



Erin Hunter

Warriors: Power of Three #2: Dark River
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Highlights from the October 2007 Warriors Tour*

by Victoria Holmes, A.k.A: Erin Hunter, author of the bestselling Warriors series

**With thanks to the booksellers at Kepler's Bookstore, Menlo Park, California, for giving my multistate jaunt an official—if somewhat obvious—name on their fabulous banner. Eleven cities, eight states, sixteen radio interviews, fifteen bookstores, seven schools, one library, eleven hotels, nine flights (should have been ten, but Birmingham, Alabama to Atlanta, Georgia was cancelled due to bad weather), eight lovely media escorts, and several thousand eager Warriors fans (and their moms, dads, and drivers). Oh, and one deceptively small purple suitcase that had the density of lead thanks to my super-efficient packing. Being on tour as Erin Hunter is brilliant. Sure, the numbers seem daunting, especially when the schedule includes things like, "Car pick-up at 4:15 A.M.," "1,300 fourth- and fifth-graders will be in attendance against their will," and "Lunch at 2:30 P.M.—eat well because your next meal is scheduled for a week from Thursday." Okay, the last two were (slight) exaggerations. But the*

numbers, the travel, the fact that the book you're carrying around with you is the shape and weight of a brick, don't matter so much when there are four hundred kids squashed (voluntarily) into a bookstore chanting your name, or a small boy has baked you cat-shaped cookies (complete with green and red frosting for eyes and nose), or a school corridor has been decorated with fabulous feral cat artwork (thanks Newtown Elementary in Pennsylvania and Miami Valley School in Ohio!). Sometimes I almost feel like I'm going to be blasted backward through the door by the warmth of the welcome. On my first tour, in April 2007, school events felt like hard work compared with signings at bookstores. After all, it's a lot easier to preach to the converted, right? For the October tour, I realized I needed to be a lot more inclusive in my approach and think about introducing non-Warriors readers to general themes rather than expect them to engage with a book fifteen titles down the line. Thus, the idea of Create-a-Clan was born. And it worked! At each school event, I asked the students to come up with their own Clan, basing it loosely on the structure of a Warriors Clan but involving humans rather than cats. The Clan could be based on any theme, located anywhere (including in space—hi to lovely RocketClan from Walter Hays Elementary in California), and with any purpose, as long as it was a positive one (DesertClan of Desert Vista Elementary in Arizona utterly disarmed me with their plans to protect scary Arizona wildlife). The only rule was that the Clan had to include all of the people at the event; every Warriors Clan has elders, which took care of the teachers' and librarians' roles. It takes me months to come up with characters, story lines, and gripping themes that can be stretched over half a dozen books. The students I met on this tour humbled me with the depth and liveliness of their imagination, conjuring in the space of one hour enough stories, themes, and plans to fill a hundred manuscripts. In my daily online diary (oh, how I loved catching up with that after an eighteen-hour day with nothing but a piece of cheese and a cracker to keep me going), I handed out feline-themed congratulations in the form of "special purrs" to students and fans who had made a particularly sparkling contribution to the day's events. But the most special purrs of all should go to the teachers and librarians who have nurtured a generation of charismatic, impulsive, storytelling children—even the ones who insisted at the start of each session that they didn't like reading and would never, ever pick up a Warriors book. I witnessed the creation of nine different Clans during this tour, not one of them overlapping in themes or rules or special warrior skills. From BearClan of Washington Irving Middle School in California (where I had the privilege of being the first-ever visiting author), to MaskClan and the Fighting Phillies Fan Club of Newtown Elementary in Pennsylvania (where the wonderful librarian Liz Dobuski has an entire wall of signatures from notable authors and illustrators, plus one in purple from me), students showed just how perfectly they understood the fighting spirit and passionate loyalty of the Warriors Clans. I'm counting the weeks until I can visit more schools and libraries and meet more young students who hold the grains of a thousand new Clans inside them. Who wants to preach to the converted when your audience has far more interesting things to say than you do?