

GRIER COOPER

the writer in a dancer's body

Bio

Grier began ballet lessons at age five and left home at fourteen to study at the School of American Ballet in New York. She has performed on three out of seven continents with companies such as San Francisco Ballet, Miami City Ballet, and Pacific Northwest Ballet, totaling more than thirty years of experience as a dancer, teacher and performer.

Her work has been praised as “poignant and honest” with “emotional hooks that penetrate deeply.” She writes and blogs about dance in the San Francisco Bay Area and has interviewed and photographed a diverse collection dancers and performers including Clive Owen, Nicole Kidman, Glen Allen Sims and Jessica Sutta. She is the author of *Build a Ballerina Body* and *The Daily Book of Photography*.



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Praise For WISH

“An extremely touching, heartfelt, and often humorous account of a young woman’s journey to live her passion. WISH reminds us, that despite our obstacles, we can live the life we dream. You won’t be able to put it down.”

– Zippora Karz, Former Soloist, New York City Ballet
Author of *The Sugarless Plum/ Ballerina Dreams*

“Grier Cooper expertly weaves her insider knowledge into this compelling read. Even if you’ve never danced en pointe, you may find yourself reaching for ballet slippers after reading WISH.”

– Charity Tahmaseb, co-author of *The Geek Girl’s Guide to Cheerleading*

“Grier Cooper’s WISH contrasts the elegant and disciplined beauty of ballet versus a gritty and often violent home life. She handles the topic of alcoholism with poignancy and honesty and choreographs in light-hearted moments of friendship, sibling rivalry and a budding romance to round out this touching story of art and love.”

–Paula Yoo (*Good Enough*, HarperCollins)

“Grier Cooper writes with emotional hooks that penetrate deeply. Her wonderfully-flawed characters are unforgettable. This book and its lovely dancing protagonist sparkle as if onstage!”

–Corina Vacco, author of *My Chemical Mountain*

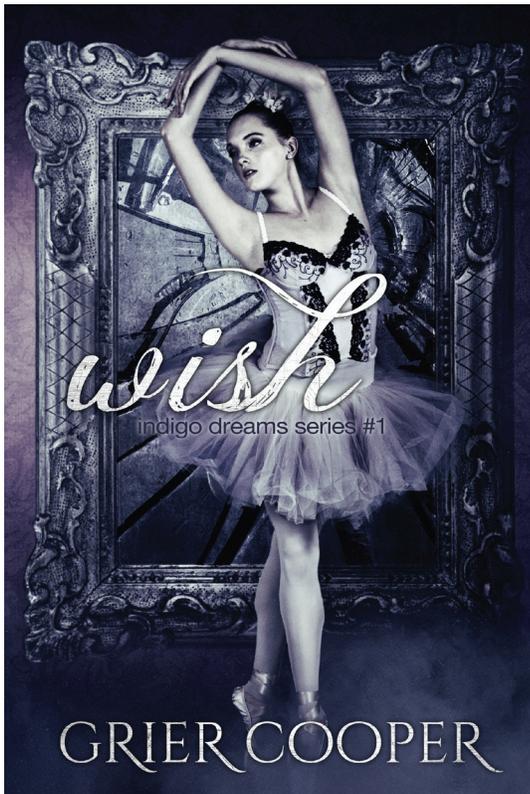
“I absolutely loved WISH; it brought back such memories of high school, boys and ballet. What a gift this is to young dance students.”

–Lauren Jonas, Artistic Director, Diablo Ballet

“Grier Cooper is completely able to express these years of sweat and tears with the accuracy of someone who has lived through it herself. It’s a great read; I highly recommended WISH!”

–Jenna Lavin-Crabtree, Former dancer with Atlanta Ballet, Miami City Ballet

WISH by Grier Cooper



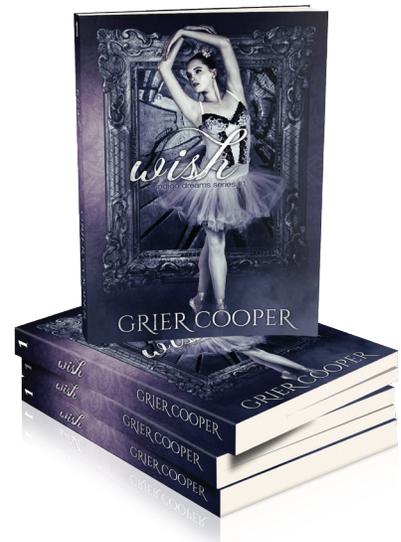
About the Book: For Indigo Stevens, ballet classes at Miss Roberta’s ballet studio offer the stability and structure that are missing from her crazy home life. At almost 16, she hopes this is the year she will be accepted into the New York School of Ballet. First she must prove she’s ready, and that means ignoring Jesse Sanders – the cute boy with dimples who is definitely at the top of Miss Roberta’s *List of Forbidden Things for Dancers*.

But Jesse is the least of Indigo’s concerns. When she discovers her mom is an alcoholic, it simultaneously explains everything and heaps more worry on Indigo’s shoulders. As her mom’s behavior becomes increasingly erratic, Indigo fights to maintain balance, protect her younger brothers from abuse, and keep her mother from going over the edge. When the violence at home escalates, Indigo realizes she can no longer dance around the issue. At the risk of losing everything, she must take matters into her own hands before it’s too late.

Why I wrote WISH: Dance has been one of the few constants in my life and my dance life has shaped who I am in the world today. Many people don’t get to experience this world firsthand and I wanted to give readers an insider’s perspective.

