

“The only thing better than a great book is an amazing follow-up. Erica Perl brings us *Aces Wild*, which matches the magic of her 2011 novel, *When Life Gives You O.J.* The ups and downs will have you laughing, crying, and trying out your Yiddish!” —NPR

What do you do with a dog named Ace who gets kicked out of puppy kindergarten? What do you do with a grandfather, also named Ace, who goes dining and dancing with not one but *three* girlfriends? Most importantly, what do you do if your parents say you can't have a sleepover until you get *both* Aces under control?

Zelly Fried wishes she knew! It's not like either Ace is interested in sitting, or staying, or shaping up.



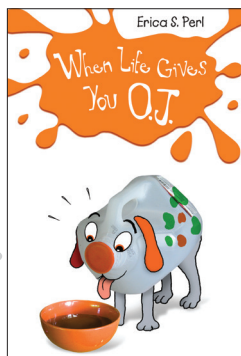
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**YEARLING HUMOR**

Ages 8–12

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## Praise for ACES WILD

"A fun and heartwarming tale. . . Readers will laugh along with this sweet story that is chock-full of relatable characters." —*School Library Journal*

"Ace-the-grandpa often drives Zelly up the wall, but there is no missing the affection at the heart of this book, where everyone is 'completely, ridiculously themselves.' This is a delightful sequel and can be enjoyed as a stand-alone novel as well." —*Booklist*

## Praise for WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU O.J.

A Sydney Taylor Notable Book

"A richly textured examination of the complexities of young friendships and of a three-generation family's abiding love." —Judith Viorst, author of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*

"A wonderfully fun read [that] will help 'goyim' youngsters relate to a rich culture with which they may not be familiar." —Lois Duncan, bestselling author of *Hotel for Dogs*, *News for Dogs*, and *Movie for Dogs*

"Smart, funny, and full of chutzpah (the good kind). This story charmed me from page one." —Rebecca Stead, Newbery Award-winning author of *When You Reach Me*

"O.J. is the sweetest, funniest dog who never lived. Erica Perl always makes me laugh." —Emily Jenkins, author of *Toys Go Out*, *Toy Dance Party*, and *Toys Come Home*

"Erica Perl has placed a fascinating little title in a seemingly simple package. Top drawer all around." —*School Library Journal*

"The novel strikes an admirable balance of humor and pathos—at times in the same scene." —*Publishers Weekly*



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Erica S. Perl

Aces  
Wild



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## CHAPTER 1

“A-ce! Ace?”

I shook a box of dog biscuits. The sound never failed to produce the skittering noise of toenails on wood floors, and always resulted in my puppy hurling his whole body—from his long flapping ears to his short stump of a tail—straight at me.

*Shake-a-shake-a-shake-a.* “Aaaa-aace!”

Nothing.

*Don’t panic,* I told myself. But how could I not? I had spent my entire eleven years trying to get a dog, and now—*poof!*—I’d lost him.

In the hall closet, I found a jumble of boots, but no sign of my spaniel mix’s small freckled snout. Calling his name, I wandered through the house, opening doors, looking under furniture, and glancing outside in hopes of seeing a furry brown and white streak race past.

Through the kitchen window, I could see my mom raking leaves. It was only the second week in October, but already it seemed like everyone was talking about snow and trying to predict when the first flakes would fall. I waved frantically to get her attention, which resulted in her making the *Just a sec* sign, patting the air with one of her gloved hands. The car was gone, so I figured my dad was out at the store getting more salt or sand or other snow-busting materials. This being our family's first winter in Vermont, my parents weren't taking any chances.

Could Dad have taken my puppy with him? No way. Ace had had too many accidents in the car for that to happen. I had already checked every possible spot upstairs, and I was starting to feel pinpricks of worry. It was strange enough waking up and not finding Ace standing over me, chewing his beloved squeaky-toy banana (which I won for him at the Champlain Valley Fair) inches from my nose. But it was truly bizarre not to find him in any of his next-favorite spots: on my little brother Sam's bed, or on my parents' bed, or in the sunny spot on the bath mat. Ace's own dog bed was empty, but that was no surprise. He seemed to view the fuzzy green rectangle as his mortal enemy, so his only contact with it was full-on attack mode, shaking it from side to side until I tried to take it away, at which point the game would change to keep-away.

