



My Animals and Other Family

Clare Balding

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'I had spent most of my childhood thinking I was a dog, and I suspect I had aged in dog years. By the time I was ten I had discovered the pain of unbearable loss. I had felt joy and jealousy. Most important of all, I knew how to love and how to let myself be loved. All these things I learnt through animals. Horses and dogs were my family and my friends. This is their story as much as it is mine'

Clare Balding grew up in a rather unusual household. Her father a champion trainer, she shared her life with more than 100 thoroughbred racehorses, mares, foals and ponies, as well as an ever-present pack of boxers and lurchers. As a toddler she would happily ride the legendary Mill Reef and take breakfast with the Queen.

She and her younger brother came very low down the pecking order. Left to their own devices, they had to learn life's toughest lessons through the animals, and through their adventures in the stables and the idyllic Hampshire Downs. From the protective Candy to the pot-bellied Valkyrie and the frisky Hattie, each horse and each dog had their own character and their own special part to play.

The running family joke was that "women ain't people". Clare had to prove them wrong, to make her voice heard - but first she had to make sure she had something to say.

My Animals and Other Family is a funny, brave, tender story of self- discovery.

My Animals and Other Family Details

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Author : Clare Balding

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From Reader Review My Animals and Other Family for online ebook

Jordan Wharmsby says

I should probably preface this review in saying that I have absolutely no interest in sport and most certainly not for horse racing, the decision to read this book was made purely out of fascination and intrigue yet it becomes the first biography I have chosen to review here, to receive five stars.

First of all, Balding's take on the technical writing of a biography is completely unique. She devotes each chapter of the book to a different dog or horse present in her life until later adolescence. Whilst this device could be somewhat unusual to most readers, I feel it adds individuality and believability whilst giving true meaning to the book's title.

Scoring a huge plus is the fact that in a world of conservatively written memoirs, Balding's is overtly honest and open. We learn about her difficult boarding school education, teetering on the edge of expulsion and an obscenely strict and isolated upbringing. Whilst being shunned for being a girl and generally being left to fend for oneself from such a young age would have been a traumatic time for most children, it wasn't for Balding. Instead she discovered a prowess for horse riding, and discovered her inherent competitive streak which is a delight to read of.

Clare's personality is infectiously warm and endearing and this tome expertly reveals how this came to be. She describes her formidable grandmother's reaction to the birth of a girl as "It's a girl, nevermind, keep trying!" before dumping the basketed child on the floor. This constant debouching over her gender no doubt has spurred Balding on to become one of the UK's best known and well-loved broadcasters, all before her early forties.

I simply cannot sing the praises of this book highly enough. It is eloquently written, beautifully illustrated by Gill Heeley and completed by a smattering of rare family photographs. Overall, the book is somewhat fairytale-like in nature and I implore that anyone looking to read a slightly different, edgier and exciting biography should put their opinions on sport and racing aside and pick up this fantastic memoir - you will not regret it.

Jemima Pett says

Loved this. Couldn't put it down... but then, I think I may have spent more time with animals than family when growing up, too. Review in April...

Rosie Review says

Now I don't normally go for biogs, preferring fiction; but something about this book made me want to read it. I loved how each chapter was separated into each different pet or horse Clare knew growing up. It had me laughing and crying in many places. She tells her story so well, which is easy to read and understand. I'm horsey but not that interested in Racing, but I understood what she was on about and could easily visualise

the races or mishaps Clare got herself into growing up! She evoked fond memories I have, especially as I was a fearless tom boy growing up too who would get myself in lots of trouble sometimes involving a pony or friend.

Such a memory she has remembering so many things she did – even that or she had such a more eventful and interesting growing up than I did. Maybe that is why I cant remember much of my childhood because not a lot happened. Such a good storyteller and because of this I'm making My Animals and Other Family my Book of the Month for October.

Taken from my blog www.rosiereview.wordpress.com

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John Grinstead says

Despite being around on Five Live and Channel 4 for a number of years, Claire Balding came into her own as a broadcaster during the London 2012 Olympics when her heart-on-the-sleeve, down-to-earth honesty and connection with people shone through. One could therefore have almost predicted that an autobiography would swiftly follow. Whilst My Animals and Other Family is entertaining, with her trademark no frills style, this account of her formative years, at school and around her Father's stables, held together by tales of family dogs and horses, somehow lacks something and left me wanting more but in an unsatisfied, 'is that it?' sort of way. Surfing on the crest of a popularity wave, no doubt the Saturday night family entertainment show will be next...oh, right, yes, there you go then. Just a bit too formulaic for me to be bowled over, I'm afraid.

