

## Meet Author and Illustrator Suzy Becker

Learn more about the inspiration behind her book “All I Need to Know I Learned From My Cat (And Then Some).”

By Stacy N. Hackett

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Suzy Becker and her cat, Earnie, a former feral.

Why did you write the book?

Back in the 20th century, when I wrote the original “All I Need to Know I Learned From My Cat,” I sat down with the intention of writing a book; I wasn’t sure what that book was going to be.

While I was frequently staring out the window above my desk, Binky (my cat) was frequently batting my pencil off the desk. After a point, instead of being annoyed, I looked at her and thought, “Maybe she’s trying to teach me something.” That pencil-batting business became, “Test limits,” and within a couple of hours, I’d jotted down a hundred more lessons, and there was my book!

What was your inspiration?

Binky was my inspiration. I was raised by dog people, but when I moved to Boston and got my own apartment, I wasn’t allowed to have a dog. So I adopted Binky from the Animal Rescue League. She was my first cat. Having grown up around dogs, I was initially blown away by her independence. I spent hours just watching and playing with Binky (a.k.a. “working from home”), and I got tons of ideas for cartoons before I ever wrote the book. Cats are remarkable creatures, and Binky was a remarkable cat.

What is your writing process?

My writing process varies, depending on the book. For the cat book (and “My Dog’s the World’s Best Dog”), it’s more of a cartooning process. Once I have the idea for the book, I’ll brainstorm until I think I have about twice as much text and visuals as I’ll need. Then I’ll organize and sequence the material and begin to rough it out, pencil sketch spread by spread. After I have an approved draft, I do the finished art in ink and gouache.

Do you have any other books?

I wrote and illustrated “The All Better Book” (an anthology of kids’ solutions to world problems), “My Dog’s the World’s Best Dog,” “I Had Brain Surgery, What’s Your Excuse?” (an illustrated memoir), “Manny’s Cows” (a picture book) and “Books Are for Reading” (a board book which will be out next spring).

What has the feedback been on the book so far?

Two million people bought the original version, and it was published in 16 languages. The new double-platinum collector’s edition is in its second printing, and all of the reviews have been favorable. I think people are enjoying the new “Are You a Cat Person?” quiz.

Are you a cat owner? Tell us about your pets.

Binky died at the age of 18½ in March 2005. I have Earnie, a formerly feral, formerly 4-pound (he no longer wishes his weight to be made public) big, black cat. He appears in the “All I Need to Know and Then Some” video. I also have two big dogs: Vita, a Rhodesian Ridgeback, and Mister, a Flat-Coated Retriever.

Do your cats influence your writing? How so?

Earnie gives me ideas for cartoons; he inspired one of the new lessons: “Make the most of your private time.” He goes through about 40 pounds of litter every time he hits the box. And, he spends a lot of time on my lap, which prevents me from going to the refrigerator and has a calming, comforting influence.

What is your favorite piece of advice from the book?

When I wrote the book, I think it was “Be yourself,” but these days, I’d say (although I’ll never say it again in front of my 3-year-old child), “Take some time to eat the flowers”— live in the moment.

Stacy N. Hackett is a contributing editor to CatChannel.com who lives in Southern California with her husband James, children Kayla and Parker, and two adorable Cornish Rex cats, Evita and Carson.