



## What the Dog Said

*Randi Reisfeld, H.B. Gilmour*

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Ever since her police officer father was killed a few months ago, Grace Abernathy hasn't wanted to do much of anything. She's pulled away from her friends, her grades are plummeting . . . it's a problem. The last thing Grace wants is to be dragged into her older sister Regan's plan to train a shelter dog as a service dog. But Grace has no idea how involved she'll get—especially when a mangy mutt named Rex starts talking to her. Has Grace gone off the deep end? Or might this dog be something really special—an angel? A spirit? Either way, he is exactly the therapy that Grace needs.

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## What the Dog Said Details

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## From Reader Review What the Dog Said for online ebook

### **Graham Herrli says**

[She eventually comes to belie

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### **Heenly Pelayo says**

This book is not that good in my opinion. I tried reading this book which is out of my comfort zone because I have never liked dog books. I never know why but I always thought they were obnoxious, i really don't know why. This book is about a girl who gets a new dog because of her sister wanting an extra curricular in her Resume. Why is the dog so important you ask? Well I guess you'll have to read the book to find out by reading the book. I recommend this book only if you like to read animal/pet books.

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### **Barbara says**

Cute engagement between the dog and main character. The sister would have made me snap! I like how it game closer to the family.

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### **Marisa says**

I cried during this book because it was so heartwarming yet so sad at the same time. The end is the best part. I loved this book.

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### **Faith says**

Grace hasn't been the same since her father was killed. She doesn't hang out with friends and her grades have dropped in school. Her sister, Regan, doesn't seem affected about this and that makes Grace angry. All Regan wants is to adopt a dog and train it to be a service dog, so she can write an impressive essay and get into Parsons School for Design. The two sisters go to the shelter for a dog. One dog grabs Grace's attention by talking. No one seems to hear him. Grace can't believe what he has to say...

Reasons why I like this book-

Reason 1- It's a dog story!

Reason 2- I learned a bit about service dogs.

Reason 3- I couldn't stop reading.

Reason 4- I could imagine what was happening.

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### **Randi Reisfeld says**

OK, I wrote it -- but...I'm really proud of it. The story's about an otherwise "normal," if slightly quirky 13 year old who loses her detective dad in what seems to be a drive-by. Grace is devastated and quickly spirals downward--won't see her friends, lets her grades drop, locks herself in her room going over memories. One of the ways she's able to heal is through her seemingly selfish sister's plan. The family adopts a shelter dog -- a very special mangy mutt -- and it falls to Grace to train him to become a service dog. Eventually he'll be placed with a family so the pup can help disabled children. Don't just take my word for it, here are some brief reviews from Publisher's Weekly and the School Library Journal. What The Dog Said is meant for kids 10-14, but adults and dog lovers all over will love it.

"This combination grief novel, mystery, and talking dog story bridges the real and the fanciful. Reisfeld's novel is moored by believable characters, dialogue, and emotions." – Publishers Weekly

"Animal lovers will relish the details about training service dogs, readers will follow Grace's determination to have her father's killer brought to justice, and all will find her hard-won healing inspiring." – School Library Journal

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### **Joelle says**

The tragic death of her father leaves Grace traumatized and disinclined to do just about anything. Regan, her sister, on the other hand acted as if nothing had changed as she continued on with her daily routines. Regan, who is self-absorbed, induces Grace to adopt a dog at the pound with her, the idea being she would train it to be a service dog in order for her college application to be more appealing. Grace not caring much about the whole scheme of things, including the pound venture, never realizes her world is about to change when a dog speaks to her and say's "pick me!" A triumphant story about coping with loss after a tragedy, being brave when surrounded by doubt and fear and believing in a cause that will better someone's life if not your own.

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### **Sandy Thorup : ) says**

What the dog said. WHAT DID THE DOG SAY? I LOVE dogs, so the main reason I read this book was because of the title. I am so glad I did. At first, the book makes no sense. i mean, a dog TALKING out of nowhere? As you read more, the story grows bigger and BIGGER, until finally coming together at the end. If you are as CRAZY about animals as I am, you will love this book. The main character is so AMAZING, and there is a hint of a MYSTERY in here as well. This would honestly be considered as a FANTASY,

realistic fiction, and mystery book all at the same time. Overall, AWESOME book Randi.

