

**“Stay” by Allie Larkin. Dutton, 2010. \$25.95, 312 pages.**

If you're a dog lover, chances are that the cover of “Stay,” will catch your attention, with an adorable German Shepherd looking at you with big, sweet puppy eyes. As soon as I saw the book, my interest was piqued, and once I cracked it open, I was hooked by the story of a flawed woman whose life is changed when she adopts a dog.

“Stay” is the story of Savannah “Van” Leone, who hasn't had the easiest life. Raised by a single mother, she lived in the carriage house of a wealthy family for whom her mom worked as a maid. Her best friend, Janie, is the daughter of the rich family, and Van grows up feeling like her life pales in comparison. When Van goes off to college, she meets Peter, and instantly falls for him, even though he only sees her as a friend. It doesn't help matters when Peter meets Janie and falls for her. Feeling like she's lost both her best friends, Van feels even more alone when her mother dies after battling cancer. Van's toughest moment comes when she is asked to be the maid of honor in Janie and Peter's wedding, and though she makes it through the ceremony, an encounter with a drunken Peter after the wedding leaves Van feeling very shaken and confused. Could it be that he has always loved her too? If so, why did he marry Janie instead? Van will never know because Janie's mother interrupts the conversation and offers Van money to leave Peter and Janie alone.

After the wedding, Van drowns her woes and loneliness in vodka, and while she's watching reruns of *Rin Tin Tin* on TV, she has an epiphany—she should get a dog! A dog would be a faithful and loyal companion and never treat her the way so many of the people in her life have treated her. Still in a vodka haze, Van searches the Internet and finds a picture of a cute German Shepherd puppy, who she decides to buy, even though he will have to be shipped from Slovakia. And so what if it's a couple thousand in Slovakian currency? Van figures it'll translate to a couple hundred American dollars and impulsively purchases the dog. Once the fog lifts in the morning, Van realizes what she's done, and that she's spent \$6000 to get a puppy. However, it's too late for her to change her mind. The puppy is already on his way.

When Van arrives at the airport to get her puppy, she's shocked to see that he's not a tiny puppy like she thought. He's a huge dog that fills up the backseat of her car, but he's very well-behaved, especially once Van learns the Slovak commands from his training sheet (which include “search the building” and “find narcotics”). Van names the dog Joe, and from that moment on, her life changes, especially once she meets cute veterinarian Alex, who helps her ride out the first few weeks of new-dog ownership. As her bond with Alex grows, Van reevaluates her relationship with Peter and comes to learn a lot about herself in the process.

“Stay” is a perfect summertime read that is a great mixture of fun and romance, with a little bit of drama thrown in the mix. If you're planning a trip to the beach, tuck this book into your bag and get lost in the heartwarming story of Van and her dog, Joe.

Alamance County Public Libraries will be closed Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup> and Monday, July 5<sup>th</sup>.

Becky Peterson is the branch manager of the Graham Public Library. Visit us on the web at [www.alamancelibraries.org](http://www.alamancelibraries.org).