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## Animals in Mysteries II



## Anaphylaxis Is My Middle Name *by Mindy Quigley*

**Whenever I visited** my great-grandmother's soybean farm in my younger days, I'd adopt one of the barn kittens as my companion. I'd tote "my" kitten around like a furry handbag, taking it on adventures and basking with it in the Midwestern summer sunshine. It didn't matter that kitten snuggles could be hazardous for me, causing my eyes to swell shut, my throat to constrict, and my bronchial passages to wither into wheezy little remnants, places

where oxygen hardly dared to enter. Despite the danger, I couldn't stay away. What can I say? Anaphylaxis is my middle name.

Okay, it's actually Anne, but I like to think that boring moniker is short for *something*. I married a fellow cat allergy sufferer, and that union, combined with my hypersensitivity, meant that having a cat of my own was out of the question. But I'm an animal lover, and I wasn't going to let a little dander foil me. After

I was hired for a faculty position at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, I started a course of allergy shots. I've worked in the biomedical sciences for over two decades, but prior to this job, my role was always with human patients. The vet school gig inspired me to finally accept that I needed something stronger than an anti-*his*tamine get to grips with my allergy. So after enduring five years' worth of allergy shots, my immune system is finally looking good, and I'm *feline* fine.

With the reaction tamed, I was able to sink my claws into one of the most widely-publicized clinical trials our college has ever run—a study of feline obesity and weight loss. The study, which measured owner perceptions of feline quality of life on different weight loss regimens, garnered TV, radio, and print news coverage and landed a featured spot on NPR's national broadcast of *Weekend Edition*. That study also spawned my interest in writing about cats, specifically “thicc” [slang for attractively full-figured] cats, one of whom, a strawberry blond tabby named Butterball, features prominently in my Deep Dish Mystery series.

I found the antics of the cats in that study endearing, but I also became enamored with curvaceous incarnations of the feline form. I discovered that there are legions of other chonky cat devotees, and I went down the rabbit hole of social media accounts and groups devoted to “chonksters.” When I pitched the idea for the Deep Dish Mysteries, I was adamant that my human sleuth needed a full-figured kitty companion. The books are set in an upscale deep-dish pizzeria in Wisconsin. Deep-dish pizza is the “All About That Bass” version of its scrawny, thin-crust cousin, so shouldn't the series mascot embody that same ethos? Through-out the series, the chef protagonist, Delilah

O'Leary, sheds her insecurities and comes to realize that her perfectionism, quick temper, and workaholism can be channeled as crime-fighting super powers. What better role model for her than a full-figured kitty who thinks, nay, who *knows* that that he is *purr*-fect, just the way he is?

Sometimes, fictional cats have extraordinary abilities, like telepathy with their owners or a proficiency in magic spells. Butterball always has an important role in my books, but he's basically just a cat. However, Butterball's confidence, his “you are fortunate to be in my presence” demeanor, have made him a solid fan favorite. He is mentioned in reviews more often than any other character. One of the first things I do when I'm plotting a new book is try to figure out how I can give Butterball a substantial role in the story while remaining true to his core personality. I might've done that anyway, because writing Butterball cracks me up, but knowing how much readers love him, now when I write a great Butterball scene, I'm thinking, “Wow, people are going to love this!”

Best of all, writing Butterball allows me to get my kitty fix without ever owning a feline of my own. Because, although my own immune reaction is now controlled, wouldn't you know it—both my kids are allergic to cats.

The third installment of the Deep Dish Mysteries, Public Anchovy #1, will be available wherever books are sold on December 26, 2023.

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Mindy Quigley is the author of two cozy mystery series, and award-winning short stories. Her non-writing career has been stranger than fiction—she worked as the personal assistant to the scientist who cloned Dolly the sheep and as project manager for a research clinic founded by J.K. Rowling. She lives in Blacksburg, Virginia. <https://mindyquigley.com/>.