



Stable Relation

Anna Blake

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When most women go through a mid-life crisis, they start a diet, get plastic surgery, or have an affair. My life went to the dogs...and horses...and llamas... and did I mention happy hour with the goats?

My urban world came apart, so I took a leap of faith and crash-landed on a dilapidated would-be horse farm on the flat, windy, treeless prairie of Colorado. It was a place where white horses turn pink at sunrise and I didn't have to worry about locking the back entry to the house, because the door was missing. The biggest social event of any week was greeting the trash man on Tuesday. And what should I do about the deceased llama in the laundry room?

Any decent midlife crisis has a quality of time travel, in this case swinging back to my childhood farm and my disconnected, secretive family, then forward to the animals who became my family on the prairie. My dogs and horses were soon joined by some line-dancing llamas and a biker-gang of goat kids, defying gravity and every other rule. I rescued an abused donkey who told me he was Ernest, and Windy, an un-wanted chestnut mare who became our beloved herd matriarch. Even Fred, the duck lived by a code.

It's the memoir of my bittersweet transition from a mid-life orphan to a modern pioneer woman, building an entirely different kind of family farm.

Stable Relation appeals to all animal lovers, midlife survivors, and anyone whose parents had problems of their own. It's told in a strong, bittersweet voice, sharing life and death on a small farm and the healing power of animals: James Herriot meets Janette Walls.

Stable Relation Details

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From Reader Review Stable Relation for online ebook

Jane Clancy says

I could not put this book down. I wanted to read it very slowly: make it last, take in every drop of bravery, fear, love, humor, humility, reality and excellent writing. I had to make a bargain with myself that I would read it again instead. *Stable Relation* may have to be billed as memoir (it is a memoir), but it reads like a great novel. It is, quite simply, stellar. This is a book for anyone who has ever succeeded, struggled, fallen short, dragged themselves forward, and let themselves be sustained by love where it lives, when love is not available where it should live. Anna Blake's skill at writing is evident in the spaces between her words and thoughts. The events or feelings she didn't speak about were as telling and eloquent as the events and feelings she put forth. As a reader, I could infer and link things together on my own. She let me form my own ideas and opinions about things. This is key to excellent writing, and shows a deep respect for her readers. While I love horses and all the things that go with them, this book isn't about horses. This is a book that positively bursts with life in all its cranky, joyful, zany messiness. Gritty, comical, sorrowful, uplifting, and ultimately inspiring, the only regret you will have is not buying more copies. I've got three people waiting for mine, and I can't let it go! Gifting, here I come.

Lara says

From the dedication to the final sentence, I was captivated and inspired. In "Full Moon Over Broken Glass," I feel as if I'm right there on the porch, exhausted from the first day of work much harder than imagined in that first place of your very own. In "Dogs to the Rescue" we are introduced to a timid rescued doberman and a cattle dog who lives up to his lofty name of Hero. Anna's insight into animal personalities (animalities?) is incredible. I really feel like I've met all these characters. "Die Hard on the Prairie" is a rhythmically paced account of a terrifying blizzard in which shivered along with the horses in their snow-bound stalls. "Wild Texas Wind" describes the grace and sacrifice of an equine mother and the moonlit gift she gave. "Visitors by Bus" is possibly my favorite chapter - one animal after another astonishes with its intuitive compassion to members of an unlikely audience. Anna's dressage partner, Spirit, is the shining white thread that weaves the story together, and you will thrill to their victories and admire their deep relationship of mutual devotion and respect. In the book's final third, we follow Anna with a sense of dread and foreboding into a dark past that shattered her sense of self and belonging, and back into the healing pastures of her herd.

The very best books are those with pages and passages we can hang on to like our own. For a memoir to succeed, it needs to be relatable, and in this way Anna draws us in. Even when our experiences differ, Anna taps in to the universal bond between the human who is open to listening, and the animal that has wisdom to share. There is something for every animal lover, introvert, and independent mind here. *Stable Relation* is just the right length - the tidy chapters leave you hungry for more like the very best small-course meal, and by the end you realize the book contains so much more than could really fit between those covers. There is no sentimentality here - Anna describes with gutsy honesty the truth of living on a farm, both as a child and as an adult. You form a relationship with loss almost as if it were an animal of its own - a sneaky beast that finds us in snowstorms, quiet evenings or broad daylight. She manages to perfectly balance gravity with humor, the mood changing with the moment with the immediacy of a horse's presence.

I laughed at the antics of goats, ducks and donkeys. I cried at the profound and intimate impact that animals had on Anna's life, just as they have had on anyone who has allowed themselves to love in that wild and

wordless way, while they are here, while they are leaving us, and long after they are gone. If you have ever saved your own life, if an animal was ever the one to save you, if you have a complicated family, if you have ever illustrated your own family album with faces you weren't related to by blood, but whose eyes and hearts mirrored your own, if you have ever been lifted by a horse or swept off your feet by a dog...you want to read this book. Anna has been teaching people how to connect with their horses for years, and this book is a beautiful story of finding and connecting with your true self.

