

Rod Michalko and Dan Goodley with Smokie. (2023). *Letters with Smokie: Blindness and More-than-Human Relations*. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press. ISBN: 9781772840339

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Michalko and Goodley along with Smokie invite each other and the reader to imagine, to look and dream, through different perspectives. On behalf of Smokie (a dog guide), Michalko wondered why Goodley's recent book *Disability and Other Human Questions* excluded non-human animals. Smokie, after all, had many insights to share about his journey into blindness when he and Michalko were together-together (how he referred to their relationship during Smokie's physical life). That provocation led to a months-long epistle relationship exploring what it means to be blind, to see, and the feeling of blindness. Recognizing they "grew up together in blindness" (48) Smokie called Michalko and Goodley to sit and move with those stories, discover surprises, and disturb/disrupt clunky human-made boundaries between animals and humans, blindness and sight, and others. *Letters with Smokie* moves with new questions and wanders through contradictions, guiding the reader on their own journey into blindness and more-than-human relationships.

Letters with Smokie is an accessible book with an untraditional approach, namely communicating with a dog who is no longer physically living in the world, that invites readers to think again about the world and our bodies and our relationships within it. Michalko and Goodley both are scholars of disability studies but are not afraid at critiquing the clunkiness of the field.

At its heart, it strikes me as a love and friendship story. Michalko and Goodley gives readers a peak into their friendship, full of ideas and explorations with humour and mutual admiration, Smokie adds another dimension of friendship between the three of them. Those who have not been together-together with dog guides will benefit from learning about the love, friendship, intimacy, and trust between companions. Together, they write beautifully about the way Smokie and Michalko communicated with one another. For me and other dog guide partnerships, it is powerful to find a relationship between human/animal or guider/guide (with boundaries blurred of course) reflect your own experience. An experience that some humans do not understand. Sure, Smokie and Rod were interdependent, and we could say Lacey and Wendell (my dogs) increased my independence. But Rod and Smokie, with Dan, describe the artistry of the relationship, moving towards loving blindness and wandering through their together-together way of being.

The book unfolds over months of friendship, rather than clearly demarcated chapters and topics. This writing style gives Michalko and Goodley the freedom to wander back to themes that were dropped over the months and to keep coming back to themes in every letter, like dogs with bones one might say. Beginning with the premise that everybody is the result of relationships and *how* we are together is vital, Michalko and Goodley ride the emotions of interpersonal (and interspecies) relations including love, joy, and grief. Smokie points out the mistreatment found in both animal and disabled communities: situations of heartbreak, abuse, and negligence. Michalko and Goodley approach such devastating stories with tenderness and with hopes of transformation. Often, I find people from marginalized communities spend time seeking to prove our humanity, but their approach of disrupting care between all our relations (including more-

than-humans) is quite refreshing. Smokie also alerts Michalko and Goodley to the unusual pattern that only humans (or “you people” as named by Smokie) need to remind themselves they are bodies. And he remains confused about why people have shame about bodies, or categorize which bodies fit and misfit, when bodies and relationships are all people are. Along with these themes of grief and blame, Smokie explored the journey he and Michalko took into blindness, moving Michalko to like his blindness because he (Smokie) loved it. Traveling from shame to love, anger and joy, and sometimes wandering back again reminded writers and readers that disability is not simply an academic exercise or discipline, but something we feel, like, and even love together.

A prominent theme throughout the letters involves disrupting/disturbing (Michalko and Goodley favour one word over the other). Smokie finds the human tendency to create boundaries, just to blur them, only to see how these were blurry already, very confusing. As an example, Smokie lifts the construct of friendship – where boundaries are created and then blurred, all by individuals themselves. In these and other scenarios, Smokie, Michalko, and Goodley disrupt/disturb human categories. Together they see the revolutionary need and potential for disrupting/disturbing across intersections. Goodley comments that they are brought together by a sense of unease with how people seem to easily pass by narratives, accounts that remain undisturbed: “...the reasonable narratives of disability. The regular accounts of whiteness. The untroubled feel of the normative. The peaceful vibe of the status quo. We clearly need disturbance and disruptions more now than ever.” (180) Michalko, Goodley, and Smokie disturb/disrupt not only the space between blindness and sight, human and animals, but also how we live together in relationships.

When I read the title of this collaboration, I immediately wanted to read it. I have had two dog guides in my life, Lacey and Wendell. Both attended the same post-graduate institution as Smokie though their major was in service instead of seeing. Lacey worked with me for eleven years and then retired and lived with my mom and I until she died at nearly 17 years old. Wendell worked with me for ten years and retired last summer, moving home with the family he lived with as a puppy. While reading Smokie's words via Rod, I imagined what my dogs might say to me or challenge me on, and how they love me, even though we are no longer together. Upon finishing *Letters with Smokie*, I had an interview with the post-graduate institution, the first step in the process of being matched with my third dog.

I was most captivated by how Smokie, Michalko, and Goodley disrupted/disturbed normative narratives through the art of writing, and especially with humour. Disability or crip humour can interrupt such regular accounts and untroubled feel. Smokie relayed how blindness can be “a shitload of fun” (85) once people stop trying to explain a reason or assign blame to it. Smokie and Michalko discovered blindness together-together and then interrupted peoples' assumptions about their bodies and their relationships. When Michalko was asked by a stranger walking by if he knew where they were, Michalko quickly responded, “Where the F*** am I?” Or when he and Smokie were kicked out of a café (the employee did not understand Smokie's citizenship) only to return with backup and an apologetic manager. I found my body resonating with these experiences with perhaps well-intentioned but ill-informed individuals. I appreciated their quick wittedness and playfulness with language throughout such experiences, disturbing/disrupting what people think about disability and moving us toward feeling disability, feeling blindness.

Lacey, Wendell, and I shared our own laughs and adventures for sure, and reading these letters only made me want to be similarly disruptive, artfully and with humour, with my next companion. Of course, the friendly Beatles' banter is not to be missed either!

Smokie, Michalko, and Goodley had me singing about and dreaming about a revolution. Their words reminded me how Lacey and Wendell too helped guide me away from internalized ableism and into my crip-ness. I look forward to further wanderings about more-than-human relations in disability and crip studies, a gap Smokie found and they helped start to fill!

While I appreciated Goodley's and Michalko's attention to intersections between disability and other liberation movements, like Black Lives Matter and Idle No More, I found I wanted more interrogation. Although, they briefly mentioned crip studies, I wondered if that too could have been a fruitful path to wander further down, as crip theorists similarly raise the fluidity of so-called boundaries as well as the commitment to exploring intersecting identities (e.g., crip and queer, indigenous and crip, etc.). I realize their conversation could not go on forever, but I wanted to learn more about their dreams of revolutions.

Their words, though, are still with me even though I have turned over the last page. I am content to sit with and hopefully move with their words, as together-together we wander deeper into just relationships, a revolutionary art.