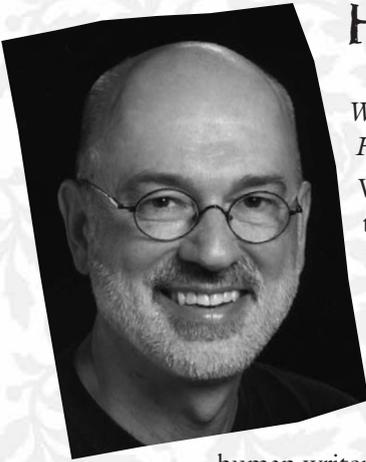


An interview with the author of *Houndsley and Catina*, James Howe



*What inspired you to write
HOUNDSLEY AND CATINA?*

When I first thought of these characters, they were very different and were meant for a series for older readers. Houndsley was going to be the canine butler and Catina the feline cook for an offstage human writer. It was going to be a droll, dry, veddy British *Upstairs, Downstairs* sort of thing, with these two extremely smart and capable servants taking care of this rather bumbling but successful author.

When I sat down to write, the characters surprised me by being nothing like what I'd planned. They were very sweet and gentle and clearly living in a world meant for younger readers. I was probably influenced by the Frog and Toad books and similar series I had so enjoyed reading with my daughter when she was little.

So many of your books, no matter what the age range, center around friendship and all its joys and disappointments. Is that deliberate on your part?

I didn't set out as a writer with any themes in mind, but your themes always find you in the end. Clearly, friendship is a major theme for me. Another major theme is being true to who you are. It's important to me to combine those ideas, I think, to show that good, supportive friends and family members are important in helping you feel good about who you are—and that that support is mutual.

One of the wonderful aspects of your books is your use of humor—no matter how serious the subject. Why is that so important to you?

When we laugh, we relax. We open our minds and our hearts. By using humor in my writing, I can take the reader almost anywhere. I can deal with serious subjects—challenging subjects that the reader might not want to deal with—by easing the way with laughter.

Did you know you wanted to be a writer at an early age? Was there a particular adult who encouraged you in that pursuit?

I loved to write from a very early age, and my mother always said I should be a writer when I grew up. I was encouraged by both my parents and also by teachers. I wrote for others to read—stories and poems and plays—and I got positive feedback not only from adults but from my friends as well. Still, I didn't think about becoming a writer. From the age of ten, I wanted to act, and I pursued that through college and into my twenties. All the while, I wrote for fun—and my first book, *Bunnacula*, was written for just that reason, with no thought of getting published or becoming an author.

What's the best part of being an author? And is there a worst part?

The best part is the process itself, when you have time to dream and drift and let the imagination go. The worst part is not having that time. The greatest frustration for me as a writer—and it's a double-edged sword, because it's an indication of success—is having to spend more time on my career than on my writing.

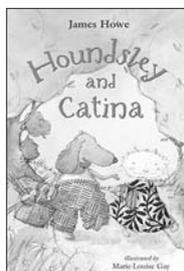
Are there plans to continue Houndsley and Catina?

Do you have any further adventures in the works?



HOUNDSLEY AND CATINA AND THE BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

will be published in the fall of 2006. And then . . . who knows? I would love there to be more stories about these characters, especially now that they've been brought to life by Marie-Louise Gay's incredible, sweet, funny illustrations. I told her that I want to live in the world she's created! In a way, I can. All I have to do is write more books!



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