

Sample questions for Eddie Price, author of *Widder's Landing* and *The Little Miss Grubby Toes Series*

1. As a retired history teacher – what inspired you to write your historical fiction series?

I was writing stories winning essay prizes early on, beginning in elementary school. I penned stories, poems, and essays for my high school and college student publications and wrote a motion picture script which I handed personally to actor John Wayne. I wrote several adventure novels—all unpublished before writing *Widder's Landing*.

I have always been fascinated with the Ohio River and its role in America's development. The world had experienced some major earthquakes in 2004, 2009, etc. And I recalled the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-1812. Folks had been predicting a natural disaster because of a total eclipse of the sun and a blazing comet—both occurred in 1811, both seen as precursors of bad things to come. As I was researching the earthquakes—and the impact on early Americans, the story began to come to me. Folks saw the comet as a sign of impending war. Shortly after its sighting, America was embroiled in its first constitutionally sponsored war—the War of 1812—and it was up against the number one superpower of the world. I began travelling to, and working in, frontier villages, learning how early settlers grew crops, built cabins, made wood shingles, churned butter, and generally survived. Learning how to plow with mules, tan hides, preserve food, use a black powder rifle added to the richness of the experience and helped make the book more realistic.

I didn't envision *Widder's Landing* as the first in a series. But my readers began wanting to know what happened to the main character and his family. They were sad when the 848-page story ended, and they wanted more. I found myself researching the years after the 1811-1815 period and realized that I had another whole story ahead of me.

2. For those who haven't read *Widder's Landing*, can you tell us what it is about?

A young man loses his job and is forced to relocate. No one is hiring in such bleak economic times. America finds itself threatened by a world superpower firmly in control of global trade. Money is scarce, businesses fail, and the Bank of the United States closes its doors. The country will soon be embroiled in another war. This is not present day the year is 1811.

Craig Ridgeway, a 21-year old gunsmith from Pennsylvania, rides a flatboat down the Ohio River and settles in Breckinridge County, Kentucky to try his hand at farming. Through an accidental association with a notorious widow (the past proprietor of a liquor vault and prostitution den), he inherits a patch of rich bottomland, embraces a nearby family, and falls in love with the abandoned wife of a violent outlaw. Overcoming inexperience and hardships, Craig builds a promising new life, learning how to raise corn, tobacco and hemp. Inspired by the Widder's recipe, he and his wife Mary manufacture bourbon whiskey, which he markets profitably in New Orleans. A new steamboat embarks on its first journey down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, ushering in a new economic era.

But good fortune comes at a high price. The looming war with Great Britain disrupts the economy and soon overshadows Craig's life. He must make choices that affect others in times of conflict. Will he risk everything by fighting on the northern frontier? Will he use his special talents as a gunsmith and marksman to help his nation? After twice refusing to fight on the northern frontier, he has one last chance to join his fellow Kentuckians in the heroic defense of New Orleans. The epic battle on the sugarcane plantations below the city provides redemption for the young American nation and for Craig, as he returns home to continue his adventure in life with Mary.

Widder's Landing is a story of life, love and survival set against the rugged Kentucky frontier.

3. How does your main character(s) play into the overall messaging behind the books?

Craig Ridgeway, the 21-year old main character, is the “vehicle” I use to give my audience a window into what life was like in the Ohio River Valley in 1811-1815. They see the diminishing frontier mostly through his eyes. He is a good gunsmith and an excellent shot, but he has a lot to learn about farming—and about life. The reading audience learns with him as different folks in the settlement teach him about farming, cabin-building and trade. They experience his downfalls and his triumphs. He and his wife, Mary, have all the same feelings that we do today—they are just set in a different era. Their humanity helps bring the historical side of the story to life.

4. How does your fascination and education in history influence your writing?

Folks rave about the story—and when they are done, they comment on how much history they learned, not realizing it at the time they were reading. My whole life career of teaching history involved making history *real*—teaching to an audience (high school kids) that weren’t always interested in it. I think I bring the same qualities of teaching to my writing, and am cognizant of who I am writing to—and how I can help best them envision the era. Research truly drives the story and I try to paint with the finest brush possible so my audience has a clear picture of what I am trying to portray.

5. You have visited many countries and states. Do you plan to create or use different states or countries in your stories?

The next two novels are set in 1739-1759 and 1775-1785 respectively. In the earlier set novel, I begin in Ireland (I have been there nine times) and then “travel” to colonial Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York/Canada at Fort Niagara. (I have been there many times.) The American Revolution story will be set in North Carolina and back to Kentucky. A later novel is set in Ancient Israel.

6. Who are some of your favorite authors?

I grew up loving Fred Gibson (*Old Yeller* and *Savage Sam*) Mark Twain, and Charles Portis (*True Grit*.) Then I became a big fan of Wilbur Smith, (a South African writer of historical fiction) Ken Follett, James Michener and Edward Rutherford. These writers all paint a vivid and engrossing picture of life in historic settings. Each one has a distinctive “voice” and each one loves their subject matter and their characters.

7. How'd you choose the cover of the book?

The *Widder's Landing* cover was inspired by my 11th grade high school history teacher. I had really decided on my life vocation (teaching history) in 1970-1971. My history teacher Floyd Hooks had taught about the explorers, early American colonies, the French & Indian War, and the American Revolution. We turned to Chapter 7 in the history book to see a picture of a flatboat drifting down the Ohio River to some western destination. At that time my English class was reading about Huck Finn's journey down the Mississippi—and that picture made a powerful impact. It was an engraving done by Alfred Waud and it was in the public domain. I decided on a sepia effect to give the impression of an earlier time.

