

Thinking about . . .

My Friend Rachel by Shep, the dog

By Cathy Feemster

A parent and caregiver's guide



Illustrated by Dominique Manga

Author's Note

I hope you enjoy reading *My Friend Rachel* by *Shep, the dog* with your child. That's why I wrote it! The book has several elements—cute characters, excitement, education, even sadness—but the main theme is friendship. As you use this guide, try to keep friendship in mind.

Using this Guide

The story of Shep, Rachel, and Jake is a very simple one. Use this simplicity as a jumping off point to help your child see the action found in their own surroundings—urban or rural, pre-school or neighborhood, secure or dangerous.

Read the book and the Parents Guide through completely first. If your child is having trouble with the book's ending, help him or her to see how events build on each other, and then the ending can be a helpful lesson.

“Why?” is the most important question. It brings out your child's true feelings. It's not your job to answer the various questions. It's your job to help your child answer the questions.

Chapter 1

Meeting in the Morning

- What do you like about being outside?
- What kind of birds are in your area?
- Shep said it was a special day. Why?
- When Shep saw Rachel for the first time, he said he was quiet, and he watched her. Why do you think he did that?
- Jake told Rachel to be careful, because they didn't know Shep. Was that a good idea?

Chapter 2

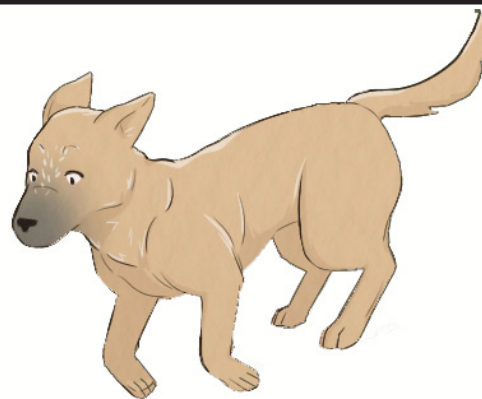
Lazy Days and Twinkling Bugs

- When Rachel's family met Shep, what did they do?
- What season of the year do you think it was?
- What did Rachel, Jake, and Shep do during the days and nights?
- Do you like to chase lightning bugs?
- Did Shep think about what had happened to him?

To children, everything is new. Sometimes they just can't understand what's happening around them—the people, places and events in their lives. I encourage you to use this book to help your child look beneath the surface to help them learn where they fit in.

Choose which questions seem appropriate for your child. You don't have to ask all of them. A good way to discover if your child understands the story or concept you are discussing is to have them tell you. If you ask, “Do you understand?” they will sometimes say they do, but they really don't. My daughter was difficult to converse with, and she might say she understood, but really didn't. Therefore, I know it can be hard to get through to children.

Making your reading time fun is the best way, along with repetition and loving perseverance. Let's go chapter by chapter, using the characters and plot to learn how their actions relate to your child's real life.



Chapter 3

The Thorn

- Do you like taking a bath?
- Why did all those people have to help with the bath?
- Do you think Shep had fun taking a bath?
- What do you think was in the brown bottle?
- What do you think Mother meant when she said it was good that Shep had had a bath before he stepped on the thorn?
- What do you think Shep learned about his new friends?

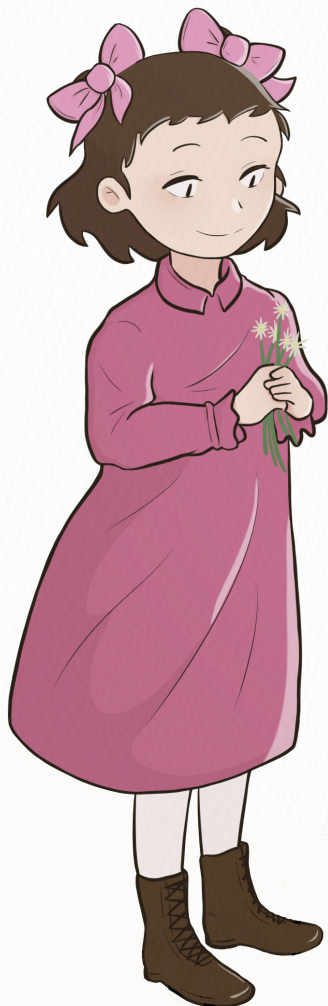
Chapter 4

Jacob's Ladder

- Have you ever gone to a new place where there were a lot of people?
- How did Shep learn about church?
- Why do you think that the boys did one thing while the girls did something else?
- What do you like better, playing baseball or singing and picking flowers?
- Do you know the song the children sang while Jake was climbing the ladder? Here is the first verse:

We are climbing Jacob's Ladder,
We are climbing Jacob's Ladder,
We are climbing Jacob's Ladder,
Soldiers of The Cross.

- How did Shep know what to do when Jake got hurt?
- After Jake got hurt, did you hear anyone making fun of him or telling him how dumb he was for falling off the ladder?



In the last chapter, Shep says that friendship is forever. Rachel tells Shep that she will never forget him.

Did she ever forget? No. This story would never have been written if Rachel hadn't told it to me many times six decades later.

Every time she told it, she ended with the same wistful note of friendship remembered.

Chapter 5

Packing Up

- If someone you know is sick or injured, how can you help them?
- What did Mother and Daddy, Rachel, Tommy, and everyone from the church do?
- What did Shep do?
- When Tommy gave the turtle to Jake, what did Shep do?
- Rachel, Jake, and Shep knew they were moving away from the happy home they had known. Do you think they were sad or anxious for a new adventure?

Chapter 6

Friendship is Forever

- Read the chapter to the end before reading it to your child, and try to imagine how the child will react. If you worry about that, you may decide to “read around” the end by asking, “what will happen next after Shep barks at the cowboy.” Then stop there.
- Having a family member – or yourself – with a long-term illness changes a lot of things within a family. How does Jake handle this? What did Rachel do? What did Mother and Daddy do?
- Sometimes things happen unexpectedly. How do you react to the unexpected? Surprise, joy, or fear can make you want to investigate, hide, run away, or be welcoming. Talk about the times you have been surprised.
- At the beginning of the book, Shep was quiet; he watched and listened. At the end of the book, he took immediate action, he was noisy and determined to change things. These two ways of acting had effects, not only on the people around him, but also on his own life. Your actions will also affect you and the people around you.
- Death of a friend or loved one can be crushing. How do you feel about Shep's death?

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