



**Birdie For Now**  
**Jean Little**

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## The Story

Dickon, who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, moves with his mother to a new neighborhood where he hopes to make a fresh start, despite his mother's overprotectiveness. He would like to make friends, but more than anything, he longs for a dog. When the Humane Society next door holds obedience training classes for children and their dogs, he longs to participate, but he is forbidden by his mother, he is too young, and he has no dog of his own. With independence and determination, and a little help from others, Dickon may just achieve both his goals.

## The Author

Jean Little is the well-known, award-winning author of more than thirty books for children including *Orphan at My Door*, *Willow and Twig* and *One to Grow On*. She lives in Guelph, Ontario, her home for almost sixty years, in a big white house with her sister; her eleven-year-old great-niece and six-year-old great-nephew; her seeing eye dog, Pippa; her Papillon; two cats; two rabbits; and two African Gray parrots named Jazz and Henry. Until recently she had a hedgehog named Sally, just like Charlie in *Birdie for Now*.

## The Ideas

- If you could have any pet in the world, what would it be? Write a story in which you go to extreme lengths to get the pet of your dreams. Make sure that the reader gets to know you, your family and the pet very well.
- Go on a field trip to the local humane society or SPCA. Learn about what they do to help animals in your area. Is there anything you could do to help them? Sometimes they like people to volunteer to walk dogs. If they do not want volunteers, lots of older people have dogs who need walking. You could try setting up a little dog walking business during the summer.
- Do you have a dog? If so, is he or she well trained? You could join an obedience class or take books out of the library and see if you can train

your dog yourself. Report to your class on your success, or bring your dog to school and demonstrate.

- Ask a blind person to bring her guide dog to visit and tell about training with him or her.
- Have a dog trainer come and talk to the class.
- Those of you who have dogs might give them some extra attention. It is easy to love a dog in a book, but it is sometimes hard to remember that while you are on the computer or watching TV, your dog is longing to play with you or go for a walk. Jean Little knows; her dogs were watching her longingly while she was writing down this idea!
- Take the class to watch obedience trials at a dog show.
- Jody has been keeping a journal. Pretend that you are Jody and write a few entries. What does she write about Dickon the first time she sees him? What does she write after the end of the book?
- Imagine that Dickon and Jody are out for a walk with their dogs and run into the Bridgeman boys. Write about what happens. What do they say to each other? How does Dickon feel afterward? What do Dickon and Jody say to each other after the bullies are gone?

### **Memories of a Papillon Owner**

We had several family dogs when I was a child, but none was all mine. My first dog that was all mine was named Susie. She was a West Highland white terrier and I put her in my first book, *Mine for Keeps*. In the book, Sally learns to train Susie much as Dickon learns to train Birdie. I took Susie to obedience training classes. It was fun. I learned enough that I taught all my other dogs afterward. Some were much better at obeying than others.

My first Papillon is named Toby. He will be eleven years old on July 15, 2002. My mother died just three days before he was born and I feel as though he came to me because he knew that I needed him. I was so lonely at that time. My mother and I had lived together for many years and I felt utterly lost

without her. I had my seeing eye dog, Zephyr, but he was old and quiet and he was grieving for my mother too. The two of us would go out and come home and the silent house felt like a tomb.

Then, one September afternoon, I decided to go and see some puppies. I came home with Toby. He weighed just over one pound. His ears were enormous. His adult coat had not grown in yet, so he looked skinny, but his face was full of curiosity and we loved each other on sight. He was so small and he was not housebroken so getting him was crazy. Since I had very limited vision, I was terrified of stepping on him. I might crush him. I went around barefoot for the first couple of weeks. But my house was no longer a tomb. I would put him in a playpen when we went out and when we came in he would leap up into my arms and lick me all over my face, never forgetting the ears.

Six months after I bought Toby, I bought his father to keep him company when I had to go away for the day. His name was Panda. The two of them were a great team. They did everything together. One day, they got out the gate and went running up the street. I was frantic, but my clever niece Maggie ran a little way after them, whistled until they saw her, and then wheeled around and dashed back down the street and in through the gate. My foolish dogs, not wanting to miss whatever had her so excited, spun around and came racing back after her. If a dog runs away from you, it is a good idea to run away from rather than chase after him. Dogs love a game of chase. Catching them is more of a challenge than I, for one, am up to. Panda is dead now, and I am sure that Toby misses him. I sure do.

Papillons make wonderful pets for older children. Small children, six and under, find it hard to be gentle enough with such small creatures with such tiny bones. After I got Toby and Panda, two children came to live in my house. Toby and Panda learned to dive under beds and hide behind couches when a child was trying to grab them.

Papillons don't bark as much as other tiny dogs, and they can learn almost any trick. They love to play and to snuggle. They don't shed a lot of hair. They have hair like ours with no undercoat. And they go way back in history. They have been owned by kings and queens. They belong to the spaniel family of dogs.

Toby and Panda are characters in *Willow and Twig*, a book I wrote for kids who like longer books.

Jean Little

### **Other Dog Stories**

*Notes of a Liar and her Dog.* Gennifer Choldenko.

*Henry and Ribsy.* Beverly Cleary.

*Because of Winn Dixie.* Kate DiCamillo.

*Ginger Pye.* Eleanor Estes.

*Piper.* Natalie Ghent (also published by Orca Book Publishers).

*Dog Friday.* Hilary Mackay.

*Bringing Up Beauty.* Sylvia McNichol. A Canadian book about a child raising a guide dog.

*A Dog So Small.* Philippa Pearce.

### **Other Dog Stories by Jean Little**

*Lost and Found*

*Different Dragons*

*Rescue Pup*