

## Catch Up With Author Dr. David Dosa

Learn more about the inspiration behind his book “Making Rounds With Oscar.”

By Stacy N. Hackett

Posted: June 9, 2010, 3 a.m. EST

What motivated you to write the book?

After the essay I wrote about Oscar the Cat was published in the New England Journal of Medicine, there was a fair amount of publicity and attention. Frankly, some of the publicity was a little over the top. Every headline seemed to paint this picture of Oscar as the “Grim Creeper.” While these headlines were amusing, I quickly realized that much of the message I intended to convey about the compassion that Oscar provided to families was lost. I remember talking to some patient families after the essay came out and asking them what they thought about Oscar. Were they concerned that we had a death cat on the premises? Uniformly, every one of them told me how much Oscar had comforted them during their difficult time in the nursing home and how they were so thankful he was around. So I started to interview patient families about Oscar and what he meant to them. Those interviews became the backbone of the book.

What was the most difficult part of writing the book?

Dr. David Dosa and Oscar There were several things that I found difficult. During my interviews, I had to pull out many sad and difficult memories from family members. Initially, I felt guilty about what I was putting them through. Then I began to realize that the experience was cathartic for most of them. In fact, I think many family members appreciated the opportunity to validate their caregiving experiences and the memory of their loved ones.

What was the most rewarding part of writing the book?

The book represented a journey of sorts for me on a number of levels. Though I started this process explicitly as an exploration of what Oscar meant to his charges, I realize that I came away learning much more about diseases I thought I knew something about (something that can only help me become a better doctor). I also learned much more about the demands of caregiving — something that can only be helpful to me as we enter a stage in our lives where we are also taking care of a parent with dementia. Finally, I came away from the process with a newfound appreciation of how important animals are in people’s lives.

What type of feedback have you received so far?

The feedback has been overwhelming positive. Perhaps the most rewarding part for any writer is hearing from readers that they identified with the characters in the book. To me that is so much more important than the other accolades. The other thing that has been inspiring to me is hearing from readers that they picked up a book about an unusual cat — and found themselves learning so much more about things that are truly important. “Making Rounds With Oscar” is definitely the story of an extraordinary cat, but it also is the story of how people cope with caregiving, aging family members and chronic diseases such as dementia.

What is your writing process?

Recently a medical student asked me how I was able to write the book while balancing a day job. My advice to her was to find a place you like to write and make sure you go consistently. I tried to write at least four times a week but never more than two hours at a sitting. After that, I found myself becoming increasingly unproductive. I also loved writing in coffee houses. I wrote most of “Making Rounds With Oscar” in the mornings before work or on weekends sitting at my favorite table over a good cup of coffee. I found being around people when I wrote helped get my creative juices flowing. Watching people interact with one another also allowed me to expand on some of the details that ended up in the book. I also liked to sit on the unit at Steere House and watch life unfold while taking notes. Several scenes in the book (such as the family visit at the end) came directly from my own experiences sitting on the floor just watching day to day life.

Do you have any other books?

“Making Rounds With Oscar” is my first published book. I took a fair amount of creative writing in college years ago so there are some other projects in various stages of completion that I plan to unearth soon. My biggest problem though is balancing my day job and family responsibilities with the writing process. Though I love the fact that I don’t have to rely on writing to make a living, the day job does definitely get in the way sometimes.

Do you own a cat or other pets? Tell us about them!

Although I grew up with pets, right now I don't have any pets at home. I hope this will change soon. I have two small children in the house that are clamoring for a pet and are just now at an age where they can be trusted not to terrorize the poor cat or dog that comes into our home. Honestly, we haven't decided yet on whether it will be a cat or dog — one child wants a cat, the other a dog. We may just have to adopt one of each!

Do your pets influence your writing?

Though I don't have any cats of my own, many of my preconceptions about cats were influenced by my grandmother's Maine Coon, Puma. Although he was probably only slightly bigger than the average cat, in my mind he was every bit as terrifying as his namesake. I have vivid memories of this gigantic cat who would hiss and lash out at me at every opportunity. So, admittedly, when I first met Oscar — I wasn't the biggest fan of cats. After years of working with Oscar, however, he's been able to help me get over my fear of cats. We're good buddies, and he will sometimes walk down the hall with me when I'm making my rounds. A large part of "Making Rounds With Oscar "is about my journey from being scared of cats to accepting and embracing their magnificence.

Stacy N. Hackett shares her Southern California home with two adorable Cornish Rex cats, Carson and Evita, and a playful tabby named Jackson.