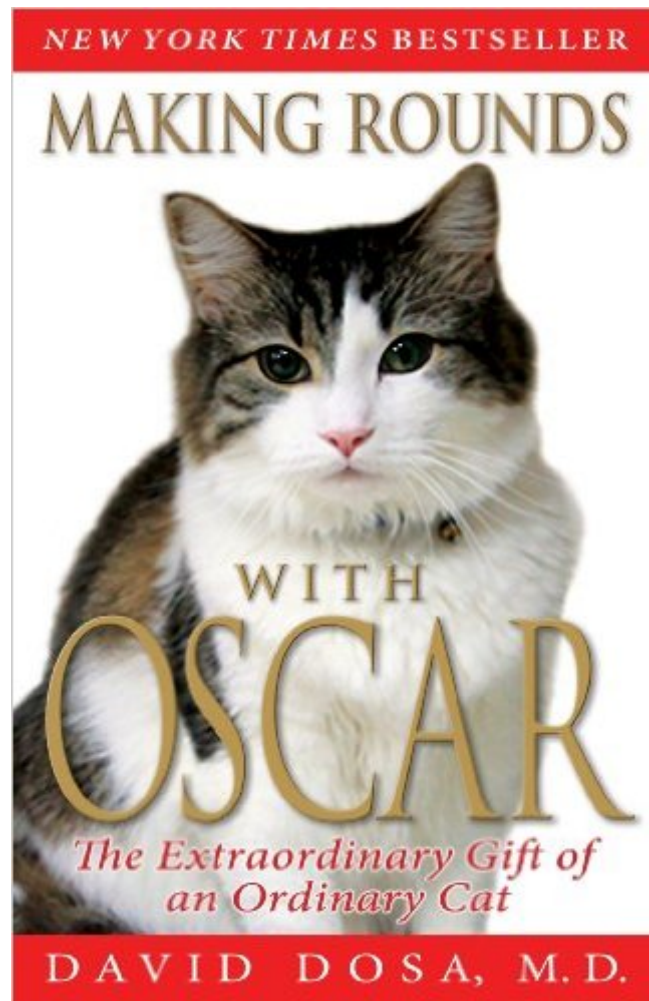


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Making Rounds With Oscar: The Extraordinary Gift Of An Ordinary Cat



Synopsis

A remarkable cat. A life-changing story. Making Rounds with Oscar: The Extraordinary Gift of an Ordinary Cat is the story of a doctor who, at first, doesn't always listen; of the patients he serves; of their caregivers; and, most importantly, of a cat who teaches by example, embracing moments of life that so many of us shy away from. "Oscar has much to teach us about empathy and courage. I couldn't put it down." --Sara Gruen, author of Water for Elephants "This book is a must-read. Truly, this is a story that needs to be told." --Fresh Fiction "You'll be moved." --People "This touching and engaging book is a must-read for more than just cat lovers; anyone who enjoys a well-written and compelling story will find much to admire in its unlikely hero." --Publishers Weekly "[The] book, both touching and humorous, isn't just about Oscar. It's about listening and letting go." --USA Today

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Hachette Books; Reprint edition (April 5, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1401310435

ISBN-13: 978-1401310431

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (425 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #47,289 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Pets & Animal Care > Pet Loss](#) #8 in [Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Hospice Care](#) #14 in [Books > Medical Books > Nursing > Nursing Home Care](#)

Customer Reviews

I loved geriatrician David Dosa's 2007 essay in the New England Journal of Medicine -- about Oscar the cat, who by then had seemingly predicted, within hours, the impending deaths of dozens of residents on the dementia unit of a Rhode Island nursing home. He'd been dubbed the "grim reap-purr" and I was thrilled to see MAKING THE ROUNDS WITH OSCAR: THE EXTRAORDINARY GIFT OF AN ORDINARY CAT and, from that title, eager to read what promised to be an expansion of the essay. So first, to be clear: this book is not much about the cat. In fact, there might be a mere cumulative total of 20 pages about Oscar. Rather, the book is one part memoir of the doctor and his geriatric practice; one part profile of the dementia unit's charge nurse; and eight parts profiles of the residents and their families, with a dollop about the end-of-life comfort