Lucinda says

Poignant, irresistibly captivating and totally candid this special, must-read book is a real delight to behold.

I have always been a huge admirer and aficionado of Claire Balding, as she is my heroine in both the equestrian and sports world but in the journalism world too because of my combined love of horses and her career. From the perspective of an animal lover, horse rider and equestrian devotee this book was a must-have as soon as I noticed it in the bookshop, with its cover standing out on the bookshelf as something quite eye-catching. I have read many autobiographies about celebrities, horse riders and sports professionals but none of them are as spectacularly fantastic and as interesting as Claire Balding's. She puts so much of her heart and soul into this insightful narrative that you feel very much a part of her world, and which I consider as a gift, a real treat for all fans of this highly renowned and recognizable celebrity/ sports journalist and distinctive name in the horse world. It is the animals, the famous horses and top horse and rider combinations that make her such a universally loved figure in television, and that she speaks of so warmly and honestly in this delightful book that you are unable to put down.

Claire Balding recounts many childhood memories of when she grew up in a rather unusual and wonderfully fascinating household, with her father as a champion horse trainer. She shared her life with more than a hundred thoroughbred racehorses in peak fitness, mares and foals and ponies hence this was where her love for the horse began and which over the years has grown into a life long devotion and passion. She also had a pack of Boxers and Lurchers and so mans best friend really did become her friend, as animals of all shapes

and sizes were an important part of her life at a very young age. As a toddler she had many remarkable memories such as those of riding the legendary racehorse Mill Reef and taking morning breakfast with the Queen! Claire also recollects about how herself and her brother came quite low down in the pecking order, as they were left very much to their own devices and learnt things the hard way (usually with the help and guidance of an animal). This is a book about Claire's adventures in the stables as a young girl which was situated in the idyllic and quite beautiful Hampshire downs. From the protective Candy to the pot-bellied Valkyrie and the rather frisky Hattie, each horse and each dog has their own unique character and their own part to play in Claire Balding's life.

Often quite moving and emotional, this heartwarming tale is something very extraordinary as you get to explore one of the most recognized and documented figures in a larger than life way. It is an impressive book that is truly magical to behold, enchanting and quite eccentric, I can guarantee that you will find nothing to quite equal it within literature as it surpassed and exceeded all of my expectations. Funny, full of wit and humor there are moments within this book that just make you laugh out loud (especially if you know horses and their behavior). She has just so many absorbing, attention-grabbing stories to tell that you cannot take it all in at once, and so I am now beginning reading this book for the second time so that I may delight in all the details of each animal's story once more. Full of flair and panache this makes for a fresh, flamboyant and stylish read and which I cannot enthuse about enough as it totally blew me away. As an award-winning broadcaster and writer Claire Balding has become the face of the BBC and is known for her sports commentary such as in the horse racing scene, 2012 Olympics and various top UK horse events such as Olympia, Badminton and Burley. Crufts dog show, Countryfile and many other top shows is hosted by this truly inspiring sports presenter, whose enthusiasm and passion for sports and animals shines through every time.

Jeanette says

Delightful read for me! This autobiography of a girlhood lived on a racehorse training estate in England is quite a window. Not only into economic class, exact era, sibling features, or temperaments, either. This author is open and few details of any embarrassment are omitted re her animals or her family relationships. Who knew that dairy farmers have a lot in common with racing horse stable keepers! They never go on vacation, for one thing. And this I know is true.

Every chapter heralds another animal from the past. Excellent read for the detailing of all these proud various creatures. Filled with depth and all kinds of asides of incredible interest beyond what you would connect to this kind of undertaking.

This is a book I would not have picked up without GR friends' rec's. THANK YOU!

Gill says

For the benefit of non-Brits, Clare Balding is a TV and radio broadcaster who became a national treasure during London 2012, anchoring C4's Paralympic coverage as well as working for the BBC at the Olympics, most notably at the Aquatics Centre. Checkout YouTube for her wonderful interview with Chad le Clos' dad after his son beat Michael Phelps to win gold for South Africa.

