

## Meet Katherine Grier

**The author of *Pets in America: A History* talks about her new book and a close pet friend.**

*By Stacy Hackett*

Katherine Grier, author of the book *Pets in America: A History*

Why did you write the book?

I'm a "pet person" — and because I am a historian, I got curious about the history of people like me. Because I document the history of everyday life, I know that everything has a history, and often the stories behind the ordinary things in life are extraordinarily interesting.

What was your inspiration behind *Pets in America: A History*?

I wouldn't say that I had an inspiration, exactly — more like a deep curiosity about things. I had one important conversation with a friend when we wondered why a history of pet keeping had never been written, and I thought, "Well, I can do that."

As I was slogging along on the manuscript in the early days, however, I did have an important muse, my cat Margaret. She died six years ago, and I still miss her.

What is your writing process?

As I get ready to begin writing something new — a chapter, an essay, even a short article — I am restless. It is often a time when I get a lot of housework or gardening done. I work with my hands and think about things. Once I am into the writing process, I relax a bit. I have discovered that I often do not know exactly what I think about the material I have collected until I start writing. The writing reveals the patterns and meanings of the information I have collected.

What has the feedback been on the book so far?

Really good! People who read the book say that I made them laugh out loud and think. Those are both good things! The reviews have been favorable. I was thrilled to get a review in the *New York Times Book Review*, and it was clear that the review author had read the book with care.

Are you a cat owner? How many do you have?

I have two cats right now: Rudy, who only loves me, and Ed, who loves everyone. Both are tuxedo cats, and both are shelter adoptions.

Do cats influence your writing? How so?

Well, not directly, but they do provide company while I work. One of the reasons I continue to miss Margaret so much is because she liked to go to work in my home office. If she saw that I was not working, she would begin to "buzz" me. She would meow and rub me and then run for the office door and look back at me. She would rush into the office and jump up on the desk where she would spend the day sitting on my notes and dozing under the lamp. I could read bits aloud to her.

Were certain parts of the book more difficult to write than others? Which ones?

The hardest part of the book to write was the chapter on the "domestic ethic of kindness." The challenge was to figure out a way to tell a complicated history of ideas in a clear way; I must have gone through a dozen drafts and I would still make changes if I could.

It is also hard to write about cruelty. I have to create some psychological distance from the material when I do that. The other hard part was picking photographs; there were so many good choices that it was agonizing. I could have published 200 rather than 100!

Stacy Hackett is a contributing web editor for [CatChannel.com](http://CatChannel.com).

In February's *CAT FANCY*:

Get your discussion questions about *Pets in America: A History* for the monthly Cat Book Club.