Goele Lousbergh says

This is her memoir, not a horse training book. Enjoyable read.

Diane Alexander says

Every once in a while you come across a book that stays with you; “Stable Relation” is one of those rare finds. And if you think, “I’m just not into horses that much, so this book isn’t for me,” you are dead wrong; it’s about so much more: life, hardship, survival, and love. In this skillfully written memoir, Blake deftly draws us in from the start. She interweaves her past and present life in a way that will have you turning pages as quickly as you can. This account of her life, told in kaleidoscopic fashion rather than serially, has a magical way of beguiling the reader.

Blake has no problem being critical of others (who deserve it) or being self-deprecating when she thinks she deserves it. Her sly, wry wit is a breath of fresh air, as is her shrewd sarcasm. At the same time, the reader soon comes to understand her feelings and motivations; Blake slowly reveals her past, and you’ll be rooting for her before you know it. It’s impossible not to become immersed in the honest, genuine attachment she has for her animals, something she’s always had trouble doing with people. You’ll see why.

Anyone who has ever loved or even liked an animal will become immersed in her story, with its unwavering quest of understanding them, caring for them, and humanely training them. But this book goes much further than that. It’s a journey many of us can relate to; a voyage of the inner self. It touched me deeply.

OnceUpon says

I'm on my 2nd reading of this memoir, Stable Relation by Anna Blake. I loved it that much! Each tangy chapter is written with wit and insight as the author shares her life's lessons learned while growing up in a dysfunctional farming family, to her successful urban career, and then drawn back to farm life, shared with a delightful cast of critters along the way. It's a must-read for any hard working woman who has experienced life's hard knocks and pulled herself up by her own bootstraps. It's an inspirational story of tenacity, hope, and achievement. Engagingly written with humor and sensitivity that is forged out of experience, determination, and a love for life. It reads like a funny, suspenseful, gritty, and heartwarming novel.

Melinda Regenfuss says

If you like animals you should read this book. If you love animals Anna Blake will speak to your heart. She

eloquently expresses exactly how I feel about the animals I share my life with. This book has something for everyone. From enjoying amusing and touching stories about life with animals to touching the soul of a true animal lover. I cannot say enough good things about this book. I plan on sharing my original copy and buying several more for gifts.

Natalie Lewis says

I adored this book - stunning and heartfelt, you are along for the ride and allowed into Anna's world. You will fall in love with her animals and feel their connection. Just beautiful

Karen says

I started by reading Anna Blake's blog. It is the only blog I get in my inbox and I actually read it every week. I think this book is for horse/farm people because it is easy to relate to Anna's ups and downs in her life and on her farm. It is very well written and entertaining!

Tracey says

When reading a book, if you're still tasting the salt of your tears as you snort through a laugh, it's a good sign that you've found a book that has captured the true essence of the human experience.

I devoured Blake's riveting memoir in one day (and frankly, I had a lot of other important things that I should have been doing). I began the first chapter as I was on a mountain highway waiting for a rock pile to be cleared off the road. I think it was the first time in history that I was disappointed when traffic began to move. Blake's often witty, sometimes wry and always poignantly honest voice became a friendly companion who I was sorry to see leave when I turned the last page of the book.

You could say that people who love animals will enjoy this book, but that's kind of like saying that people with taste buds will like chocolate ice cream. The reader base for this memoir extends much further than animal lovers or people who live in the country. This book is for anyone who has encountered a fork in their road of life and didn't know which way to go. It's for anyone who has felt that they have lost it all. It's for anyone who realized that they can be their own hero(ine). It's for anyone who has fallen in love and danced that back and forth sway of being the rock of support and accepting the strength when you're weak.

In short, to me, this book was a love letter to the Colorado plains, a hodge podge collection of personable farm animals, the unwavering love of a white knight soulmate, and the process of excavating your true strength and beauty beneath the rubble of a lifetime of experiences.

Me says

Through GoodReads I was sent this book free of charge in exchange for an honest review. Stable Relation is the true account of one middle-aged woman, who after a divorce, death of her parents, (who at best provided

her with a dysfunctional home life), abandoned her city life after buying a dilapidated farm in Colorado. Describing the would-be horse farm as dilapidated is no exaggeration. For example, “there’s no need to worry “about locking the back porch, because the door was missing.”

Narrated in short chapters, the reader is kept enrapt, as the author single-handedly renovates the house, barn, and land to meet the needs of her horses and assorted rescue animals. Sometimes, this involved bringing a donkey inside the laundry room when a major snow storm left the barn a dangerous place or having to drag a dead llama off of her front porch. It’s important to note that the author also undergoes a complete and inadvertent career change as her life progresses. This is just one of the aspects of the book that had me cheering her on for her perseverance, creativity, and sense of self as she reinvented herself, and yet found peace with her new roles.

