

LISA MARTIN *and* VALERIE MARTIN

on writing

ANTON *and* CECIL: CATS ON TRACK

Go West, Young Cat! *Anton and Cecil: Cats at Sea* took place at sea, aboard the great tall ships of the era—clippers, barques, and brigs. Weaving nautical terminology and aspects of colorful shipboard life into the story was fascinating for us, and we wanted a setting just as rich and interesting for the second quest. As we conceived of further adventures for our cat brother duo, we thought about other modes of transportation in keeping with the mid- to late-nineteenth century time frame. Airplanes and automobiles weren't yet viable, and it's a bit tricky to sit a cat on a horse for very long (though a quick trip on a bison may be in store). Luckily, there was a huge land-going innovation during that period in the United States: the train. The Transcontinental Railroad, newly completed, carried people from coast to coast faster than they ever imagined and opened up the Wild West for humans and cats alike.

We had a lot to learn. Old photos, recordings, journals, and newspaper accounts helped us understand how the trains looked and sounded, and how two cats might be able to stow away for a long journey. The Transcontinental Railroad was fairly linear, so our heroes point themselves toward the setting sun and make their way west, passing through tiny towns and wide stretches of unsettled prairie. But along the way, a straightforward rescue mission spanning a continent turns into something more complex as Anton and Cecil begin to consider the living arrangements of the creatures they encounter.



Michael Lionstar

VALERIE MARTIN

Orange Prize winner **Valerie Martin** is the author of eight acclaimed adult novels, including *Property* and *The Confessions of Edward Day*. She lives in Millbrook, New York.



Nicola Stewart

LISA MARTIN

Valerie Martin's niece, **Lisa Martin**, has worked as an educator and children's poet and currently resides in Charlottesville, Virginia.



AUTHOR INSIGHTS

As the brothers observe the various relationships animals have with humans, they understand that one choice not all creatures have is to live in “the wild.” Of course they’ve met dogs and horses, seen dolphins and whales, been chased by mean birds, and talked to lizards, but they have not been in a place like the West, where the wild is being steadily encroached upon by human civilization—which the train represents. The brothers had no idea that as cats they belong to a family that is large in every sense of the word.

The contrast of liberty and captivity is continually presented to them. They meet a horse strapped to a cart, hoping for an apple; a cheerful dog in his cage, willing enough to make the trip but not happy with the travel accommodations; an owl who sneers at the idea of using human transport; a buffalo, for whom the humans are a matter of indifference, though their machines are dangerous; a very wild and carefree ferret; and a lynx who knows about humans and has come to a kind of agreement with some of them. The Great Cat (a mountain lion) tells them something they hadn’t thought about—that while many animals make bargains to co-exist with humans, all cats are wild. After the brothers must break into a house to free their imprisoned friend, it’s ultimately an African Gray parrot who, given the power to choose, makes a choice that surprises everyone.

Anton and Cecil are also smart, and they love to travel. If they find that the best way to get from place to place or be sure of a next meal is to have truck with humans, they learn to use the system. In *Cats on Track* they make their way across the continent and arrive at a new ocean. Not exactly homesick, but thinking of their friends and family left behind, the brothers contemplate one more adventure. That’s when Cecil sees something he’s never even dreamed of and that immediately strikes his fancy—a human eating a sandwich in a very large basket, being carried gaily over the waves by an enormous balloon.

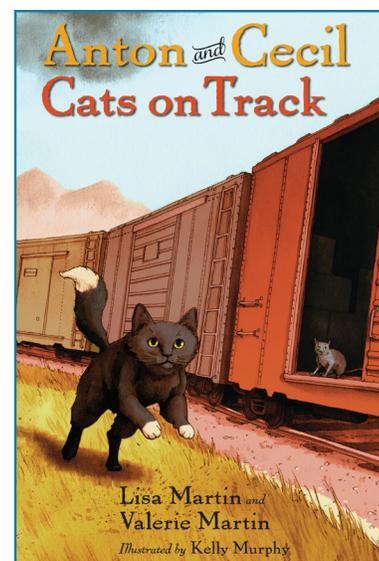


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On sale August 25, 2015

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\$16.95

257 pages, 5½ x 8¼"

ISBN: 978-1-61620-419-8

E-Book ISBN: 978-1-61620-551-5

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