Anyway, this memoir of her childhood proves that Clare can write just as well as she can present. Her father was a successful trainer of racehorses who in 1971 won the Derby with Mill Reef. If asked "were there any other events of note in that year?", her dad would likely overlook the fact that Clare was also born. Both she and her younger brother learnt that their place in the pecking order was behind the horses and dogs. The Queen was an occasional breakfast guest, and as a young jockey Clare nearly killed Olympian Princess Anne in a race.

It is both funny and moving, and very, very well-written. I've always admired Clare Balding for her consummate professionalism as a broadcaster, being knowledgeable and well-prepared, as well as for being out as a gay woman. After reading this I now admire her turn of phrase and also her tenacity. Hugely enjoyable, I'd recommend this to anyone.

Rachel says

A really good read. Autobiography's are clearly only generally interesting to those who have a direct understanding of the celeb/sports star etc, but I genuinely think that this book will reach more than just those who are aware of Clare Balding and or horse racing.

She writes this in a wonderfully honest and open manner, which from someone who has found herself at times to be at very close hand to royalty and celebrities is very refreshing. Whilst there's no scandal within it there are some hilarious etiquette 'foul ups' that are dealt with in a truly human way.

I loved every second of the book, never found a dull moment to be found and discovered a person who, despite her upbringing and opportunities, really did strike out for herself ultimately and chose her own path into adulthood. Hugely recommended read and I defy anyone to not outwardly laugh at moments when you really hope no-ones watching or listening.....

I don't do 5 stars, I do today!

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

Clare Balding is on TV a lot at the moment presenting the Commonwealth Games. I hadn't considered this when I began to listen to her autobiography a few days ago, but it is certainly an apt time to experience her book. I like Clare as a presenter because she is knowledgeable and comes across as a strong role model - no reliance on simpering or cleavage from her! However, I knew very little about her life before she began presenting mainstream sport. I had no idea she had been such a successful jockey for a time, nor that her family is so steeped in the world of horseracing.

Although this is very much a book about that world, I was pleased that I didn't need to be a fan in order to understand it. While the result of a privileged upbringing, Clare is very down to earth about her childhood and adolescent experiences. I particularly liked that she doesn't shirk from revealing actions that show her in a bad light as well as times when she shone. Her dawning awareness of the constant misogyny around her makes for an interesting theme and I am grateful that my teenage weight battles weren't made such a stark focus as Clare's were.

At one point Clare mentions that she enjoys listening to audiobooks and I believe this comes through in her narration as, not only is her story well written, but she does a great job of telling it too.

Caroline says

Clare Balding is a well known sports presenter with a special interest in horse racing. I have no interest in sports and an out and out dislike of racing.....but I adored this book, and could not put it down.

Clare gallops joyously through her rather eccentric life, basing each chapter on a beloved dog or horse from the period being described.... She graduates from a plump Thelwell-type Shetland pony called Valkyrie, to gymkhana ponies, and finally on to racing the thoroughbreds trained by her father, who's a famous horse trainer. Throughout this journey we are immersed in her deep love of animals, sharing her pleasure in a life rich in dogs, horses and riding.

Her family is quite batty - her mother in a charming and rather sweet way, her father in an unpleasantly chauvinistic and narcissistic manner, whilst her ever-present grandmother just seems plain horrible. She has a beloved younger brother too, who accompanies her bravely on many of her outrageous exploits.

Clare has guts. Funny, stoical, determined, adventurous, she tells her story honestly and with humility. One cannot help but like her. I ain't going to be watching sport on television any day soon, that is for sure, but I am delighted to have got to know a bit about this captivating woman and her interesting life. What a great read.

Jim says

Who is Clare Balding & why the heck should any of us care? She's a BBC sports presenter, was an amateur jockey, & grew up with race horses. I still don't really care, but her autobiography is told through her interactions with the more memorable horses & dogs she knew & it was excellent. There were quite a few & they're real animals - people to her (as they are to me), but animal people. She captivated me in the first chapter with our similarities growing up on a farm. She learned to walk with the help of her dog & drank out of the same water dish occasionally. (My dogs are all good at eating off my fork & always finish off my milk. They're not really begging, just attentively waiting for me to share.) Kids can do far worse than a loyal dog as a role model. I had one, too.

There was some skipping around in time due to the way the story was presented, but each chapter was well laid out & the animal characters made them hold together well. The joys, love, & loss were very real. From outward appearances, we have nothing in common, yet she is obviously a kindred spirit.

