

Deb Mangelsdorf – A Dog’s Purpose

This is Kansas Profile. I’m Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The book was on the New York Times bestseller list for 52 weeks. In the acknowledgements section of the best-selling sequel to this book, the author expressed his thanks to several people – including a woman veterinarian from rural Kansas. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Dr. Deb Mangelsdorf is the veterinarian who is credited in this remarkable book by W. Bruce Cameron. The book is titled *A Dog’s Journey*.

Deb Mangelsdorf grew up in Prairie Village where her father, a K-State alum, worked in the seed business. “I always wanted to be a veterinarian,” she said.

Deb went to Shawnee Mission East high school. Among her classmates was W. Bruce Cameron who was born in Michigan and then moved to the Kansas City area. “He was the class clown,” Deb said. “I tutored him in math.”

Deb came to K-State to get her doctor of veterinary medicine degree. Bruce Cameron went to college in Missouri and pursued a writing career. He became a humor columnist for a Denver newspaper and published several books, including *8 Simple Tips for Dating My Teenage Daughter*. He subsequently moved to California.

Dr. Mangelsdorf stayed in Manhattan and founded the Konza Veterinary Clinic which has grown to include eight employees and serves customers throughout the region. She now lives in Ashland Bottoms, a rural area south of Manhattan. Ashland township has a population of 139 people. Now, that’s rural.

Dr. Mangelsdorf had lost touch with Cameron, her old high school classmate, until a class reunion provided updated contact information. She then exchanged emails with him. When he learned she had become a veterinarian, he got excited. “I’m writing a book about a dog,” he said. He wanted her input.

From time to time, he contacted her to discuss the elements of his book, and to see if the animal behaviors which he described made sense. The book itself is written from a dog’s perspective about human relationships and behavior. In Cameron’s fanciful novel, one particular dog is reborn over and over again as a different breed of dog each time, but the dog’s role is always to help people. It is a touching book.

The book was titled *A Dog’s Purpose*. It follows this dog through several lives and a relationship with a particular family. Published in 2010, the book was a major success with 52 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. In 2017, it became a movie starring Dennis Quaid. Most of the dogs in the movie were rescue dogs. Part of the proceeds went for humane rescues.

A Dog’s Purpose was followed in 2012 by *A Dog’s Journey* which became an instant New York Times bestseller. In the acknowledgements, Cameron thanks Deb Mangelsdorf for her “wise advice about dogs and veterinary medicine.”

“I appreciate what the book says about our relationship with animals,” Dr. Mangelsdorf said. “When the movie came out, we took our entire staff to see it.”

The movie and the books provide a fascinating and engaging look at how dogs relate to people and how they might see human behaviors. Dr. Mangelsdorf has observed that dogs seem to have a sense of what is happening in their owner’s lives at some level. Some dogs can tell if their human owner is experiencing stress or joy, for example.

“We don’t know what our pets know, but they know something,” Dr. Mangelsdorf said. She has closely observed the benefits of the human-animal bond. “I’ve seen it so many times,” she said.

The books and the movie handle sensitive issues realistically. “Sometimes euthanasia is the kindest thing to do,” Dr. Mangelsdorf said. Of W. Bruce Cameron, she said, “He has a lot of talent, and he has a lot of compassion too.”

More information about Konza Vet Clinic can be found on Facebook. For more information about the books, go to www.brucecameron.com.

The New York Times bestseller list included a book with a reference to a woman veterinarian from rural Kansas. We commend Dr. Deb Mangelsdorf for making a difference with her care for animals, and for helping develop this remarkable story. It helps show the purpose in a dog’s life.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.