppy that he named Cowboy. This wonderful golden retriever became a buffer for Wills, helping him learn to communicate with his classmates, and even strangers. She brought him out of his shell, and taught him how to let himself go and enjoy life. Five stars is the maximum I can give, but I really give it infinite stars. It was absolutely the most touching book I can remember reading in a very long time. Monica Holloway is my hero. Oh yeah, and now I really want a golden retriever!

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### **Gerry says**

Wonderful memoir of a mother and father, their son Wills and a wonderful dog, Cowboy.

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### **Lettie Cox says**

Great writing and such a great book!

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### **Kathy says**

Willis is a gifted child with autism, and the first part of the book traced his development and the extraordinary insights gained by a mother who is relentless in her search for anything that will help him. She is also an animal lover and her menagerie at times could rival Gerald Durrell's collections. Then they get Cowboy, a golden retriever puppy named by Wills, and she transforms their lives. Tragedy strikes when Cowboy gets lupus but Monica handles that as she handles everything else: by learning and by doing

everything that is humanly possible. Might seem improbable to anyone who has never experienced life with a neurological disorder.

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### **Jean Brown says**

A wonderful story..that I was afraid would break my heart but instead it left me feeling hopeful..glad I read it.

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### **Amy Meyer says**

Cowboy & Wills

Author: Monica Holloway

Date Published: October 6, 2009

Publisher: Simon Spotlight Entertainment

Pages: 288 pages

ISBN: 978-1416595038

Genre: Non-fiction Memoir

Rating: 4.5 out of 5

Summary: The day Monica Holloway learns that her lovable, brilliant three-year-old son has autism spectrum disorder, she takes him to buy an aquarium. But what Wills really wants is a puppy, and from the moment Cowboy Carol Lawrence, an overeager and affectionate golden retriever, joins the family, Monica watches as her cautious son steps a little farther into the world.

With his new "sister" Cowboy by his side, Wills finds the courage to invite kids over for play dates, conquer his debilitating fear of water, and finally sleep in his own bed with the puppy's paws draped across his small chest. And when Cowboy turns out to need her new family as much as they need her, they discover just how much she has taught them about devotion, loyalty, and never giving up.

Sometimes it's what you don't know to hope for that saves you. For Monica and Wills, salvation came in the form of a puppy with pale blond fur, chocolate brown eyes, a fondness for chewing the crotch out of underpants, and a limitless capacity for love.

My Thoughts: *Cowboy & Wills* is Monica Holloway's heart-warming, poignant and funny story about her amazing son, Wills and his best friend, a golden retriever puppy named Cowboy Carol Lawrence (yes, that's the dog's "full name"!). Wills, diagnosed with autism before he is 2 years-old, is fortunate to have parents, particularly a mother, willing to do whatever it takes to help him including opening her home to a menagerie of pets. Wills has always responded to animals much better than people, but none quite like the golden retriever puppy who helps Wills conquer his anxieties, embrace the world around him and become a happy, popular young boy. Wills sees several therapists regularly and is assisted by an aide in school but nobody helps him through the days like Cowboy. Wills' connection with Cowboy is remarkable. She provides Wills with the safety and comfort he needs to calm his fears and learn to communicate. In a very short time, with Cowboy by his side and his parents' love and support, Wills becomes an independent, personable, and enthusiastic boy who, rather than cower and hide, welcomes new experiences and seeks out friendships.

Author Monica Holloway tells the story about learning her small son is autistic and the extent she and her husband go: physically, mentally, emotionally and financially to get Wills the help he needs with honesty and a refreshing openness. Holloway doesn't pull any punches when relating the range of emotions she experiences watching her son deal with the social anxieties and fears that assail him daily. She shares what a confusing, overwhelming situation it can be because Wills is extremely bright in many areas but can only communicate with a very small number of people. Holloway displays a remarkable energy and drive to get Wills any available help that will provide him the tools he needs to be able to interact with children his age.

Holloway obviously adores her son and writes graphically about the extremes Wills experiences. There are difficult episodes, such as Will experiencing extreme sensory overload during a birthday party causing him to run screaming from the house. But then there are inspiring instances: while driving home from the same birthday party, Wills exclaims "That was a fun party!".

Wills, despite his anxiety, shows a desire to be a part of activities. During Wills' first year of preschool there is a sing-along in the park. This is essentially a nightmare for Wills but Holloway takes him because isolating him is not the answer. Wills starts out screaming and refuses to let go of Holloway but as the sing-along progresses, Wills stops covering his ears and he starts humming the songs! Holloway writes that Wills often surprises them behaving in unexpected ways, fighting against the fears and anxieties that threaten to overwhelm him. But nothing prepares Holloway and her husband for the impact a small golden retriever puppy will have.