There was no way to explain it. My puppy was just plain *gone*.

The front door opened, and my mom blew in with a loud "Wow! It's nippy out there!" She stomped her boots on the mat and stripped her gloves off.

“Mom, have you seen Ace?” I asked her.

“Ace-the-dog or Ace-the-grandpa?” she asked.

I held up the box of dog biscuits.

“Right,” said my mom. “Ace-the-dog.”

I never would’ve named Ace Ace if I had realized this would be the standard response to the question. The thing is, when I got Ace-the-dog, my grandpa—who is, yes, also called Ace—claimed he was going to retire the name. According to him, the nickname Ace represented his old self: the loud, kvetchy, tell-you-what-to-do-y guy he left behind when he had a heart attack (and almost died). The plan was that Ace-the-dog would be the only Ace. Ace-the-grandpa would be just plain Grandpa.

Unfortunately, with Ace-the-grandpa around, things don’t usually go as planned.

“I haven’t seen Ace-the-dog yet this morning,” said my mom. “Come to think of it, I haven’t seen either Ace.”

There was one place left to check: Ace-the-grandpa’s room. A no-dogs-allowed zone if ever there was one. Ace’s door was shut, so it seemed unlikely, but I needed to rule it out. Cautiously, I knocked.

“Grandpa?” I said, cringing in anticipation of Ace’s booming “WHA?”

But it didn’t come. This was starting to feel like an old episode of *The Twilight Zone*, Ace’s second-favorite show after *Star Trek*. Had aliens come in the night and taken *both* Aces? I pushed the thought out of my mind and knocked again, louder this time.

“Ace?” I tried.

*Bupkis*, as Ace would say. No response.

Ace-the-grandpa was probably sleeping. That is, I hoped he was sleeping. Ever since his heart attack, I was a lot more nervous that something bad was going to happen to him. Every coughing fit that forced him to sit down made my heart race like I was going to have a heart attack of my own. But each time he turned out to be fine, I would tell myself, *See?* Still, I couldn't seem to stop worrying in the first place. So getting no answer at Ace's door did not feel good at all. Even his usually annoying response of yelling "WHA?" would have been reassuring.

I was turning to go back to the kitchen when I heard a very soft whining noise: *hrrnnnnnn*.

Now, that sound, I'd know anywhere.

"Ace!" I exclaimed happily. Slowly, I turned the handle and opened the door a crack.

"Ewwwwwwww!"

The telltale smell hit me first. Holding my nose, I stumbled in, fumbling for the light switch, and stepped in something squishy.

*Click*. I found the switch. The ceiling light came on, revealing:

Yup, that's what I stepped in.

And, yup, another mushy pile right next to it.

And, yup, total chaos in all directions.

My mom often says that my room looks like a cyclone hit it, which is just plain not true. But Ace's room actually did. Several issues of *Golf Digest* magazine had been shredded,



and clothing was everywhere, like a basket of laundry had been tossed in a blender with the cover off. For good measure, there was a big dark stain on the throw rug beside Ace-the-grandpa's bed. The bed itself was, thankfully, the only thing that appeared to be undisturbed.

And guess who was wagging his whole body excitedly? *You're here!* his happy expression and thumping stubby tail seemed to say. *It's about time! Now the party can really begin!* He was standing over a pair of Ace-the-grandpa's beloved golf shoes. Which looked like maybe his favorite pair, the ones with the tassels. Or maybe it was another pair, which, thanks to a good gnawing, now looked tasseled.

"Oh no! Acey . . .," I groaned, covering my face with one hand.

Yup. Good news! I found Ace-the-dog.

The bad news?

Ace-the-grandpa—assuming he hadn't been abducted by aliens—was going to have another heart attack when he saw this disaster.

Or kill me. Or both.