

Meet Tiger Hample

Cat-ching up with the author of Happy Cat Day! and advocate for National Cat Day.

By Justin Wescoat Sanders

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For nearly a year now, the adventures of Tiger Hample have been chronicled in CAT FANCY. Each month, the comic strip, "Tiger's Tales," presents a new installment in the ambitious kitty's ongoing efforts to make National Cat Day, Aug. 15, an official holiday. In his fight for greater feline recognition, Tiger has picketed, rallied, hung out with Jerry Garcia, and cried "Cat Day! Cat Day! Give it to us now! Cat Day! Cat Day! Meow! Meow! Meow!" on national television.

More than just a drawing on a page, however, Tiger is a living, breathing personality. He is the feline companion to longtime cartoonist and illustrator Stu Hample. In fact, Tiger is the writer of both "Tiger's Tales" and the book that inspired it, Happy Cat Day! Stu Hample, meanwhile, gets illustration credit.

"He only gave me two percent of the book's royalties," Stu says of his partnership with his "collaborator." Fortunately, Stu swallowed his bitterness and granted us an interview with Tiger, whom we caught up with in his New York home...

CAT FANCY: Hi, Tiger, thanks for chatting. If you had only one word to describe how it feels to be unrecognized, what would it be?

TIGER HAMPLE: Rage.

CF: I see. Why do cats deserve their own holiday, as opposed to say, chickens, lizards or other species?

TH: Well, cats are the only creatures who have their own patron saint (Saint Gertrude). Cats have been around since forever, bringing serenity to people all that time, and they've been overlooked for it. These wonderful creatures are so beautiful and mysterious. They deserve a day. Do you want National Duck Day? National Rhinoceros Day? I don't think so!

CF: What did you do for this year's National Cat Day?

TH: Aug. 15, 2006, was the third annual Cat Day. There was quite a bit of activity. We promoted a nationwide cat "adoptathon," and donated proceeds from my book, Happy Cat Day! to Hurricane Katrina cats.

CF: Why is National Cat Day Aug. 15, as opposed to say, some other date?

TH: Well, I looked on the calendar and saw that was an empty spot. And! I realized it was the dog days of summer.

CF: What do you think of your friend Stu Hample's rendition of you? Has he taken any artistic liberties in his illustrations?

TH: I'm perhaps more debonair than he makes me, but he does bring out my warmth and inner friendliness. I have a cat heart that knows no bounds.

CF: You do indeed. What do you consider your proudest achievement to date?

TH: Why, being the author of this marvelous book that offers my breed a special day in our honor. What cat can equal that?

CF: What does the future hold for Tiger?

TH: Right now, I plan to continue with my column in CAT FANCY — which is to the cat world what Fortune is to the money world and Variety is to the show biz world. I'm the most heralded cat column writer in the universe and beyond!

CF: And so modest to boot. But what happens if National Cat Day becomes official and all your work is finished? What will you do then?

TH: I will become the George Washington of Cat Day. I'll probably get a white wig and some wooden false teeth. I will never lie about a tree or anything else. Whether I'll go in a boat across the Delaware I don't know, but I'd like to replicate the actions of our nation's founder.

CF: Ah, so you plan to run for office then?

TH: Actually, no, because in every politician there lives a snake. And I am anti-snake. I prefer to speak with full integrity like the cat that I am.

CF: Well, you're a very articulate kitty. Maybe you could become a political analyst of some kind ... What are your thoughts on campaign finance reform?

TH: Meow?

Justin Wescoat. Sanders is a freelance writer living in Portland, Ore., with his two cats Squeak and Purrina.