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### **Cathlin says**

Grace, a 13 year old girl, is still reeling from the murder of her father 6 months ago. Since then, she has turned into a former shell of what she once was. Her sister, Reagan, decides that in order to help her college essays, she will adopt a dog and train it to be a service dog. The only problem is that Reagan isn't one to put in much of the work and Grace is left picking up her slack. From the moment she meets Rex, Grace knows that there is something special about him (and not just the fact that he seems to be able to talk to her). Things are going well until she gets to the service dog training class to discover that a boy who had been questioned about her father's murder is also in the class with her, and the information he has could answer all of Grace's questions.

This story was very touching. My heart broke for Grace and dealing with her father's death, but she was so wrapped up in her own grief she didn't really seem to care much about anyone else in the beginning. It was uplifting and beautiful to watch her once again find herself as well reconnect with her friends and family.

I especially loved that each character you meet isn't quite what they seem on the surface and have a revealing moment in their character development. It reminds us, that each and every one of us is dealing with something in our lives, and while we may not deal with things in the same way, it doesn't mean we all still don't feel the pain.

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### **GracieB says**

I sobbed for like five minutes at the end. It was fantastic.

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### **Elizabeth? says**

This is a look at dealing with the death of a parent. Grace's father dies at the hands of a criminal (he is a police officer). Grace feels guilty about his death and can't get past this guilt.

Enter Rex. Rex is a rescue dog Grace's sister, Regan, has adopted to train to be a companion dog. Regan is fixated on being popular and fashion, so Grace takes up the training.

What develops is a friendship between Grace and Rex that allows Grace to work through her pain and grief.

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### **Lori says**

I read this on my kindle. I think it was for a younger age maybe middle school. a quick read though. this is a sweet story told through the eyes of a 14 year old girl named Gracie. she is going through a horrible time. her

father a policeman died in the line of duty. her grades are now failing in middle school and she is in danger of being held back. her older sister has to do a project to put on her records for high school in hopes of getting into a college. she chooses to get a dog and enter it in a training school to learn to be a companion assistant to someone with a disability. soon Regan the older sister does not have the time to attend the classes and it is put on Grace to take "Rex" the dog to the classes. soon Grace and Rex become close. Rex even starts to talk to Grace but only Grace. this is a nice story about a girl grieving for her father. the bonding between Grace and the dog. Will she be able to help Rex get ready to be a companion dog to a disabled child? will there be answers behind how her father died? I would give this a 3.5.

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## **Sarah P says**

What the Dog Said is by Randi Reisfeld and HB Gilmour. It is about a girl named Grace Abernathy, who lives with her mother and her older sister, Regan. Her dad, who was a detective at the local police station, was shot while he was leaving the police station to go see Grace's softball tryout. Grace used to be an excellent student, got high grades, played sports, and hung out with friends, but ever since the accident, Grace has been holed up in her room, not talking to any of her friends and flunking out of all of her classes. Her mom and her sister are extremely worried about her, and her newly acquired habits. They know that Grace was the closest to their dad, he was practically her best friend, and that is why she is taking it so hard. They all have moved on, but they have not totally forgotten about him. The book starts out when Grace and her family go to the shelter to get a dog. Regan is applying to go to Parsons School for Design for college and decided that for her essay she is going to write about how she rescues a dog from the shelter. Regan plans to train it in a program her Dad supported, to be a service dog, and then give it to a physically or mentally challenged person who could have a better, happier and safer life because of the dog. Also, her mom thinks that a dog will make Grace more connected with the rest of the world and not just hide in her room 24/7. Regan just thinks that it will make Grace "normal" again, back to the way she used to be. Little do they know, this visit will change Grace's life forever.

