

Meet Carole Nelson Douglas

The author of *Cat in a Quicksilver Caper* talks about her writing process and her inspiration, *Midnight Louie*.

By Stacy Hackett

Where did you get your inspiration for the first *Midnight Louie* book? Was Louie inspired by one of your own pets?

Some of the books have the dedication, "For the real and original *Midnight Louie*, nine lives were not enough." This makes people think he was my cat, but he never was. I was a St. Paul, Minn., newspaper reporter in 1973 when I ran across a classified ad that offered "*Midnight Louey*" to the right person for a dollar. It described "18 pounds of cuddly pussycat, equally at home on your best sofa as in your neighbor's garbage can."

I called the woman and learned they'd met at an upscale motel in Palo Alto, Calif. This big black cat would ankle up to her at the soft drink machine before bedtime, wanting to get into a room for the chilly night. The management was planning to send him to the city pound where he'd be put down. She saved him by flying him back to St. Paul, but he didn't adapt to apartment life with her husband, two fixed female Siamese, a litterbox and an upright vacuum. She wanted to get Louie a place in the country, and did.

Why did you write *Cat in a Quicksilver Caper*?

It's the 19th book in what's designed as a 27-book mystery series with an alphabet in the titles' "color" word. The series is written like a three-year, ensemble-cast TV series. *Cat in a Quicksilver Caper* is the third season "opener." The series has four point-of-view human characters — two men and two women, two amateur and two pro crime-solvers. There's also a parallel universe of animals involved in the series. Louie writes his own chapter and tells how he helps the humans solve the crime and also comments on their romantic conundrums.

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

The *Midnight Louie* series is packed with mysteries beyond the murder in each book, so it's challenging to keep all those elements going. And it's a balancing act to keep Louie's part of the action credible. He does nothing a big, strong cat couldn't do, if he could think like Sam Spade. Like Sam Spade, Louie likes to think he's a ladies man, and in this book he meets the charming Squeaker. She's based on a real rescue cat. Squeaker's human companion paid a few hundred dollars to charity to get her in the book, so I wanted to give the "guest" animal a real role, not just a walk-on.

Which book in the series is your favorite?

One of my favorites divided some readers because it involved a controversial media icon. Since the series is set in Las Vegas, Elvis makes apparent appearances now and then. *Cat in a Jeweled Jumpsuit* delved far more deeply into Elvis's life and legend. I wanted to find and present something real and human about Elvis, despite the hype. I think I did, and some readers and reviewers agreed. Other readers felt Elvis took over the book and page-time away from the beloved continuing characters.

Do you own cats? How many? Tell us about them!

In 1988 I decided I wanted two pet-quality Persian kittens. "The babies" are 18-and-a-half now: Summer and Smoke, a shaded silver and a smoke Persian.

Summer is the model for the showgirl Louie calls the Divine Yvette in the books. She is dainty and dominating. Smoke is a mighty mite who's been plagued with health problems her whole life, but it's been a long one. We also adopted a mother/daughter pair of shaded silver and shaded golden Persians at ages four and two-and-a-half. We lost Victoria at age 16 in July, but Secret is still here and happy.

I adopted *Midnight Louie, Jr.*, in 1996 during the first *Midnight Louie Adopt-a-Cat* tour sponsored by my publisher, Tor/Forge Books. Our newest cat is Amberleigh, a tortie with a stumpy tail and a blaze down the middle of her face. I also found a dumped 4-month-old chow-mix puppy at the stop sign near our house, so Xanadu quickly found her inner feline



and has been with us for 10 years.

What other books have you written?

I've written 50 novels, including contemporary and historical romance, women's mainstream fiction, science fiction and high fantasy. My most significant other series is set in the world of Sherlock Holmes and was the first Holmesian novel to take a woman, not a man, from all the stories and use her as a protagonist.

The next book in the Midnight Louie series, *Cat in a Red Hot Rage*, comes out April 25, 2007, which is also the Red Hat Society's "birthday," so you can guess what the theme of that book will be!

Stacy Hackett is a contributing editor to CatChannel.com.