Wills has always responded well to animals and Holloway makes a habit of visiting the pet store if her son has a difficult day or a doctor's visit is disappointing. In a few years their family has included several hermit crabs, three jumping frogs, hamsters and a large rabbit named Ruby. But Wills has wanted a puppy for quite a while. Specifically, a golden retriever puppy. Enter Cowboy Carol Lawrence, as named by Wills, joins the family on December 21st in Wills sixth year

Monica, Michael and Wills are in love. Understandably as Cowboy is adorable, full of energy, and chewing anything in sight! In only a matter of days Wills begins to assert himself like never before. For example, on the first day back at school after Christmas, , Wills teacher asks if anyone has anything they'd like to share. He is the first to volunteer. Wills, never having participated in any kind of sharing with the class before now, has a picture of Cowboy in his hand and shows it to each classmate and then tells all about Cowboy.

Cowboy helps usher in many new experiences for Wills, one of the most significant being friendships with other children. With Cowboy the center of attention the focus is off Wills allowing him to ease into a situation and become comfortable with it. Holloway writes with joyful amazement at the many changes in Wills with Cowboy in his life.

I like Holloway very much. She is a kind, funny and personable woman and a terrific, loving mother. She is also quite an animal lover! Her writing is insightful, engaging and filled with heart-wrenching and humorous anecdotes. She can be very self-deprecating at times and suffers a lot of guilt for Wills autism because of her OCD behavior. It's obvious that there is no limit to the love she has for her son which comes through on every page. Holloway makes it clear in *Cowboy & Wills* that there's no end to the lengths she will go to open doors for Wills and help him cope with his anxieties and fears. I wish every child was fortunate enough to have a parent like Monica Holloway. Holloway has written a very inspiring story about a mother's love for her son and the healing that can come from a relationship with a beloved pet.

I recommend this book for any family coping with autism and any person involved in treating individuals with autism. But this is also a book that would be enjoyed by anyone who loves animals and understands the

transforming power of loving one. I will caution anybody who reads this book that there are some very difficult and emotional chapters towards the end of the book but also hopeful and inspiring.

I received this book from the publisher, Simon Spotlight Entertainment for review.

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### **Eileen Reeger says**

This was a book that I won't ever forget. I had a friend who always claimed her 3 yo son is autistic. We had a falling out and I don't know how to get ahold of her to apologize for doubting her, which is odd b/c I never told her that, so technically I suppose an apology is unnecessary (I bet she sensed it in spite of all my attempts to be available and sympathetic and "helpful"). She lied about so many things and stole from me and is a very troubled woman so I just assumed SHE was why he had problems. She WAS a TERRIBLE mother but I can now see that her son DOES have autism and that she actually, in spite of her defects of character, loves him the best she knows how. I'm very sorry I didn't take the time to learn more about autism when we were still friends. I found this author's style of writing to be honest, hilarious and gut-wrenching and very very unmistakably human. I understood perfectly her need to protect her child from the cruelties of life, while empathizing with being an imperfect woman with neurotic tendencies of her own. I was comforted by the pain I saw her go thru when forcing herself to "do the right thing" for her boy while at the same timemaking the same mistakes many of us do in "relapsing" into being overprotective of our kids. And then there is the wonderful, brimming with love, Cowboy. What a blessing a dog can be, and only someone who knows how much love a dog can bestow upon us undeserving pitiful creatures can understand the depth of emotion they truly have. You can start out with the idea that an animal is just something to own or to make you feel better or to serve a particular purpose in your life. Then one day you realize that that animal loves you so unconditionally and before you know it, your pet owns YOU and you can't explain that kind of love to someone who hasn't allowed it to happen. Anyone, esp. children, disabled or not, benefits from the lessons learned by loving a pet and being loved by that pet in return. Animals ARE emotional beings and teachers of the sort of lessons that cannot be emulated by a human being. Wills, an undeniably brave and sensitive child, had for his first confidante, and truly his first teacher in deep communication, a perfect companion and mentor in Cowboy.

We all need guidance and teamwork to raise our kids, lots of people just aren't modest or wise enough to realize it and IMO you have done a superb job. P.S. If we try to fool ourselves and our families into thinking we're perfect, people always know we're full of shit anyway, kids especially:)

Admitting our flaws is just being honest about our humanity and I think that makes it easier for us to love and to be loved, unconditionally. Maybe our pets teach us something of that b/c they seem to be awfully forgiving and tolerant.

Thank you for this gorgeous book Mrs. Holloway, and thank you for sharing Cowboy and Wills with us.

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### **Laine The Librarian says**

"Mr. and Mrs. Holloway, I have some news concerning about your son." When a parent hears this from their doctor, they know right away something is wrong. At first you don't want to hear it. You don't want to accept that there could possibly be anything wrong with your child. Yes, he may show some signs of being too clingy, he's terrified of strangers, won't look you in the eye, and a simple bubble bath is an excruciating experience, but there can't be anything seriously wrong with him, it's just....HIM. But when the Doctor

confirms that your son has Autism, and that it is a “lifetime affliction” that there is no cure, it changes your life forever. The first thing that usually pops into a mother’s head is “How am I going to do this? What can I do to help my child? Will he ever know how much I love him?” Monica Holloway is lost in trying to find these answers for herself, but because of her unconditional love to her son she wants to make his transition to life smooth.

