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Dewey: The true story of a world famous library cat

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off

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Book

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If, like me, you'd not heard of Dewey, the library cat from Spencer, Iowa, then obviously you should have done, because, as the subtitle of this book tells us, he is 'world famous'. His fame partly rests on the adult bestseller from which this children's book is drawn, told to Bret Witter by Dewey's 'mom', retired librarian Vicki Myron. Reading this version, I am at a loss to explain why the original was a bestseller. It's pleasant enough, full of the kind of anecdotes about darling feline eccentricities that characterise the conversations of cat lovers, taking place in the slightly unusual setting of a library in a small town in Middle America. Yet, at over 200 pages, it's much too long, even for someone like me who has known three cats intimately, worked in a library for half my life, and has a soft spot for the kind of warm hearted, folksy populism in which a cat might become the means by which its human acquaintances find meaning in life and a community comes together. The problem, I think, is that nearly all the tough issues that faced Vicki and Spencer, which I imagine formed an important part of the adult book (and appear on Dewey's posthumous website, www.deweyreadmorebooks.com [4]) have been stripped out of the children's version, including Vicki's breast cancer, which is alluded to here coyly as being 'really sick' and takes up a very short chapter. It is crises like these that must have provided the necessary weight in the original and whose absence, because the writer does not have courage or skill to share them frankly with children, makes this version bland and uninvolved. I suspect, too, that Vicki Myron herself is a lot more small-town politically astute and media savvy than you might learn from this, with Dewey one of the ways in which she kept the library in the public eye.

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