Each chapter is either a short segment of life on the farm, obstacles faced head-on, or a description of one of her llamas, horses, dogs, or goats and how each helped carve the author’s view on life. My favorite chapter involved her llama being a ring-bearer at a friend’s wedding. Honestly, I can’t recommend this book enough as I think it will appeal to a wide audience as everyone, at one time or another, dreams of ditching their current life and moving to a completely different situation. Through this book, you can see how your wildest escape dreams can be possible.

Cheryl says

When friends ask me why I like to read memoirs I usually say it's because I'm the curious sort. Perhaps that's just another way of saying I'm nosy, but there you have it. I like to read about how other people have navigated the challenges they've met in life. Because we all have them, you know. Some memoirs do a great job of telling you about everything that went right or wrong, but fail to really explore the nuts and bolts of the journey. That's not a criticism; everyone tells their story their own way and for different reasons. But I happen to be most fond of the memoirs that tackle the grittier stuff. The stuff that makes you have to put the book down and really chew on the words for a bit.

Stable Relation is that kind of memoir. A perfect blend of tongue-in-cheek humor, confessional and a heaping dash of salt-of-the-earth common sense. This book not only challenges how you think and feel, but encourages you to become more present and aware of your path in life. Yes, there were several Kleenex moments for me. Actually, I lost count, but I'm a woman of a certain age and I've earned the right to lean more toward the sentimental side now. And no, I'm not ashamed. You won't be either. It's OK.

This memoir is about Cattle Dogs, Dobies, mutts, ducks, horses, llamas and goats. There are blizzards, bad memories, blistering sun and batty first dates, as well as the occasional flashback about dysfunctional family, distant relatives and old friends. Anna makes it pretty clear from the start that her birthright was an early life chock full of crap and crisis. By the time she hit midlife she was at a crossroad. She wanted to exorcise the crazy and decided to use a career dilemma as her turning point. With little more than burning passion, determination and an abundance of elbow grease, Anna begins to carve out a place of her own on the prairie.

As the story unfolds, Anna talks about becoming temporarily attached to the various assortment of birds and critters that share the daily routine at her farm. I can relate. The first Spring on my farm we were visited nightly by a methodical, comedic female raccoon who not only stopped by to see what we might have to offer, but for several years thereafter brought her entire family along for the ride! (We called her Sport) And

I still search the trees by the pond where I once photographed a one-eyed hawk. I have no reason to believe she might still be around, except that I'd like to think she is. Anna writes about her awe for the creatures and the unique environment she shares with them, in spite of life's ups, downs and (often times) harsh lessons. Anyone who grew up on a farm knows that as beautiful as farm life can be, an unforgiving and harsh reality is always lurking in the shadows. Survival depends on balancing what is perfect and good with the fear of what that can morph into in the blink of an eye. Mention the word colic around any horse person and you'll see what I mean.

Anna shares several experiences that helped her find the strength to push past a miserable start in life and mature into a woman who, above all, values and models grace, kindness and generosity of heart and spirit. What makes this book so special is the hilarious cast of characters who mentor Anna on this journey and help her build a new trust in the healing balm of love. If you're anything like me, you'll be humbled by the author's unfiltered adoration and devotion for her charges and impressed by her intuitive, gentle approach. These gifts seem especially unique given how little love or compassion she was shown as a child. How does one learn to use these tools if they've never been taught? Anna shows you how. And if she can do it, so can you.

I started out reading this memoir slowly. I wanted to savor every chapter. But as the story continued I no longer had to force myself to slow down rather, I NEEDED to read it slowly.

This book is not just good.

It's not just a winner.

It's profound.

And if *Stable Relation* is any indication of what we might be hearing from Anna in the future, I can't wait for more!

Susan Walker says

This book really makes you think about overcoming life's speed bumps. The woman, Anna Blake, tells how she bought a broken down farm and takes the reader through tears and laughs as she lets you into her life. A very enjoyable read.

Bethany says

I had long awaited the arrival of this book with high expectations, and yet I was still completely blown away by it. If you have ever been lucky enough to owe a debt of gratitude to a good dog or good horse this book will hit you at your core. Anna's absolute gift of observation brings to life the beauty of the Colorado prairie, but it also provides brilliant insight, humor and honesty on the topic of the human species. She doesn't gloss over the pain of loss, but also vividly describes moments of connection and compassion that fill you up with fresh air and hope.

If you pick up this book you will treasure it and want to savor it. I could have easily flown through it in a few hours, but found myself pausing half way through and wanting to just sit with each bit, finishing it off like you might the last pieces of a chocolate bar.

Katie says

A beautiful autobiography. A true reminder that we are more than our circumstances. That love and hope can heal and make a beautiful life.

Thank you for the courage to share yourself this way, Anna.

OnceUpon says

I loved the book! A must-read for any hard working, animal loving person who has experienced life's hard knocks and pulled themselves up by their own boot straps. A good horse story. A good story of human perseverance. Delightfully written with sensitivity and humor throughout. It left me feeling encouraged. I highly recommend it.