Many readers know that I love to read books and when it’s my turn at the Recommended Reading section, I like to read a “themed” book. This month is Autism Awareness Month and in honor of those that have Autism or a family member that has Autism I read the book “Cowboy & Wills”. It is a memoir of an unconditional love of a mother whose son has autism. Monica Holloway has read all the books; she read all the forums on the internet; she knew that some way, somehow her son was going to be alright, was going to be able to see the world for what it is and not be afraid of it. Monica didn’t realize that with all the doctors in the world, it was the love from a puppy that would change her sons’ outlook on life.

The moment that her son was diagnosed, she went out to buy some fish to get Wills interested in something. He seemed to be interested in the fish, in the hermit crab...a rabbit...a hamster and a sea turtle. Animals seem to keep her son stay in tune with life, and not crawl into his own shell. But with all those animals, Monica never imagined how much one Golden Retriever puppy would transform her son’s life....and hers. Because of her love for her son Wills, she bought him a Golden Retriever which Wills named her Cowboy. Cowboy is a female. She has blonde fur. While Wills not be able to look you in the eye, Cowboy would lick anybody close to her. Wills is in love. Where ever the dog went, Wills was sure to follow and vice versa. Wills wouldn’t leave the dog side for anything. And in turn, Cowboy showed that the big world that Wills is so afraid of isn’t so bad after all.

A memoir so rich, so unforgettable that had me reaching for tissues, that I know you all will love and cherish. (I would like to dedicate this book to my cousin who has Autism.)

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### **Allison says**

Loved this account of a mom struggling to raise a high-functioning autistic kid -- great sense of humor and very real. just loved it!

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### **Iamshadow says**

As someone who loves animals and does animal rescue, people who impulse buy from pet shops without caring about the consequences make me want to punch things. The author did realize her 'mistake' when the dog she bought turned out to be sick, but if she'd thought of living creatures as something more than objects in the first place, it could have been avoided. Whatever regret she mentioned couldn't wipe out just how angry the book made me. And in case anyone wonders, I'm autistic, yes, animals can be great for autistic people, no, I wouldn't touch a pet shop dog if you gave me a thousand bucks. I stepped in and adopted an 'unadoptable' rescue that came from a puppy mill and was slated for the needle. His anxiety and trauma could have filled a book to rival the worst misery filled parental account of raising an autistic child. There's no excuse for supporting this horrendous industry.

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### **Maddie says**

One of the best books ever. Throughout the book I was amazed at how much Wills was able to break out of his shell and embark on a journey with Cowboy. After reading the book, I immediatly went to play with my own golden retrievers, thankful for everlasting friends.

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### **Katrina says**

Being a person who works with children with learning and emotional problems, Wills reminded of a few students I have gotten close to in the past. His repetition of speech and sensitivity to touch and sound were very familiar. As I read this book, I could see Wills and his plight clearly. Monica did a fantastic job filling this book with emotion, as well. I cheered for Wills successes and cried the entire fourth part of the book. I love a book that can make me both laugh and cry and Cowboy and Wills did just that. Wills was so smart and took things at face value, I found that to be so endearing.

This book would be great for a number of people. Animal lovers will find the relationship between Cowboy and Wills one they will never forget. Memoir fans will find the emotion and real life experience intriguing. Parents or teacher of children with autism will find hope and a sense of not being alone. This book was wonderful and I highly recommend it to all.

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### **Louise Jones says**

i have high functioning autism otherwise known as aspergers . I was not diagnosed til an adult it tends to be less obvious in girls . I saw myself so much in will not good at making friends and liking people younger or older then self this books shows how with the right support you can succeed although not easy !! I have had 2 dogs which i adored because their love is unconditional and they greet u with a smile each day , I saw my mum in the book and other people i have noticed that other kids etc may be on the asd spectrum but people dont want to admit that their is something wrong with their kids which is a shame as the sooner they get the help the better . I know exactly what is it like for something to be to loud or touching me and it = pure torture their is good stuff and bad stuff about being autistic guess thats life

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### **Nancy Brady says**

With compassion born of a mother's love for her son, this is a memoir of a remarkable little boy, Wills, and his puppy, Cowboy, who helped him through his struggles with his autism.

Upon Wills's diagnosis, Monica's home became a menagerie. Each pet helped, but it was when the family added Cowboy, a golden retriever puppy, to the family did Wills have some breakthroughs in his schooling. Because of this dog, Wills was able to overcome so much including developing friendships.

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## Colleen says

This is a must-read for any parent , anyone who wants to parent, for dog lovers, and anyone who loves to laugh/chuckle/cry/snort as they read a memoir.

Monica Holloway wrote this lovely tribute (and love story) to her son, Wills. Cowboy is Wills' first dog.. And it's a beautiful story of love and awakening. But....don't think it's just about a young boy and his dog - it's NOT.

Spoiler: Monica's son, Wills, is on the spectrum (high-functioning autism) and this love story is about a family's struggle to find some answers, adjust to life, weather a few slight (!) storms, and yes, it's about a boy and his dog. Monica is self-deprecating and soooo funny. I love her snarky sense of humor - it appeals to me on so many levels (snarky woman that I am)..... I also love her perspective as a parent and woman.

I only have one problem with it.....it ended too quickly (and I dragged it out as long as I possibly could by only reading a few pages each night).

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