I also feel strongly about the difficulties of growing up in a dysfunctional family. I know the longterm implications from personal experience: my mother was an alcoholic. You learn to distrust your instincts and feelings, to play small, and to stay quiet when you know you should speak up.

Young adulthood is a time of huge transition and change even when there are healthy family dynamics. It’s a time to find your voice, to clarify who you are and who you want to be in the future. It’s not an easy road to navigate. I wrote WISH to give readers hope, to show them a path to self-empowerment, and to help them understand they can create change in their lives.



Author Q & A With Grier Cooper

Why did you write WISH?

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Describe your writing process.

I'm a very visual person so I always begin a project by creating a vision board. I cut out pictures from magazines that resemble the characters and settings I've envisioned and put them together in a giant collage. The vision boards hang right next to my desk so I can look at the characters whenever I need to. I also write character sketches for all of my characters before I begin writing. It's important to know your character before you put them in action.

Next I outline the whole novel, scene by scene. I'm one of those people who likes to plan ahead – my family and friends sometimes give me a hard time about it and call me the cruise ship director. But seriously, it pays to plan ahead...especially when you're writing a novel. Once I have a complete outline I look at the big picture: I make sure transitions between scenes and chapters work seamlessly and that there's a good balance and pace throughout. Figuring all of this out before I write anything saves a lot of time and headache.

I began writing *WISH* several years ago, in between writing a bunch of other things. The first draft took me a little over a year to write because I wrote in very short bursts, about 30 minutes at a time. A first draft is often needs a lot of editing. I spent a lot of time combing through my novel and polishing it, then worked with a group of other YA writers to get feedback. My critique partners asked a lot of questions, often about things that I hadn't thought about.

Even after the work I'd done revising and implementing some of their suggestions my novel still wasn't quite there. That was a little hard to sit with but I wanted the book to be as good as it could possibly be. I tinkered some more, focusing on the parts I felt needed more work. Finally, I gave the entire book a final pass by reading it out loud, word by word. Errors or clumsy language in your writing are much more obvious when you hear it aloud. This made a huge difference – not only did I trim thousands of words, everything read more smoothly.

How did you make the transition from dancer to writer?

I've written since I was a kid; I kept a diary with a lock on it, which was necessary growing up in a big family. After I stopped dancing professionally I took some writing classes in college and started playing around

with poetry and short stories. I kept writing throughout the years but once I became a mom I started to think more about writing for kids. Eventually I began to transition into freelance writing, which eventually took off. I mostly wrote about dance and fitness and wrote a regular dance column where I interviewed top Bay Area dancers, choreographers and directors. I started writing WISH simultaneously. I also put a lot of time into educating myself about the craft and business of children's books by attending conferences, workshops and webinars. Learning to be a writer has definitely been a process; luckily it's a process I enjoy. I'm still learning now; there's always something I can improve.

What role does dance play in your life today?

I've been a dancer since I was five and I don't see that changing, although my relationship with dance has evolved over time. When I was young, dance was something I did for fun. Later it became my profession and now I look at it as a sanctuary, a home, a place to move beyond my small self and connect to something bigger.

The things I've learned as a dancer – discipline, dedication and persistence– still serve me now. Without this foundation I couldn't do what I do. Writing is self-paced and self-driven. No one is telling me what to do or looking over my shoulder to make sure it gets done. It's all on me.

Sometimes I'll take a break and put on some music and dance to counteract all the sitting and staring at a computer. Dance keeps me happy.

Why did you choose to self-publish?

The publishing industry is changing so much and independent publishing is really growing. In today's market it's the author's name that sells a book; we writers are our own brand. All writers have to do the work of growing that name through marketing and promotion, whether they are traditionally published or self-published. That is the reality. I realized if I'm going to do the work anyway, why not do it on my terms?

I also didn't want to wait years to see my book on shelf. I have many other books in the pipeline and I wanted to keep moving forward. I've enjoyed maintaining my creative freedom and having the ultimate say on things like cover design. I also like knowing that after all I've put into it my book won't expire or go out of print.

I've found the world of indie publishing to be incredibly giving and supportive, which has been a nice surprise. I'm really grateful to the other indie writers out there who share their knowledge and expertise so willingly.

What advice would you give to other young dancers and writers?

My advice is really the same for both. First of all: dream big! Clarify your vision and make it as real as possible in your mind, using all of your senses. Keep your thoughts focused on that vision as often as you can. Believe it is possible.

In the meantime, work at your craft. Strive to perfect all aspects of what you do and ask for help and support. When you feel ready to find work develop a solid plan. Make a list of all potential places or companies you want to work with. Cast your net wide and see what comes through. Follow up with everyone you talk to. Even if it takes longer than you would hope keep going no matter what. The difference between those who succeed and those who don't is persistence.

Which of your characters is the most like you?

I'm a bit like of many of my characters. I have aspects of Indigo's emotional sensitivity, Miss Roberta's work ethic and perfectionist tendencies, and Becky's supportive nature. I wish I had more of Monique's sass and Jesse's laid back attitude.

The cool thing about creating characters is that even though I come up with the initial vision they eventually take on a life of their own. I'm often surprised by some of the things they say or do and I'll think to myself wow, I never would say that to someone. Which is strange since the idea came out of my head. But it's what the character would do, not what I would do.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I'll still be sitting at my desk, writing! I hope to have at least 3 more titles out by then and be doing fun events interacting with readers. My daughter will be a junior in high school so I'll be actively looking for my future home on a tropical beach somewhere.