Her father was one of the top race horse trainers in England, even had some of the Queen's horses, so she met a lot of interesting people in intimate detail & had a lot of great riding opportunities, not to mention a love for all things equestrian. Her story provides a great personal view of that life, although I was a bit lost with her education. Their grades & such are far different than ours.

The only downside was her constant references to how her family put her down, yet she never seemed inclined to get back at them. It was a rather ugly thread that seemed too lopsided & undermined the veracity

of her story somewhat. Not a huge deal.

If you want the bare facts of who she is now (this book concentrates on her early life into college) the Wikipedia page fleshes it out.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clare_Ba...

Lola Et La Vie says

I have always admired Clare Balding, a sports presenter for British television. I know her from the racing coverage the BBC used to carry, but she has since gone on to do all sorts of events, including the Olympics and Paralympics. I have always admired her a lot. She comes across as an intelligent, knowledgeable and most of all genuine human being. I decided to listen to this book on Audible. It makes sense to me to listen to memoirs narrated by the author and I had a lot of fun with this one.

Clare tells stories of her childhood with a lot of warmth and good humour. All the chapters are named after animals, dogs and horses, that have played a part in her life. She paints a vivid picture of growing up with a father, who is a race horse trainer, and a grandmother who thinks women are second-class citizens. Everything, from her first pony to being caught shop lifting at boarding school to becoming an amateur jockey, is told with enthusiasm and often you can almost hear her smile at the memories. There were definitely some laugh out loud moments and some sad moments and I lived them with Clare as she told me about them.

These tales of the first twenty years of her life are probably most interesting to those who know and like her, but if you like horses, you might like it regardless. If you do not, well, maybe this one is not for you. If you do decide to pick this one up, I thoroughly recommend listening to the audio book, as I did. She knows how to tell those stories!

Ashleigh says

I absolutely loved this. It's not very often I read an autobiography in nearly one sitting (I would have had I not have gone to bed!) but I didn't want to put this down. It's so brilliantly written, I love how each part of her life is told through an animal she's loved - I love that uniqueness of it.

I've been an admirer of Clare for quite a long while - so this book was a must-have for me and I treated myself to it after my exams were over. It was well worth waiting for. She writes this in a wonderfully honest and open manner, which from someone who has found herself at times to be at very close hand to royalty and celebrities is very refreshing; whilst there's no scandal within it there are some hilarious etiquette 'foul ups' (That time the Queen came to breakfast? Or nearly 'killing' Princess Anne?).

I loved every second of the book, there was never a dull moment to be found and discovered a person who, despite her upbringing and opportunities, really did strike out for herself ultimately and chose her own path into adulthood. I'd loved more on her 'later years' because this really only follows her up to about 20. I hope that she decides to write another because I'd love to hear more about her broadcasting career, the epilogue was lovely but... I could easily have read 300 pages more!

A.E. Shaw says

A joy from beginning to end. I laughed plenty, I cried twice, I remembered a million things about horses and horse-racing that I'd forgotten I knew, and when it was finished, I could have read it all over again.

This book achieves the best things about autobiography by not pushing you through every last 'comic incident' of the writer's life, but by guiding you through what was important and notable to them as they grew up.

The book ends when Clare is 19, and I dearly hope writes another - I'd love to read the same deftly-handled, brilliantly written approach to her broadcasting career.

Most importantly, Balding is as fluid, fascinating and professional a writer as she is a presenter. A very comfortable and pleasant afternoon's read I can well imagine returning to. More please.

Michelle says

(3.5 stars) This is a memoir from Clare Balding as told through memories of key animals, primarily horses and dogs, in her life. Her father is a trainer in the horse racing industry, and has a mostly benign neglect for his daughter and son, her mother is somewhat frazzled by the children and helping to manage their business, and their grandmother is horrified by their wildness and poor manners. Their unusual upbringing includes receiving a pony from the queen, knowing that the horses come first with their father, and thinking that the seasons are flat racing and jumping rather than spring, summer, autumn, and winter. She learns important lessons from the dogs and horses in her life, and eventually becomes a jockey. Clare's encounters with the royal family continue, including an incident where she almost ran Princess Anne off the track during a race. She also chronicles some of her struggles at boarding school and the difficulties of being a female jockey. This was a forthright, sometimes humorous, and clear look at the racing industry from an inside perspective and the unconventional life of an English girl.
