

## Catch Up With Author Blaize Clement

Learn more about the inspiration behind her book “Even Cat Sitters Get the Blues.”

By Stacy N. Hackett

Blaize Clement and Winston1. Why did you write the book?

“Even Cat Sitters Get the Blues” is the third book in the Dixie Hemingway Mystery Series. The second book ended with Dixie killing a man to save her own life and that of a dog racing to help her. In this third book, I wanted to explore the reactions that would be normal for a woman like Dixie to have after such a traumatic experience.

2. What was your inspiration for Dixie Hemingway?

Dixie is my version of every-woman. She has known tragedy and loss and sometimes has lost her emotional equilibrium, but a persistent faith in life makes her get up every day and go out and do the very best job she can, no matter how much she may be hurting inside. She also has a quirky sense of humor and a strong sense of loyalty to her family. My friends say her smart-off mouth is purely mine, which is probably true.

3. What is your writing process?

I begin with some idea that drops into my head. With “Even Cat Sitters Get the Blues,” it was the opening sentence: “Christmas was coming, and I had killed a man.” As unconscious prompts always do, it led me to the deep grief Dixie felt going through another Christmas without her husband and child. That, plus all the self-doubt she felt because of killing a man, allowed me to create an under-story. That’s vital for me. With my background as a psychotherapist, I’m always as interested in the reasons for people’s actions as in the actions themselves.

I never know exactly how a story is going to end, but I allow it to grow organically until the ending seems inevitable and right. When I’m satisfied with the story, I read it aloud a few times and edit awkward lines until my tongue doesn’t stumble over any of the sentences. Then, I set it aside for a week or two. The last step is to listen to the impersonal voice of my word-processing program reading it aloud. That robotic voice doesn’t know which words to stress for meaning, which helps me spot sentences that need more editing for smoothness or clarity.

No matter how satisfied I am with a manuscript, I’m always aware that it could be better, could be more exciting, could be funnier, could be closer to perfect. That’s hard for me because I’m something of a perfectionist. I have to back off and remind myself that this particular piece of work is the very best I can do at this particular time, and send it off to my publisher. Each time, I hope it’s better than the last one, and that the next one will be even better. It’s the only way to grow as a writer.

4. What other books have you written?

The first two books in the Dixie Hemingway Mystery Series are “Curiosity Killed the Cat Sitter” and “Duplicity Dogged the Dachshund.” The fourth book will be “Cat Sitter on a Hot Tin Roof,” due out in January 2009.

5. What has the feedback been on the book so far?

Happily, it has been overwhelmingly positive. Every day brings several e-mails from fans who feel a personal kinship with Dixie. Sometimes they want to tell me how they laughed out loud one minute and cried the next, sometimes they want to thank me for portraying pet-sitting as the important profession it is. The most gratifying responses have been from people who’ve had losses similar to Dixie’s and thank me for “telling grief like it really is.”

6. Do you own a cat?

For the first time in my life, no.

7. Do pets influence your writing?

My last kitty finds her way into every story in one way or another. In “Even Cat Sitters,” she is the model for Ella

Fitzgerald, the cat who makes scating sounds. Writing about her is a comfort to me now that she's no longer with me.

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

The book's plot involves scientists developing biological weapons. I had to do a good bit of research on the topic, and the more I read the uglier and more inhumane I found it. It was difficult to write about characters doing that kind of work without making them stereotypical mad scientists. Knowing that they have real counterparts was even worse.

9. What can we expect next from Dixie Hemingway?

Next up is "Cat Sitter on a Hot Tin Roof," in which Dixie once again is forced into a dangerous situation involving a pet. Look for the book early in 2009.