When they get to the shelter, Grace can already tell that she is going to regret this, and she barely agreed to this in the first place! It's loud, cold and very frightening in the dog kennel. Finally Regan thinks that she found the dog. It is a small, white, puffy dog that Regan believes is going to be the one, but when Grace walks over to look at Regan's fluff ball of a dog, Grace hears a voice. At first Grace is extremely confused and skeptical when the dog starts telling her that they should get him, but after a bit of convincing, she finally asks Regan if she would consider getting the dog. At first Regan is thinking that Grace has lost her mind and that there was no way that she was getting that mutt, whose name according to the tag on his cage is Rex. Regan finally agrees to get him, and both Regan and Rex were both excited on the ride home. Regan was happy, because she got her dog to train for her acceptance essay, and Rex was even happier because he got adopted. Once they get home, and after Rex makes a mess of the living room, Grace soon figures out that Regan will not take Rex to his lessons, but plans to take all of the credit for it in her essay.

The next day after school, Grace takes Rex to his first training lesson. Grace notices that all of the other dogs are young purebred dogs, and not grungy mutts like Rex. Training goes well for Rex's first time, and the instructor named LuLu likes Rex and Grace. For once Grace is actually enjoying something, but then a guy who Grace knows and hates shows up and ruins everything. His name is JJ Pico. He was the only person out of four to admit to being in the car from which the gunman shot her dad. Ironically it was Grace's dad who recommended JJ to be in the dog training program. One day after Grace and Rex got home from training she finds out that Regan has friends over. After a while, Rex tells Grace to follow him. Reluctantly she does and she follows Rex to her mother's room where Regan's best friend Sheena is standing in front of Grace's mom's jewelry box, stealing one of Grace's mom's necklaces, her bracelet and her dad's wedding ring. Grace decides not to tell Regan and up set her, but personally Grace is angry beyond belief. The next day she

goes to training with Rex and the dogs are going to learn how to lead a blind person, stop at a curb and cross when there is a green light. Rex is really good at it so it doesn't take them as long to get it as other people. When Grace and Rex are just standing and waiting for the next lesson, they see JJ and another girl in the class named Lissa, who is here for the same purpose as JJ, stopping and looking at houses, doing what looks to be deciding if they should rob a house or not. That's when Grace gets suspicious, but she didn't know what to do. Finally they rejoin the group. When they get back to the training center, it was only JJ and Grace waiting for their rides. Then Grace gets this sudden blast of courage and starts grilling JJ about the almost robbery earlier and her dad's death. JJ says that he doesn't know anything and that he wasn't there, even though he told the police that he was in the car. By now, Grace is fed up with his lies and is extremely mad, but then JJ's ride shows up and it's two of the suspects from her dad's killing. Grace is so mad after JJ left that she didn't even realize that Regan showed up. In the car ride home, Grace finally tells Regan about Sheena stealing and Regan flips out saying that Sheena wouldn't do something like that and Grace realizes that Regan is a lost cause. The following week after training, Rex gets the brilliant idea that he can navigate them home. Grace is, of course, skeptical but then she gets dragged by Rex. Rex ends up getting them lost and in a really bad neighborhood, and they end up having to knock on some random person's door to use the phone, and turns out that the house is JJ's house. Then Hector and Chris come to the door and start giving them trouble. Just as Hector is about to punch Grace, JJ, Otis the poodle, and Rex protect Grace and finally Regan shows up and saves Grace and Rex. At the next training session all of them, except JJ who didn't show up, go to a mall to test out how the dogs can handle being in crowded, loud areas while trying to work. Regan comes with Grace, but as soon as she enters the mall she leaves Grace to go shopping. Rex does well in this test, but he doesn't attract attention like the other dogs do, which makes Grace feel bad for him. While they are in the food court, Grace runs into her friends and they ask her if she wants to go shopping with them and then study later. Grace tells them about how she is going to get held back next year because of her grades. Her friends all feel bad for her and devise a genius plan to bring up her grades with all of her friends tutoring her and her mom tutoring her in math. Grace is happy that her friends are helping her, and she can see that her grades are starting to better from it. Onetime Regan comes into Grace's room and tells Grace that Sheena admitted that she was stealing when Grace found her in Grace's mom's room. Later, Grace has to catch up JJ because he missed a bunch of lessons. Grace tells LuLu that she will not help JJ, but in the end she does. They meet at a grocery store for the lesson. What they have to do is they are in wheelchairs and the dogs have to get all of the things they need, like toothpaste and aspirin. Otis and JJ did pretty well, but instead of letting Otis grab his card and pay, JJ pays not giving Otis a chance to practice. Once they got out side, they both decided to get a drink from the soda machine. JJ did it himself, but Grace has Rex get her drink. Then JJ's ride showed up, hit the wheelchair that was behind Grace and sent her flying, landing hard on the concrete. As JJ was leaving he told Grace to meet her at the pier in Jupiter Beach. While they were there, JJ told Grace about her dad's shooting, but he didn't tell her everything and that he will not tell the cops anything. To get him to tell her more, she started telling and texting him inspiring things to tell the police and defy Hector and Chris. This goes on for a long time till JJ finally tells Grace everything, but he still hasn't told the cops yet, because he fears that Chris and Hector will do something bad to him if they get turned in to the cops. One day, when Grace and Rex go to training, they can tell that something is up. It turns out that the people who have been selected to get one of the dogs in the program are visiting to see their possible new dog. After each one says who they are, something about themselves, and why they need a service dog, Grace easily matches up the kid with a dog. The last person to speak is the person, and that Grace knows will get Rex. Her name is Kim and she has cerebral palsy. When she thinks of giving away Rex to one of the kids, she gets extremely sad and cannot bear to think about Rex leaving. She knew it was selfish because the kids needed dogs to help live a more normal life, but she couldn't just give up Rex. Just before the Public Access Test, Grace thought of a plan. She would bribe Rex to bomb the test, so he could stay with Grace, but that failed miserably. When LuLu called with the results she said that Rex passed with, as LuLu called it, "flying colors." Grace was so mad at Rex about it! Later, JJ Pico shows up at Grace's house and tells her that he told the cop who was in the car, and who shot her dad. She is so surprised that her

