



Interview with Elizabeth Partridge—Author of Dogtag Summer

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Elizabeth Partridge is the author of one of my favorite MG reads of the year. I am super excited to have Elizabeth at the Cafe to chat about Dogtag Summer!

[Manga Maniac Cafe] Describe yourself in 140 characters or less.

[Elizabeth Partridge] I'm stubborn and usually hardworking, occasionally lazy. I'm kind, but can be fierce. And I'm insatiably curious, always.

[MMC] Can you tell us a little about your book, Dogtag Summer?

[EP] Dogtag Summer is the story of an Amerasian girl, Tracy, adopted from Vietnam when she is six. When she is twelve, she and her best friend, Stargazer, find a dogtag in her father's stuff, and it brings up all kinds of questions for her, parts of her life she's blocked out of her mind for many years.

[MMC] How did you come up with the concept and the characters for the story?

[EP] Years ago I overheard a Vietnam veteran talking to my husband about serving in Vietnam. Words tumbled out of the vet: what he'd seen, what he'd done, what he felt. It was clear he was still haunted by what had happened in Vietnam. I had never thought about the war from the point of view of the soldiers, I'd only wanted us to leave Vietnam. I began thinking about the long term effects of a war on everyone: the people just trying to survive, the soldiers on both sides. And I thought about the kids who grow up in a war zone, and I wondered what that would be like.



[MMC] What have you learned about yourself through your characters?

[EP] What an interesting question. Tracy's grandmother says to her (and this was a Vietnamese expression I discovered while researching), 'what cannot be changed, must be endured.' Sometimes I say it to myself when I just have to put up with something. And what I am putting up with is so much less than what Tracy and her grandmother are dealing with!

[MMC] Tracy's voice was so convincing, and the flashbacks to Vietnam were my favorite part of the book. What kind of research did you conduct, to make it sound so authentic?

[EP] First I read a couple dozen books on Vietnam and the war. I wanted to know what the war was like for ordinary villagers caught up in the fighting. I talked to Vietnamese refugees who now live here in America, and I spoke with a wonderful woman who was adopted from a Korean orphanage by an American family when she was eight. She was really able to tell me what the experience was like for her.



I also took a trip to Vietnam. An amazing trip! I got to feel what the wind felt like on my skin, what the rivers smelled like, what the open-air markets were like. I was especially fascinated to talk with older people. Some of them were very glad to tell an American their story, others were more reserved. Their stories were incredible.

[MMC] Is there a message you want readers to come away with after reading the book?

[EP] Compassion. I wanted readers to see the deep wounds in people who were involved in the war – living through it, fighting in it, married to people who fought.

[MMC] What was the most challenging aspect of writing the book?

[EP] To write a good book you have to really be hard on your main character. That's tough to do. I wanted to just rescue Tracy, make everything better. But I don't think you get over the kind of trauma she lived through. You learn to live with your vulnerabilities.

[MMC] If you had to pick one book that turned you on to reading, what would it be?

[EP] Wow. This is a hard question – just one? What comes to mind is *David and the Phoenix* by Edward Ormondroyd. David has all these wonderful adventures with a phoenix, and then when the phoenix makes his 500 year funeral pyre, I could barely stand it. The fire dies down and a tender young phoenix breaks out of a golden egg in the ashes. Eager scientists try to capture it. 'Fly, Phoenix, fly!' David screams at the young, confused bird. To save the phoenix, David has to lose him. What a story.

[MMC] What do you like to do when you aren't writing?

[EP] I like to hang out with my family and friends. I live in a big house with my 93 year old father, my husband, our son and his girlfriend, dog, cats, chickens and a huge vegetable garden. I go for long walks with my dog Penny. I love to garden, mostly vegetables, and some flowers. My family and I have started an apple orchard with 40 old varieties of apple trees, including one named the Wickson Apple after my great-great-uncle who was a pomologist. And yes, I like to read.

Dogtag Summer is in stores now! You can pick up a copy at your favorite bookseller.

I loved this book and can't recommend it highly enough!