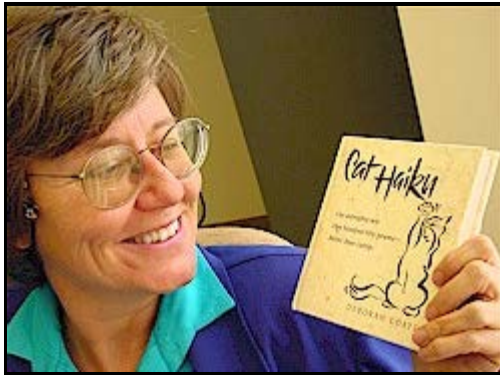


Haiku filled her mind
'Till they overflowed a box.
Publish or toss 'em.

-- B.H.



MTA's Deborah Coates, Author of 'Cat Haiku', Didn't Set Out to Write a Book



Deborah Coates' book, "Cat Haiku", is now on bookstore shelves in the U.S. and will be published in England in October.

[READ: Excerpts from "Cat Haiku"](#) by Deborah Coates. Illustrated by Sandra Bruce

By BILL HEARD, Editor
(Sept. 14, 2001) Deborah Coates, author of a newly published volume of humorous poems titled, "Cat Haiku," didn't set out to write a book. It was a painful nip on the hand from her cat, Pinch, that was the cat-alytst that started her on the road to success.

Coates, 47, a management reviews supervisor in the MTA Inspector General's office, was reading peacefully at home one evening. Pinch dozed on her lap. "Suddenly, she just reared up

and bit me. I yelled, 'What did you do that for?' That's when the first haiku came to me."

That was in early 1999 and for the next several months, 60 haiku – three-line, 17-syllable Japanese-style poems – flowed from her pen. Enough to fill a shoebox. Written from the cats' perspective, they chronicled the eccentricities of Pinch and Pippin, Coates' other feline companion.

"After awhile," recalls Coates, an energetic woman with an infectious laugh, "the box was pretty full and I kept tripping over it. I thought, 'I've got to do something with them or throw them away.'"

She needed an agent

So, she typed them up and sent them off to a couple of publishers. When that effort didn't pan out, she checked around to see who was publishing books about cats and realized that she needed an agent.

The reference book, "Writers Market," led her in late 1999 to a New York City agent that primarily represents first-time authors. Her agent helped her organize and polish the manuscript, then held an auction for the publishing rights.

Time-Warner won the publishing rights in early 2000, but it wasn't just about the money.

"We liked their concept better," says Coates. "I felt it should be a lower price book and not some whoop-te-doo hardback with a dust jacket. It's a fun little book. An impulse purchase."

But, with only 60 haiku in hand, Time-Warner thought the book needed something more: 90 additional haiku!

Thinking in haiku

"For awhile I was thinking in haiku," she laughs. "Waking up in the middle of the night and writing them down. Trying to write them while driving to work – which I don't recommend!"

"Cat Haiku" was printed this summer – 10,000 copies initially – and was placed on bookstore shelves across the nation in late August. The haiku on the cover describes it as:

*"Cat-astrophic wit
One hundred fifty poems –
Better than catnip."*

The book, which sells in the U.S. for \$13.95, is expected to be released in England in October and in Japan later in the year. Coates is scheduled for a book signing at 8 p.m., Nov. 30, at the Barnes & Noble bookstore in Pasadena.

Her advice for aspiring writers: "Don't give up! I'm 47 years old and my first book has just been published."

As for her own future as a writer, Coates says, "I'm hoping this isn't just a fluke. I have a couple of other things in the wings. Whether they go anywhere is anybody's guess."



Author with a hug for Pinch, who inspired many of Coates' haiku.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A native of Glendale, Calif., Deborah Coates earned a business degree at Whittier College and a master's degree from the American Graduate School of International Management in Glendale, Ariz. She did a stint in the Peace Corps in Cameroon, West Africa, then served as a Foreign Service Officer in Jamaica, Haiti and Singapore.

Prior to joining the MTA Inspector General's Office, she worked for the City of Glendale and for the South Coast Air Quality Management District. She lives in Mount Washington with her cats, Pinch and Pippin. "Cat Haiku" is dedicated to her godson, Quinn Bolander, 8, because, "He makes me laugh even more than the cats."

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