motivational texting finally worked, and that he defied Hector and Chris by turning them in, when he knew that he would be in big trouble with them. After JJ leaves, she has tears in her eyes and starts to go to her room, when Rex says something only Grace's dad said to her. He said "Say goodnight, Gracie." That was when she broke down and started to cry. Her mom found her curled up next to Rex in the mudroom, sleeping the next morning. After what Rex said the night before, she started to believe what she had been thinking for a long time. She thought that Rex was a reincarnation of her father, sent to protect her and lead her down the right path. Ever since Rex had said "Say goodnight, Gracie," he would not talk. He would just make regular dog noises, and this frustrated Grace. That night Grace went to a movie and dinner with her friends. It was one of the first times she had done this since her dad's death, and she was happy to be hanging out with friends. The next morning, Rex woke her up at 5:00 soundlessly. No I love you, no hurrying her up, just barking and yapping. Then she got an email from Regan asking if Grace could help fix her essay for Parsons. Once Grace started to read, she realized that Regan had changed the subject. Now Regan's essay was about how Grace has had a serious influence on Regan's life. Regan's essay was really nice, but Grace had a lot to work on to make it perfect. One day Grace finally gets fed up with Rex not talking. She starts crying and flipping out, then Regan comes in to Grace's room. Grace tells Regan that he could talk but won't any more. Regan's answer to that was "Maybe you finally heard what he had to say." Finally the big day came, the dogs getting assigned to their families. Grace's predictions had been absolutely right for all of them, even Rex. When Rex got called up, Grace didn't know what to do at first, but then she knelt down, hugged Rex for what could be the last time and said that she would always be here for him. Either her imagination was playing tricks on her or Rex really did say it, he said "Say goodnight, Gracie," and then he was gone, Kim's dog now.

