

# Interview With Author

## Dena Harris

**Q: When and why did you begin writing?**

A: In the late 90's I decided to take a correspondence writing course. The first time I received negative feedback I dropped the course and didn't write again for almost two years. I eventually took some on-line courses, found some writer friends, and built up a thick enough skin to withstand the industry. I grow bored easily and writing is the only career I've found where I'm constantly challenged.

**Q: Did you always want to write about cats?**

A: Not at all. It's one of those things that just happened. My husband and I were first-time cat owners and I was sending funny stories to family about our adventures with this fuzzy creature that had taken over our lives. I submitted a story to *Cats & Kittens* magazine and they bought it. Then they bought another one and another one and pretty soon I was their de-facto humor columnist. My first book, *Lessons In Stalking*, was a collection of my columns and from there I was contacted by another publisher to write *For the Love of Cats* and all of a sudden – bam! I'm a cat writer.

**Q: Where do you get your ideas?**

A: All I have to do is watch and observe. Eventually one of my two cats or my husband will do something cute, clever, or stupid and I just record it.

**Q: Where did the idea for “Who Moved My Mouse?” come from?**

A: I was brainstorming with friends and threw out the idea of a self-help book for cat owners. One of my friends said he thought it would be funnier to have a self-help book *for* cats and everyone just cracked up. I knew immediately there was something there. I loved the supposition that cats – who are typically seen as these aloof, manipulative, super-confident creatures – are really just neurotic messes like the rest of us. They're just better at hiding it.

**Q: Did you have to do research for the book?**

A: I went to the library and checked out every self-help book they had. *Every* book. One can only imagine what they thought of me.

[www.selfhelpforcats.com](http://www.selfhelpforcats.com)

**Q: Is there any specific skill set required to be a humor writer?**

A: You must be named “Dena.” Okay, not really. As with most writing, what’s required is a keen observational sense. If you look at my stories or the jokes in *Who Moved My Mouse?*, 90% of what I write is factual and the humor comes from just slightly tweaking the remaining 10%.

**Q: Can you give an example of how that works?**

A: Sure. For the “A Cat’s Conversations with God” chapter, I made a list of all the physical and personality traits of a cat and then had the cat drill God on why He/She made things that way. For example, the cat asks why felines can see better than people in the dark, which is a fact. God’s reply is “I thought it would be funnier that way.” Who knows? Maybe that’s the real reason.

**Q: Have any authors influenced your work?**

A: When I started writing this book, I pulled some of Dave Barry’s books from the library. Reading his work, I noticed that every single line has humor in it. That was an eye-opener for me. I was writing a couple of sentences to a paragraph to set up a joke. I realized I would lose the reader. Dave’s work taught me to get funny right away.

**Q: For as much as you write about cats, it’s surprising you have only two.**

A: Actually, it’s surprising I even have the two. I have horrible allergies – dog and cat dander just sends me through the roof. I get a weekly allergy shot and try to keep the house clean to deal with it. I’m constantly trying to sneak a third cat past my husband and he’s constantly reminding me I’ll explode if we add any more cat hair to our house.

**Q: You write about cats. What are your feelings toward dogs?**

A: I love dogs! I’d have a dog, but my allergies just won’t allow it. Plus, the cats would mutiny.

**Q: Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?**

A: Spay/neuter. And hug your pet today!