

Catch Up With Author Bob Somerville

Learn more about the inspiration behind his book 'The Cats of Kittyville: New Lives for Rescued Felines.'

By Stacy N. Hackett

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Author Bob Somerville says he gets some of his best writing ideas when out on walks with his dog, Judge.¹ What was your inspiration behind the book?

I had worked with the people of Best Friends Animal Society on a book about the dog area at their sanctuary, and it seemed only natural to follow with a book about the cats. In visits out there, I spent some time volunteering at Kittyville and was highly impressed not only with the people working there but also with the intriguing personalities of the cats themselves.

2. What was the most difficult part of writing the book?

As with everything I've written about animal rescue, by far the most difficult part is learning just how terribly some people treat animals. The instances of cruelty and neglect of cats are very disturbing. In terms of my own process, though, being a dog person, I did find it initially challenging to get into the cat soul, as it were. This turned out to be one of the most fascinating aspects of my research, and I'm particularly proud of the insight that, in general, cats are both needy and independent. Cat lovers, I came to see, have a deeper understanding of the independent lives of their pets.

3. What was the most rewarding part of writing the book?

Counterbalancing the horror of mistreatment is the blessing of compassion and care exemplified by the people of Best Friends. The book is full of great stories about people who gave their hearts to cats and brought them back from the brink.

4. What type of feedback have you received so far?

All positive, thank goodness! I was particularly gratified when "The Cats of Kittyville" made it to No. 8 on the Denver Post's nonfiction best-seller list.

5. What is your writing process?

I'm sure you've heard it before: I gather research, mostly through interviews, then I sit staring at the blank computer screen until panic — the great motivator — sets in. Seriously, writing at times seems like almost a magical process; the right words come eventually, but it's not entirely clear to me how! It's a lot of hard work, too. I tend to write best when I can lose my sense of time; that means early in the morning, with a whole day ahead, or late at night.

6. Do you have any other books?

I've written two other books about Best Friends: "Not Left Behind: Rescuing the Pets of New Orleans," and "Dogtown: A Sanctuary for Rescued Dogs." With George Constable I co-authored a book about the 20 greatest engineering achievements of the 20th century. It's called "Century of Innovation: Twenty Engineering Achievements That Transformed Our Lives." I've ghost-written a couple of books ... but I'm sworn to secrecy on those!

7. Do you have a cat or other pets?

My dog, Judge, is a Kerry Blue terrier whom I adopted when my Scottish uncle, his original owner, died. Judge had to make a flight from Scotland to Washington, D.C. He's been with me for more than four years now, and we take daily walks down on a beautiful historic farm on the banks of the Potomac.

8. Do your pets influence your writing?

Judge keeps me calm through the writing process. He reminds me of what really matters. On long walks with him, I have a chance to work through stories in my head, which can often break up a logjam of ideas.

Stacy N. Hackett, a freelance writer based in Southern California, shares her home with two adorable Cornish Rex cats, Carson and Evita, and a playful tabby kitten, Jackson.