provided to them by Oscar. Nor does Dosa explore (beyond a couple sentences) the source of Oscar's instinct -- the theories and research about the physiology of dying and animals' amazing sense abilities. That said, I'm going to take a sharp turn and say that I liked the book it actually *is*, and that it's an important book for the elderly and (especially) their caregivers to read. Dosa is frank about the fear, denial, frustration and guilt inherent in caregiving generally, and specifically in losing a loved one in "the long goodbye" of dementia. He touches on the inadequacies of doctors and the healthcare system and the importance of realistic end-of-life directives. And there are takeaways: that simple diversion is more effective than trying to reign someone in from their altered reality; that it's important to interact according to who the person is now (in dementia) rather than who they were; and that it's most important to simply "be there" rather than necessarily interacting at all. Recommended.

Oscar is one of several cats who live at Steere House nursing home. All of these cats provide companionship and love for the residents, but only Oscar has the special talent of being able to sense when people are nearing the end of their lives. The nurses were the first ones to figure it out as they noticed how frequently he showed up just at the right time. No one knows how he does it, but when he detects that someone is near dying, he takes up residence on their bed and usually stays until the funeral director comes to collect the body. During this time, he also offers comfort to the family who are there to be with their loved one during this transition. When there's no one to sit with the patient, Oscar maintains a solitary vigil. No one dies alone on Oscar's watch. People who love their pets probably won't question Oscar's abilities, but one of the doctors who works there was a bit of a skeptic. This book is the result of his interviews with family members and staff who shared their experiences with him. Over and over they told Dr. Doza how much the gift of Oscar's presence had meant to them during a very difficult time. Most people who have cats know the comfort they can bring when they curl up next to you in bed and share their warmth. It's as if Oscar's being there normalizes the events and removes some of the fears. All of the patients on Oscar's floor are in the final stages of dementia, usually due to Alzheimer's. Experience and research have shown that two things are often able to break through the haze that envelops them - music and animals. In the process of telling Oscar's story, Dr. Doza also gives us insight into this very scary disease. If raising a child is about watching them learn skills, living with an Alzheimer's patient is the opposite - they are slowly unlearning them. Each loss is a form of good-bye. While this book doesn't make the disease any less scary, it does offer comfort and hope for those affected by it. We may never know just how it works - how Oscars knows just the right time to show up. Maybe all we really need to

know is just that he does.

OK so here is this book with this cool cat on the cover, and you think there is something neat about the whole concept. Maybe you have already heard there is this cat that knows when people are going to die. Well, it's way more than that. This book, written by a doctor who is not actually a cat person, is more of a tribute to those creatures, human as well as feline, who allow advanced dementia patients to die with dignity. I imagine that Steere House will not be lacking for residents after this moving depiction. Needless to say, it is heart-wrenching for any family member to place his/her loved one in a nursing home, probably more so when the loved one has dementia. What a gift to know that Steere House exists, where the staff is compassionate, even loving, and treats their residents like family. Where a cat moved in while the building was still under construction, and the management took it as a sign that animals were meant to live there along with the patients.

Personally, I find dementia to be a pretty scary topic and generally try not to think about it. The author is a geriatrician who makes it real, even if still mysterious. He interviews family members who speak courageously and honestly about losing their loved ones, and how it helped to have Oscar there at the end. I learned that hospice is not just for the very end of life, and it is about much more than medical care. I learned that people who refuse to eat at the natural end of their lives are not starving themselves. I learned that there is a lot we don't know about dementia, but we are learning more all the time. Dr. Sosa writes in a very easy, straightforward style. His patients and their families are very lucky people. I can't recommend this book highly enough. It made me laugh and, yes, cry, but mostly it just made me feel better in general. Losing a loved one to dementia is about the most horrible experience one can contemplate, but after reading this book I feel like I could cope. And Oscar is a pretty amazing cat too.

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