

Jody Ferguson



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Author Bio

Jody Ferguson is a native Texan and political-military affairs expert whose numerous articles and books have been published in outlets including *The Wall Street Journal* and *International Herald Tribune*. Specializing in affairs relating to Eurasia, his most recent work was in the Pentagon. Over his 20-plus year career, Jody has lived and worked in four different countries. A Ph.D. in International Relations from the John Hopkins University School, and a Fulbright Fellow in Russia for two years, he speaks and reads Japanese, French, and Russian.

Jody recently left his profession to return home to Austin, Texas home with his wife and children in order to pursue his life-long passion for writing historical fiction and to be closer to his extended Texas family. Many of their colorful life stories are woven into the characters of Jody's books. *Above the Water* is his debut novel. Learn more about his journey and his family at jodyferguson.com.

FAQ

Why Historical Fiction?

"Reading great novels teaches us so much about humans, with all of the accompanying beauty and warts. History books do the same. But reading history usually tells us much more about culture, mores, and societies within which people lived. This is why I was always drawn to historical fiction, because it is a lesson of human character, and of the context and framework within which that character developed.

"I have written history and I have written about politics. I have read more about both than I care to remember. So, I often read fiction as a welcome distraction from the reading I did professionally. As I have traveled the world and read about different places and people, I see similar human dramas played out across different continents in varying cultures. I love reading works of historical fiction that describe regular people trying to live their lives during periods of great upheaval and transformation.

"If you peruse the section on my website about my family and my ancestors, you see an ordinary group of people. Many of them lived in seemingly momentous times, but everybody in every generation can probably say the same. Witness what is transpiring today as the society we built that is based on global interconnectedness is under threat. Nobody knows what the system will look like in twenty years. My aim with writing historical fiction is to highlight the travails of ordinary people in extraordinary times. And by writing about my ancestors, I will leave a record of them for my family and for future generations of my family. As for my first novel, *Above the Water*, it is loosely based on several of my relatives and what they experienced before and during the Second World War.

Where Do You Get Your Inspiration?

"Most of my inspiration comes from reading well-written narrative. I love reading history and fiction. As you read history, you often come upon sidebars to history--interesting stories that may not make the headlines or occupy great historical research. These topics are often passed over in history books or are given a mere sentence. But when I personally come upon references to details like these—seemingly just thrown down on the page—I often find myself craving to know more about these anecdotes of history. These mere footnotes are to me fascinating vignettes that can vividly portray vexing social issues during momentous times. I plan to write stories based loosely on the tragic – and yet sometimes comical and farcical – situations that peoples often find themselves during transitions, when they are tossed about like foam on an ocean wave, all events and circumstances completely beyond their control.

You've Written Extensively Academically. What Was it Like to Make the Jump to Fiction?

"Early on I was told by an English teacher that I should look into writing as a career. I didn't exactly brush off his advice, but I did choose a different path. But as I grew professionally, I realized how important written communication is in all professions. The only creative writing I was doing was with travel journals and letters (back when we wrote them on paper). Time and time again I was told I should publish the writing I did outside of my work. It was through interaction with mentors and friends that I finally decided to take a chance and begin writing fiction. Making the jump has had its challenges. In academia or government work you know your target audience. Each piece you compose, you do so with specific people in mind. The templates are also well-defined. There are of course templates to writing fiction, but ultimately the author chooses the format, the narrative, the outcomes. Fiction is not a product in the traditional sense. Additionally, with fiction, you are forced to identify a much larger, more varied audience. This forces the writer to more closely consider word choices, language, topics, etc. Although it is a great challenge, I have been enjoying the creative work I'm doing immensely.

What's Your Next Book?

"My next novel will be based on the life of my great grandfather who lived in Mobile Bay, Alabama. He and some partners founded an agricultural colony in Mexico in the late 19th century. After that failed he continued living in Coatzacoalcos, Mexico, and began exporting tropical hardwood to the southern United States. He survived hurricanes, the loss of a child to tropical fever, and bankruptcy before retiring to Kansas, where he was born. All the while his wife wrote about their story in letters and poems. The novel will explore complicated family relationships, somewhat in the vein of Wallace Stegner.

Which Historical Fiction Authors Do You Find Inspiring?

"The writers that have inspired me the most are Pearl Buck (because of the Asian connection), Willa Cather (the clarity and realism of her prose), John Dos Passos (the sheer audacity and scale of his writing), Thomas Hardy (his ability to transport the reader emotionally and dimensionally--his work is familiar in feeling, though alien in context), W. Somerset Maugham (his wonderful plot construction), and Wallace Stegner (who I feel is the most underappreciated American writer of the 20th century). As for contemporary writers of historical fiction, I greatly admire Stephen Harrigan, Hilary Mantel, and Michael Ondaatje.

What Themes Drive Your Characters? Or What's Your Process?

"All of my novels will deal with family themes. Each of us has an interesting story to tell about our own families. There is so much great material out there if we just think about all the stories we tell others about our families. I like to think of the opening line to one of my favorite novels, *Anna Karenina* by Lev Tolstoy: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."