



The Real James Herriot: A Memoir of My Father

Jim Wight

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With full access to his father's papers, correspondence, manuscripts, and photos, Wight has created a fitting and affectionate tribute to the well-loved vet and author of "All Creatures Great and Small". of photos.

The Real James Herriot: A Memoir of My Father Details

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Beverly Hollandbeck says

What's not to love? The biography of a warm, intelligent, sensitive, observant man who gave the world warm, intelligent, sensitive, and observant stories from his veterinary practice in the mid-twentieth century, this detailed picture was written by his son, who follows in his father's steps in recording a life well-lived. It was a joy to read about the real people behind Herriott's tales.

April says

I grew up reading and rereading James Herriot's books. Learning about the man behind the story from his son was great. Although Jim Wight is not the author his father was, he does a job that is just fine. We learn more about Alf (James Herriot's real name) and his life. We learn that the stories he wrote are based on real life, real character that Alf and the people around him knew and experienced. We learn that Alf's life was not always as great as he led us to believe. We learn about his journey to and through authorship. He's an interesting person. Fun to read for anyone who want to know more about the world's favorite vet.

Luann says

Jim Wight has written a moving tribute to his father, James Alfred Wight, known as James Herriot to millions of fans around the world. At times it felt too long and detailed, but then he would catch my interest again with a funny or interesting story that hadn't been shared in any of the James Herriot books.

In places it was quite reminiscent of the autobiographies of Dick Francis and Roald Dahl who shared some similar experiences - especially during the war. In fact, Dick Francis is mentioned several times and is even in one of the pictures. He says: "Dick Francis, author of many best-selling books about the world of horse racing, was one of the most famous people Alf got to know well and he was probably one of his favourites – a modest and charming man with whom he kept in touch throughout their almost parallel climb up the ladder of fame."

I particularly enjoyed the personal memories shared by Wight about his father and others well-known from the books. He quoted from diaries and letters written by his father and even included a few love letters Alf wrote to his wife. There are also 16 pages of family photos.

It was very interesting to find out what bits were real in the books and what had been changed. Mostly only the names of the people and the settings were changed. The stories James Herriot told in his books were all based on actual events. The last paragraph in the book says: "James Herriot, the unassuming veterinary surgeon who enthralled millions, was no fictional character. There was a man I knew, who possessed all the virtues of the famous veterinarian - and more. A totally honest man whose fine sense of humour and air of goodwill towards others ensured that he was respected by all who knew him. A man on whom, after his death, a Yorkshire farmer delivered his final verdict: 'Aye, he were a right decent feller.' That man was James Alfred Wight."

If you are a James Herriot fan, I highly recommend this book. Now I need to go find a copy of James Herriot's Yorkshire.

Jane says

have been a fan of James Herriott books all my life watch films, tv series and was saddened by Alf Wight death.

This book could only have been written by someone very close to him and was apt this was written by his son.

I was eager to read this and what a story, with so many surprises too, I always thought he was born in Glasgow but he was a macham (born in Sunderland) although he lived and studied in Glasgow.

The book fills in the gaps and gives the reader a greater understanding of this vet first and writer second. He practiced in a time before antibiotics and technology.

It was aparent that it was not plain sailing for Alf (Herriot) to get his books published and I am sure now the publishers who rejected the vet books are still reeling from this.

A wonderful insight into a wonderful man, family, Yorkshire and a great loss to the world of books.

Well written and a joy to read.

Willa Grant says

I wish I had not read this book. Not because it was not well written, though his son certainly lacks his father's flair, but because it was TMI. I had LOVED James Herriot's books, I read them again & again & laughed myself sick over them. The reality of the man's life was quite different. If you like and/or admire James Herriot's books I strongly urge you not to read this biography.

Linda says

There are two authors on the top of my personal favorites list. One is Sebastian Barry and the other is James Herriot. I devoured everything JH wrote in my younger years, so when we planned our four week return to England, I just had to visit his house/surgery in adorable Thirsk. It was such a moving experience for me. I was one of the Americans who loved his stories about animals and people with a passion. I laughed and cried my way through the books by this beloved writer. It's only fitting his son should tell the story of his Dad. His admiration and love soak the pages. There are some surprises in this book; they made me appreciate and love (JH) even more. Now I must read his books again. Yorkshire was just as gorgeous as he said it was. I highly recommend The World of James Herriot for anyone in the area. It's an interesting time capsule of the 1940-50s if you're a fan or not. IF you're a fan, it's an absolute must! So is this book.

