

On the Positive Side

By Jean Gilbert / For the Sun-News

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"Mrs. Crump's Cat" good book for kids

Children's stories are often a great launch for discussion on important topics or for stimulating interest and clarifying opinion, or significant for what they convey in values and standards. "Mrs. Crump's Cat" by Linda Smith is one of those kind of stories written for young children, with thought-provoking content and wonderful humor, telling what's possible when the door to friendship is opened.

With April declared as "Prevention of Animal Cruelty Month" by animal welfare advocates, organizations, and SPCAs across the nation, it seems only fitting that "Mrs. Crump's Cat" be recognized as a noteworthy book for this observance.

The story first sparks your attention with the emergence of a rain-soaked and forlorn looking cat, shivering on the porch step of Mrs. Crump's house. She discovers the cat while fetching the newspaper and tells him to go away because she has no use for a cat. The cat is quickly identified as "sneaky by nature" for managing to get inside the house through a door left ajar. After resting by the fireside, preening and polishing its fur, the cat is regarded as "finicky" by Mrs. Crump who fully suspected such behavior of cats, especially with its refusal to eat a slice of bread laid out on a plate for him.

As the story progresses, the reader finds Mrs. Crump in a grocery store buying a pint of cream and a shiny red pet dish. Mr. Henry the grocer advises Mrs. Crump upon learning the news of her stray cat not to feed the animal because "if you do, you'll never get rid of it." For practical reasons, Mrs. Crump delays turning the cat out: the pint of cream wasn't finished, the weather was inclement, the cat had fleas, and so on.

To solve the dilemma of the lost/found cat, and engaging the help of Mr. Henry, a poster ad is assembled and pinned to the wall inside the grocery store with a message written by Mrs. Crump: "found, one sneaky, finicky, troublesome, wet, yellow cat with fleas."

The outcome of the story is just as you imagined. Myths about cats are dispelled for their bias or silliness, through the skill of Linda Smith's storytelling. Important attributes are retained: "Cats are clever that way," concludes Mr. Henry at the home of Mrs. Crump where he finds the cat, quite smugly one week later, to be a full-fledged family member.

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Educational presentations

- Jean Gilbert of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, 523-8020 or www.hssnm.org
- Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley, 382-0018, www.ascmv.org
- City of Las Cruces Animal Control, 528-4100, www.lascruces.org
- Dona Ana County Animal Control, 525-8846, www.co.donaana.nm.us/animal