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Pup takes bite out of grief

At the darkest moment, Jazzy renewed the author's sense of fun

Kristina Lanier

When Cindy Adams's husband died, she found herself in a difficult position. As a famous gossip columnist for the New York Post, she had a city full of friends, but no family to lean on for support.

But then a well-meaning pal sent her an unusual condolence gift. Instead of the requisite bouquet of flowers, Adams received a purebred, pedigreed Yorkshire terrier puppy - limousine delivery included.

Even for a celebrity who spends her days hobnobbing with the likes of Donald Trump and Joan Rivers, a dog seemed a strange remembrance. But the pup turned out to be a providential gift. From the moment Jazzy arrived and ceremoniously stained the floor, Adams didn't look back.

"The Gift of Jazzy" is Adams's memoir of the year following her husband's death and Jazzy's role in reconnecting her with life and love. Though Adams credits Jazzy and his companionship with pulling her through, it doesn't seem that a woman with her spirit and sense of fun could stay down for long.

In fact, the book reads like a series of comedy sketches starring Jazzy and delivered with Adams's signature wit: Jazzy marks his territory at a Gucci store; Jazzy sets a tablecloth on fire in a high-end restaurant; Jazzy hangs up on Gen. Manuel Noriega.

Adams turns her pen on herself, too, weaving tales from her career and marriage to comedian Joey Adams in between slapstick episodes with Jazzy. While one can take only so many stories of a terrier running amok, pair a dog with an indulgent celebrity-owner who turns him loose at political soirees, and bad-dog stories get infinitely more colorful.

The book skips along under Adams's rapid-fire narrative style. Anyone who takes guilty pleasure in a celebrity dish from time to time will be thankful she doesn't stray far from her gossip-columnist roots. Adams welcomes us along for the ride that is her life. We're swapping diet tips with Sarah Ferguson, eating Big Macs with Imelda Marcos, and telling off Raquel Welch.

Gossip aside, Adams makes the real story - about recovering from a devastating loss - humorous, honest, and optimistic.

As for Jazzy, it's tough to decide whether he should go to remedial obedience school or be applauded for keeping a celebrity humble. Regardless, small-dog lovers will rejoice to count a prominent spokeswoman like Cindy Adams among them.

- *Kristina Lanier is a freelance writer in Boston.*