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### **P.M. says**

13 year old Grace is trying to deal with the drive-by shooting death of her father, a police detective. Her older sister decides they should adopt a dog from the shelter and train it to be a service dog. Grace's attention is caught by mutt Rex who persuades her to adopt him rather than some of the purebreds available. Apparently Grace is the only one to whom Rex talks. At first, she thinks this is a sign that she is losing her mind as well as failing every class in school. When she attends the first training class with Rex, she is shocked to find JJ Pico there - the gang wannabe who was in the car when her dad was killed. Rex convinces her to work on JJ to get him to tell the police what he knows. As the story progresses, Grace continues to get good advice from Rex and learns to do what must be done, no matter how hard that might be. I liked this story as Rex reminded me a lot of Chet from the Chet and Bernie mysteries (although Chet is still my favorite). When Rex is given to a girl who has CP, Grace realizes that Rex's ability to talk is her coping mechanism and not a reincarnation of her dad. ( Or is it?)

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### **Mai says**

How can life continue when you've lost someone you love?

What the Dog Said is a tale of coping with grief, healing through helping, searching for closure and learning how to face our deepest fears. Eighth-grader Grace is stuck in the past, in a moment she feels she could have changed. Along with grief, she's overwhelmed by guilt that somehow she was responsible for her father's death. If she hadn't asked her police detective dad to leave work early so he could watch her softball game,

would he have been caught in the drive-by shooting?

Her mom and older sister Regan convince Grace to adopt and train a shelter dog named Rex to become a service dog – supposedly to help Regan with her college application. But the truth is, Grace ends up helping herself. Rex isn't just any other dog. He's a talking dog, whose constant cajoling, careless enthusiasm and emotional insight has her learning how to reach for a new normal.

It starts with the service dog classes, which are well-rooted in reality. Randi Reisfeld shadowed Guiding Eyes for the Blind and Educated Canines Assisting with Disabilities (ECAD), and it shows. She gives an excellent description of the wide range of service dogs and the types of chronic illnesses and disabilities they mitigate.

**“My dog will go to live with a child in a wheelchair?”**

...

**“Mainly,” Lulu acknowledged, “but we train dogs for recipients with varied physical and mental disabilities, including muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, blindness and hearing impairments, and autism. Once we had a child who had to sleep with a respirator. Her parents were always worried the respirator might stop and they wouldn’t hear it. We trained a dog to wake her parents if that ever happened.”**

**“Did it?” asked a girl holding the leash of a yellow Labrador retriever.**

**Lulu nodded. “That dog saved the child’s life. By the end of this training program, the dogs you’re fostering may one day do the same for others in need.”**

There were a few instances, however, that were not quite accurate.

The timeline for training a service dog was significantly compressed. Training can last around 1.5-2 years – sometimes longer. A few weeks is an unrealistically short time frame. I can only assume this was done for the purposes of the story arc.

**Like him [Rex], they were enrolled in a twelve-week training course to become service dogs.**

The dogs in the class seemed to be in training for multiple services at the same time – learning how to guide the blind AND perform mobility assistance tasks. This isn't plausible given the short time frame. Also, they miraculously learned very challenging skills, i.e. stopping at curbs, with one magical click of the clicker and the delivery of a savoury treat. But again, this is fiction.

Rex's time with Grace is limited, however, and he only speaks English until Grace no longer needs him and he's learned all the necessary skills to graduate as a service dog for a young person.

**“Why did he stop [talking], then?”**

**And then Regan said something that broke and healed my heart at the same time.**

**“Maybe you finally heard what he had to say.”**

And his message was this.

That part of healing means seeking closure, and seeking closure means finding justice. Grace will never have the revenge she thinks she needs, nor can she bring her father back to life. But she can have the answer to why her father died the way he did. With the help of Rex, and some advice from her father, she convinces one of the at-risk youth that her father worked with – and who's also training a service dog – to report what he knows to the police.

**There's a time to be brave, and a time to cave – if you know something is the right thing to do, even if you're scared, do it anyway. Especially if you're scared.**

Her dad's advice also gives Grace the courage to give up Rex. She discovers that as much as she wants Rex to stay with her, there's something special about training a dog to help someone else find their own normal.

There's a startling parallel between learning how to live after losing a loved one and learning how to live after becoming disabled.

**The idea is that with time – with each passing day – it's supposed to hurt a little less. The pain will always be there. That doesn't ever go away completely. But eventually, it will feel okay to go on with your life, to smile, laugh – dance.**

Warmly recommended.

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