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DEWEY

The Small-Town Library Cat
Who Touched the World

VICKI MYRON with Bret Witter

Wonderful and inspiring."—*Chicago Sun-Times*

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GRAND CENTRAL
PUBLISHING

NEW YORK BOSTON

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Praise for DEWEY

"Touching...Purr-fect."

—*New York Daily News*

"The little guy crawled his way right into my heart... every town should have a Dewey."

—*Christian Science Monitor*

"Charming, lovely, and moving. It's about life and death and small-town values, and, above all, love. Norton would have liked Dewey—the cat and the book—immensely."

—Peter Gethers, author of
The Cat Who Went to Paris

"Warming the hearts of cat-lovers across the country... This is more than just a cat book. It's also a biography of Ms. Myron, and the small town of Spencer."

—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

"Heartwarming... Gives Marley a run for his money."

—*Miami Herald*

more...

“What an extraordinary story of love, courage, and devotion. I will not soon forget the good people of Spencer, Iowa, and their wonderful library cat. DEWEY is truly inspiration for the soul.”

—Jack Canfield, cocreator of
Chicken Soup for the Soul

“Warm and fuzzy.”

—*People*

“Memories of a magical cat in a small-town library.”

—BookPage

“You’ll laugh, you’ll cry.”

—*New York Post*

“[A] tender story...not only a tribute to a cat...a love letter to libraries.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A warm, deeply emotional book about a gentleman cat...it’s about survival, and how one life can alter others, even if that life happens to be a cat’s.”

—*Palm Beach Post*

“Chronicles the struggles of the library worker who found the trembling kitten, the town that embraced him, and Dewey himself.”

—Associated Press

“Iowa has produced a true feline Hall of Famer, a loveable library celebrity named Dewey, who put Spencer, Iowa, on the international map. This book is a purring good read, whether you are a cat lover or not.”

—Jim Fanning, former Major League
Baseball player and manager

"[A] loving account... [and] intimate portrait of a place snugly set within its historical moment, preserved in Myron's understated, well-polished prose."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"A warm, fuzzy read."

—*Sioux City Journal*

"You'll laugh and you'll cry... If you're looking for a charming, touching, feel-good story, then curl up with your favorite pet and read all about Dewey... It's a reminder that love comes in all sizes and has a power beyond our wildest dreams."

—*Kalamazoo Gazette*

"The perfect book for anyone who adores animals... Part candid memoir, part fierce love story to small-town living, and part biography of a beloved cat, DEWEY is a book that any pet owner will cherish. From the first pages (which will hurt animal lovers to the quick) to the last two chapters (a three-hanky read, to be sure) authors Myron and Witter weave their tale with the same gentleness that Dewey used as he wove around patron's ankles."

—*North Andover Eagle-Tribune*

"Through this plucky cat we come to know and love the town of Spencer, Iowa, and learn lessons about courage, generosity, and the power of relationships. Dewey is a hero. I wish there were more people like him."

—Toni Raiten-D'Antonio,
author of *The Velveteen Principles*

more...

"Get warm fuzzies from Dewey."

—*Woman's World*

"The story of Dewey captures what makes small-town life worth preserving—a sense of community. DEWEY rekindles my belief that one person (together with one cat) can change lives. Vicki Myron gives Spencer's famous library cat a tenth life by writing this engaging biography."

—Christie Vilsack, former First Lady of Iowa

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To Gran, Mom, and Jodi—
three amazing women who loved
Dewey almost as much as I do

DEWEY

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Introduction

Welcome to Iowa

There is a thousand-mile table of land in the middle of the United States, between the Mississippi River on the east and the deserts on the west. Out here, there are rolling hills, but no mountains. There are rivers and creeks, but few large lakes. The wind has worn down the rock outcroppings, turning them first to dust, then dirt, then soil, and finally to fine black farmland. Out here, the roads are straight, stretching to the horizon in long, unbroken lines. There are no corners, only occasional, almost imperceptible bends. This land was surveyed and plotted for farms; the bends are corrections in the survey line. Exactly every mile, every road is intersected by another almost perfectly straight road. Inside is a square mile of farmland. Take a million of those square miles, lace them together, and you have one of the most important agricultural regions in the world. The Great Plains. The Bread Basket. The Heartland. Or, as many people think of it, the place you fly over on your way to somewhere else. Let them have the oceans and mountains, their beaches and their ski resorts. I'll take Iowa.