Manybooks says

A glowing homage to the late great Alfred Wight (who penned the *All Creatures Great and Small* series

under pseudonym of James Herriot) by his son and fellow veterinarian James Wight, while the author might not have the same power of penmanship that his father possessed, The Real James Herriot provides a sweet and loving human portrait, whilst also showing fans of the series instances and anecdotes not covered in the novels (about Alfred Wight's childhood and university studies, his parents and their respective families, as well as interesting and welcome information on some of the many clients and their animals that are presented and depicted in the novels, what is truth, what is fiction, what has been combined from separate incidences, and multiple characters who are merged into one). Highly recommended, but with the caveat that the narrative does at times move a bit slowly and haltingly (this did not bother me all that much, but I think it should at least be mentioned as a so-called heads-up).

Christie Bane says

This book is the life story of “James Herriot”, whose real name was Alf Wight, written by his son, and it was a seriously delightful book. James Herriot has to be one of the most beloved authors in history, and the delightful thing about this book is that it shows the person behind the books was just as good as the books!

Alf Wight as he is described in this book was a kind, funny, hard-working man who stayed humble even when he (finally) became very successful. He loved his work, he loved his family, and he loved writing. According to his son, the stories were all either true, or else heavily based on true stories with just a few details changed.

James Wight writes like his father! That was really surprising. Not exactly like, of course, but enough like. He has the same open, inviting, amused tone. I don't know if he's written anything else or not, but I'm going to find out!

One last thing. I read this book at the same time I was reading *Prairie Fires*, the biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder. Laura Ingalls Wilder came off as boring and slightly annoying, while Alf Wight came off even more interesting than I would have expected — and a decent human being as well! (Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter Rose, by the way, is even worse than her mother, a manipulative egomaniac with really bad judgment.) I used to want to go visit all the Laura Ingalls Wilder historic sites, but that urge has kind of dissipated after reading the book, while my previously non-existent desire to visit James Herriot's Yorkshire is now burning strong. Goes to show how powerful a good book can be!

Brett says

This book was a very interesting insight into the beloved author and "World's most famous vet". It seems Herriot was every bit as likable in reality as he seems to be in his famous semi-autobiographical books. Herriot's son, Jim Wight tells us proudly of Herriot's successes and unflinchingly of his struggles, which given his very private nature were often completely internalized. As a side bar it is also delightful to have some knowledge of the men on whom Tristan and Sigfried Farnon are based and indeed it sounds like their portrayal in print is mostly spot-on.

Right up-front, Wight tells us that he was reluctant to pen a biography about his famous father because he doesn't really consider himself a writer. While it is true that he writes in a different style than his dad, his biography is accessible and interesting to read. For me, he really hits his stride about thirty pages in. In a

couple of places, Wight seems to inadvertently fall into the trap of recounting stories we've already heard told so masterfully in Herriot's canon. I feel these time are unfortunate because they don't play to Wight's strengths as an author. And a couple of times, Mr. Wight comes off a tad defensive in tone over some details that I would suppose the misunderstanding of which has been a source of irritation. But these are very minor flaws, and I am grateful that he has shared with us his unique perspective on the life of his father.

I believe Mr. Wight provides a wonderfully succinct and insightful epitaph to his father's career as an author on Page 238:

[Herriot:] felt compelled to describe the old Yorkshire he had grown to love -- a way of life that was fast disappearing -- and he wanted to preserve it for others to enjoy.

And thank god he did!

Herriot was always a little bemused by the interest that we Americans showed in his stories about his far-away rustic agricultural community. I must admit I'm bemused by his bemusement! But he supposes at one point the drive behind our attraction to his beloved Yorkshire. He says, in essence that he supposes we are drawn by the quiet, slow-paced, old fashioned ways that contrast so sharply with the face-paced, industrialized lifestyle which most Americans live. It is an accurate supposition, I think.

What a remarkable man. What remarkable stories. What a remarkable legacy.

