

Author Interview 1 — *84 Ribbons*

Q: *Why did you become a writer?*

A: I've always loved to read and write. As a teacher I enjoyed writing poems, plays, and songs for my students. I had always valued the volunteers in our school that I had trained. When I retired from teaching in 2000, I realized the wider need for training volunteers. I wanted to preserve and share what I created for my school. That desire inspired my first books, *Educating America*. It was then I realized my enthusiasm for writing remained strong.

Q: *Paddy, you've won several awards for your nonfiction books Educating America. What inspired you to jump into fiction and write 84 Ribbons, the first book in your trilogy about the competitive world of ballet?*

A: Stories come to me like an itch; they refuse to leave until I promise to scratch around for their meaning and write them down. Like many writers, our novels arise from our backgrounds. I grew up in a small town near Seattle, WA. where dancing was my first love. At the age of three I began lessons in tap, character, jazz and ballet. Over the next seventeen years I performed in local recitals, area functions, musicals and a World's Fair. Those years of dance, my life experiences, my travels and my ongoing involvement in supporting ballet and the arts inspired me to satisfy my story itch.

Q: *Why did you select the late 1950s as the setting for your story?*

A: The mid-century felt right. I grew up shortly after my heroine, Marta. I could discuss the time period and share the similarities of competition, worries about injuries and finding time for a personal life that still exist today in world of dance. I wanted young readers to realize that even though the world has changed, many life situations and conditions remain unchanged.

Q: *What's surprised you most as you wrote this story about Marta and her friends.*

A: I think it was when I discovered that writing and dancing share several traits. Both require practice and perseverance as well as a good sense of movement and a desire to share a deep yearning for self-expression. Both challenge our views of reality.

Marta and her ballet friend Lynne are small town girls competing with dancers' of privilege for coveted positions with a professional ballet company. Marta is a strong dancer but shy and unsure of herself away from dancing. I was surprised when Lynne stepped in, became my alter ego and provided balance for Marta's seriousness.

Paddy Eger

D: 425.420.5161

Paddy@PaddyEger.com

Find me on   

Fendul Press

ISBN 978-0-9858933-2-3

Scan this Code to
Connect with the Author Online
www.PaddyEger.com



Q: *What events in 84 Ribbons do you think will surprise readers most?*

A: *84 Ribbons* shares ballet issues like competition, injury and health problems head-on. I believe readers will be surprised that I don't shy away from those challenges and that I keep the doors open for readers to feel a sense of hope. Unlike many ballet stories, I've given Marta a life outside the world of ballet. That life allows interactions with non-dancers and a chance for her to learn that people in all careers face challenges.

Readers may be surprised to learn that story characters grow and change the longer an author works with them. Some act like petulant children; they have their own voices and often demand to be heard.

Q: *Paddy, I know you're retired from teaching but you still volunteer in K-8 classrooms regularly. How did becoming an author change your life*

A: After I became a writer it widened my circle of friends to include other writers across a variety of genres. We share the commonality of searching for the best techniques and working to uncover the most effective language for our stories.

When I became a published author it changed how I think and act and my awareness to the world around me. My choice of activities has shifted. I attend more events that provide inspiration for my current book interests: author talks, historical talks and ballet performances. Ideas for stories pop up when I travel, watch the news or a movie and attend conferences where I have the opportunity to speak with other writers.

My reading interests have also changed. Through reading I meet authors. I find myself scrutinizing such things as their word selection and use of imagery. I uncover ideas and techniques that improve my skills. That said, it's challenging to follow the suggestion to read more hours than you write. Even if my fingers get itchy to sit down and write, it's important to read, read, read.

Q: *How do you balance research, writing, volunteering and still have time for the retirement?*

A: During the school year I'm always busy. I'm an early riser so I write for several hours before I work in classrooms, lead volunteer training sessions or go to my writing groups. By late-afternoon I'm ready for other activities like my book club, hobbies and cleaning the house. My husband and I plan one or two trips a year around my writing and marketing schedule. Those trips refresh me and provide opportunities to uncover new story concepts.

Q: *What's the most important message readers will get from 84 Ribbons?*

A: All careers have struggles as well as successes. It's important for us to meet those challenges, honor our definition of successes and work to change what's holding us back.

Since writing *84 Ribbons*, I've been told Marta's character is strong and resilient; 'I couldn't do what she did'. That's nonsense. When our commitment to our passion is strong, most everyone can dig deep and find their inner strength like Marta. We discover more about our inner strength and our resiliency every time we solve a problem. My hope for those who read the trilogy, *84 Ribbons*, *When the Music Stops*, and *Letters to Follow*, is that they will come away with confidence believing in them selves, saying, 'if Marta can do it, so can I'.

Q: *84 Ribbons shares with readers that ballet is a demanding career. What external or internal qualities must a dancer strive for to succeed as a professional?*

A: Successful dancers possess three important qualities: physical, mental and emotional tenacity.

Physical tenacity includes a strong body and stamina to work long, grueling hours. Ballet demands agility and gracefulness and the ability to finish one movement before starting the next. A strong sense of musicality is beneficial.

Mental tenacity includes dedication to the art of ballet. It's the boldness to dance thru minor injuries, drive oneself to keep up with new choreography and prepare audition pieces for solo considerations, knowing that many attempts may fall short of the goal.

Emotional tenacity may be the most difficult attribute to develop and maintain. A strong support system is vital. Dancers need validation from family and friends who recognize and encourage their dreams. Often personal lives are shoved to one side while dancers strive for greatness and accept the reality of ballet's extreme competition. The intense commitment to succeed often takes over a dancer's life to the exclusion of everything and everyone.

Marta, Lynne and Bartley strive to own physical, mental and emotional tenacity. They audition, join the dance company and give over their lives to reach for perfection. They laugh and cry together, share confidences and celebrate their performances in the glow of stage lights. All the while, Marta collects her 84 dance ribbons.

Paddy Eger

D: 425.420.5161

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Q: *What are you working on now?*

A: I mentioned, my husband I love to travel and those trips often lead to story ideas. During a trip to Australia we visited the historical remains of the brutal Port Arthur penal colony in Tasmania. The images and deafening silence of the site spurred a poem that grew to a short story and evolved into a novel. I am in the final draft of *Tasman*, a YA adventure novel of a young Irish lad in the 1850s who's falsely accused of a crime. The main character, Ean McClaud, struggles with his three-year imprisonment wondering if he'll survive the brutality or if he should attempt a daring escape. It should be on shelves at your local bookstore sometime in 2015. If readers go to paddyeger.com and sign-up for my notifications I'll notify them when the early copies are available.

Q: *How can our audience learn more about you?*

A: My website and blogs at PaddyEger.com share information about all my articles, writing and events. And—if you attend one of my events and mention this interview, I'll have a special gift waiting for you. I encourage readers to sign-up for my blogs, download free information, join a book discussion and find sneak peaks at new titles and more. I'll enjoy the opportunity to Chat, Comment and Connect.

Closing Suggestions

Interviewer—

Thank you Paddy for sharing your debut novel *84 Ribbons*. You have truly created an exciting look behind the curtain into the world of ballet and revealed the lives of young, aspiring professional dancers. Our listeners will surely want to get this book for the ballet enthusiasts in their lives. Ask for it at a your favorite local or online bookstore. And visit PaddyEger.com for reader guides, book discussions and book club discounts.

**For a selection of additional Questions and Answers
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