In northwest Iowa, in winter, the sky swallows the farmhouses. On a cold day, the dark clouds that blow in across the plains seem to churn the land under like a plow. In the spring, the world is flat and empty, full of brown dirt and hacked-off cornstalks waiting to be plowed under, the sky and land perfectly balanced like a plate on a stick. But if you come in the late summer, you would swear the ground is about to push up and tip the sky right out of the picture. The corn is nine feet high, bright green leaves topped with brilliant gold tassels. Most of the time you are buried in it, lost in the walls of corn, but top a small rise in the road, just a few feet of elevation, and you can see endless fields of gold atop green, silken threads sparkling in the sun. Those silks are the sex organs of the corn, trapping pollen, flying golden yellow for a month and then slowly drying up and browning out under the stiff summer heat.

That's what I love about northwest Iowa: it is always changing. Not in the way the suburbs change as one chain restaurant replaces another or the way cities change as buildings crowd each other ever higher, but in the way the country changes, slowly back and forth in a gentle motion that is always sliding forward, but never very fast. There aren't many roadside businesses out here. No crafts stores. No farmers' markets. The farmhouses, which are fewer every year, hug the road. The towns pop up suddenly, bearing signs announcing THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF IOWA or THE GOLD BUCKLE ON THE CORN BELT, and disappear just as quickly. Two minutes, and they're gone. A grain elevator or a processing plant, maybe a downtown strip with a convenience store, a place to eat. Every ten miles or so, there's a roadside cemetery, small plain mark-

ers behind low stone walls. These are pioneer plots that grew into extended family plots and eventually into town cemeteries. Nobody wants to be buried far from home, and nobody wants to waste much land. Use what you have. Make it simple. Keep it local.

Then, just when you're sliding away, when you're drifting into complacency like a corn row down the back side of a rise, the road widens and you pass a strip of stores: Matt Furniture, the Iron Horse Hotel, the Prime Rib restaurant, but also a Wal-Mart, a McDonald's, a Motel 6. Turn north at the stoplight, the first turn in fifty miles no matter which direction you've been driving, not to mention the first stoplight, and within a minute you've left the chains behind and you're driving the beautiful low bridge over the Little Sioux River right into the heart of Spencer, Iowa, a town that hasn't changed much since 1931.

Downtown Spencer is picture postcard small-town America: rows of storefronts in connecting two-and-three-story buildings where people pull their cars to the curb, get out, and walk. White Drug, Eddie Quinn's Men's Clothing, and Steffen Furniture have been in business for decades. The Hen House sells decorating items to farmwives and the occasional tourist on her way to the Iowa lake country twenty miles north. There's a hobby shop specializing in model airplanes, a card shop, and a store that rents oxygen tanks and wheelchairs. The Vacuum Cleaner Store. Arts on Grand. The old movie theater is still in business, although it shows only second-run movies since a seven-screen cineplex opened south of the bridge.

The downtown ends at The Hotel, eight blocks from the bridge. The Hotel. That's the actual name. It was

known as the Tagney in the late 1920s when it was the area's best accommodation, bus depot, train station, and only sit-down restaurant. By the end of the Great Depression, it had become a flophouse and, according to legend, the town bordello. The five-story building, plain redbrick and built to last, was eventually abandoned, then rehabilitated in the 1970s, but by then the real action had moved five blocks down Grand Avenue to Sister's Main Street Café, a no-frills diner with Formica tables, drip coffee, and smoky booths. Three groups of men congregate every morning at Sister's: the old guys, the older guys, and the really old guys. Together, they have run Spencer for the past sixty years.

Around the corner from Sister's Café, across a small parking lot and just half a block off Grand Avenue, is a low gray concrete building: the Spencer Public Library. My name is Vicki Myron, and I've been working in that library for twenty-five years, the last twenty as director. I've overseen the arrival of the first computer and the addition of the reading room. I've watched children grow up and leave, only to walk back through the doors ten years later with their own children. The Spencer Public Library may not look like much, at least not at first, but it is the centerpiece, the middle ground, the heart of this heartland story. Everything I'm going to tell you about Spencer—and about the surrounding farms, the nearby lakes, the Catholic church in Hartley, the Moneta School, the box factory, and the wonderful old white Ferris wheel up at Arnold's Park—all flows back eventually to this small gray building and to the cat who lived here for more than nineteen years.

How much of an impact can an animal have? How many lives can one cat touch? How is it possible for an

abandoned kitten to transform a small library into a meeting place and tourist attraction, inspire a classic American town, bind together an entire region, and eventually become famous around the world? You can't even begin to answer those questions until you hear the story of Dewey Readmore Books, the beloved library cat of Spencer, Iowa.