Tom says

It was with hesitation that I purchased and eventually picked up this book to actually read. James Herriot is one of my favorite authors of all time. I grew up reading him in middle school, and he's my fall back author for when I'm feeling totally depressed and crapped out. So his books are very meaningful to me, and I was hesitant to discover any back story. This biography was written in chronological order by his son. It probably could have benefited from another format. When the author begins talking about the great-grandparents, it's purely derived from letters and distant documentation - not meaningful relationships, so it comes across as clinical and dry. When we finally get to the Herriot side of things, it's titillating but there's a lot withheld. Wight's significant encounter with depression is talked about but I feel like his son was trying to protect his father, so he never is at liberty to actually disclose those tough details. And there's shockingly little about Wight's wife - almost as if she declined to be involved. The ending is tough - do I really want to know what happened to my dear friends? Wight dying painfully of cancer, Donald intentionally overdosing, and Brian dying of disease. Painful, and I almost wish I didn't know just so that I could make believe Herriot's snapshot in time was eternal.

Bob Anderson says

So the popular books by James Herriot, novels which told the story of a country veterinarian charting a course through the changing times of the modern world with humor and heart-felt passion, were in fact written by a man named James Alfred Wight. The exact nature of them had been questioned in the past: were they fully fictional beyond the grain of truth given by Herriot's veterinary background, or did each story

have authenticity of its own? This book, by Alf's son, Jim Wight, attempts to dispel most of the mystery created by these pseudonymous books. The first chapter of Herriot's first book (I will use Herriot for the subject in his literary capacity, Alf for the personal, and Wight for the biographer, Alf's son), depicting an absolute ordeal of a calving gone wrong, gripped me instantly when I first read *All Creatures Great and Small*; I was glad to learn that nearly every story in these books was an actual event in Alf's life, though rearranged for best narrative effect.

This peeling back of the curtain, especially from such an intimately privileged position (Wight was not just Alf's son but also worked in the same veterinary practice as his father), reveals some details that, even if one took the Herriot books at face value, would surprise a reader. Alf's depression, and his spat with his partner (and inspiration for Siegfried) over his portrayal in the books, were fascinating glimpses behind the scenes. Wight writes about this with care and taste, not revealing details just to be salacious or to sell more copies, but to make the portrait of his father whole. The use of archived material from his father's life (Alf was a prolific letter writer) helps to make the narrative come alive, and the photo spread is particularly nice. Wight writes competently, though not with as much flair as his father; he shares some Herriot's knack at inspiring emotion. Some readers of Herriot's novels may not appreciate a book that tells about how principal characters from those books met their deaths in the real world, but for me the principle of approaching death in a direct way is a key feature of the James Herriot experience. If you love those books, read this one. If you get bored with childhood stories, skip around until you first meet a character you particularly enjoyed in Herriot's books, whether it was a human or a dog. You'll gain a new appreciation for the world behind those books, the stories told within, and even some new ones that weren't ever written but just passed down though

Susan says

You think you know James Herriot by reading *All Creatures Great and Small* and all the other books he wrote, but, you haven't really known him until you see him through his son's eyes. Jim Wight has written a marvelous memoir of his dad.

If one can have said of himself that he refused to let fame go to his head, that his family was the most important thing he had, and that his love for his work showed in every word he wrote, he lived a good life. James Alfred Wight, James Herriot, lived a good life. He's left an excellent example of manhood for generations to follow.

Kim Hampton says

A beautiful tribute to veterinarian and author James Herriot by his only son. James Alfred Wight was the real name of the man who would become the most famous vet in the world and bring Yorkshire to life for fans all over the world. It was fascinating to get a glimpse of his life from the person who probably knew him best.

Moses Operandi says

Jim Wight tells his father's story with humor, compassion, and candor. Although I was mortified when I first learned that 'James Herriot' was not the real name of the author who had since childhood enthralled me with

beautifully written stories of the strong bonds between the human and animal worlds, I realize now that this was a selfish attitude--I did not want 'James Herriot' to protect himself and his friends from the inevitable media coverage that resulted from his multi-million book sales, I wanted his real name so that he would in fact be the man I read about.

I realize now that his rejection of the public approach chosen by many authors only shows that he was a far more real person, and that his stories came just as much from his memories as they did from his heart.

Jim Wight's biography is not truly surprising--I would have worried, had it been. We KNOW James Herriot from his books; this just fleshes out the story a bit, and in that Jim Wight succeeds admirably.

From the irrepressible antics of 'Siegfried' and 'Tristan' to his own unique mind, James Herriot's stories thrilled us, and Jim Wight brings that man into the realm of hard truth.

Highly recommended.

Nancy Dawe says

This book well captures the spirit of "The Real James Herriot," Alf Wight, in its humour and sentimentality. It was often hilarious, and offered a candid look into Mr. Wight's life as both vet and author. My only complaint is that some sentiments were oft repeated creating a longer book than necessary.