8. Speaking of old time survivors, you're a reenactor. What have you reenacted?

When I began visiting frontier villages to take my books directly to those who were interested in the time period/setting of *Widder's Landing*, I discovered a whole subculture of people from blacksmiths, to farmers, carpenters, weavers, spinners, historians and more. I dressed out in authentic costume and this made me more attractive to prospective buyers. The reenactors began needing “settlers to be scalped,” frontiersmen to shoot black powder rifles, and to reenact battles like the Battle of Blue Licks, Fort Meigs, Fort Niagara, “massacres” at Long Run, Harrodsburg, River Raisin—and big reenactment battles like the Battle of Chalmette at New Orleans. Soon I was demonstrating frontier tools, farm implements, and cooking utensils—also discussing flatboats—using a four-foot model New Orleans “broadhorn” with sweeps, ramps, and ladders, barrels, bales and model animals.

9. You're also the author of the children's series Little Miss Grubby Toes?!?! Tell us about the series and when you came up with it.

I have two daughters and when they were young, I always told them bedtime stories, each with an embedded safety message. This dates back to the late 1980's and early 1990's. Folks told me that I should create a series about the little girl who didn't listen to her parents. While in Miami Florida for the Readers Favorite Awards, I met my future illustrator, Mark Wayne Adams. I pitched the story to him and he shared what he could do to help make the books reality. We agreed to a series of eight children's books. The misadventure series is pretty formulaic—Little Miss Grubby Toes is inherently a good little girl, but she doesn't always listen to her parents, and this always gets her into trouble. In the books she Steps on a Bee! Plays with Fire! Falls in the Pool! Eats Too Much Candy! Gets Stuck in a Tree! ...and so on. She is clearly warned, is confronted with a choice, makes the wrong choice and suffers the consequences. While she survives her mishaps, her parents or safety personnel point out that some children are not so lucky. In the end she promises to be good...at least until the next book!

10. How do you manage writing and touring?

This is the hardest part of being an author—at least for me. I want to get my books to the public, so I am constantly making phone calls, emailing, etc., trying to drum up events where I can speak and have my books available. This takes the BIGGEST part of my time. My tours are actually VERY rewarding. I travel to events, am treated very nicely by my hosts and I get to meet my future readers (and often those who have read my books. Usually they are the ones who have invited me. I am often put up in hotels or people's home, and treated to a delicious meal—also given tours of historical sites that the general public does not get to see. The downside of marketing is that I have less time to write. There has to be a certain amount of energy leftover for creativity—and often the marketing and touring gets in the way. Nevertheless, I do try to carve out time, usually late at night/and VERY early AM to write.

11. Tell us about some of your historical programs?

The programs are all based on certain aspects of my novels. Folks are interested in the book and have asked—"did that really happen?" My first historical program was a PowerPoint slideshow entitled "Remember the Raisin!" It includes a lot about the natural phenomena that confronted early Americans, and early Kentucky life, leading up to the War of 1812. I took battlefield and historical site photos and integrated them with historical portraits, maps, and other slides to create a "history lesson" much like what I did in the classroom. I jazzed them up with historical songs to engage the crowds, dressed in authentic costume, table displays etc. Soon I was in demand for historical and genealogical societies, libraries and arts councils, schools colleges and universities, historical sites and reenactments. Pioneer villages, etc. Folks asked about the wild "brush arbor sermon" in *Widder's Landing* and I developed a program called "What I

Saw at Cane Ridge!” about the great Cane Ridge Revival of 1801. This became popular for the same groups and many churches. Other programs include:

Homemaking on the Frontier

Ohio River Heritage

The Battle of Blue Licks/ The American Revolution in the West

American Rising? Kentucky After the War of 1812

Take it to Your Readers—a look at identifying and physically finding your readers

How a Children’s Book Happens

Children’s programs based on book titles with reading singing, puppet show and activities.

Catholic Pioneers to Kentucky/Maryland Kentucky and Beyond.

Lincoln’s Brown Water Navy (Union gunboats in the American Civil War.)

And a neat program entitled “Roscoe Tarleton Goose: Kentucky Derby Winner” a one-man drama that I present for the Kentucky Humanities Council Chautauqua program.

12. Can you give us a sneak peek into your next novel?

The novel (currently entitled *Broken Bonds*) begins in Ireland in 1739. High adventure, romance and betrayal collide in a fantastic world war that will change the direction of world history. While the reader gets involved in the characters’ lives, they will learn the reasons Irish settlers came to Colonial Maryland and look at life from the planter society, the poorer classes, Native Americans, African slaves and British Military. The book will take the main character, Martin McDonnell, across the Atlantic to Maryland, then to Pennsylvania (Braddock’s Defeat,) and conclude in New York/Canada at the Battle for Fort Niagara. The book will provide insight on why the colonists chose to break away from their mother country.

13. Fill us in on your children’s programs?

These are children’s programs based on book titles with reading, singing, puppet show and activities. I embed safety lessons and classroom standards into each lesson. In the book *Little Miss Grubby Toes Steps on a Bee!* I often present with beekeepers. In *Little Miss Grubby Toes Plays With Fire!* I often work alongside firefighters. The misadventure series is pretty formulaic—Little Miss Grubby Toes is inherently a good little girl, but she doesn’t always listen to her parents, and this always gets her into trouble. New programs are coming for Falls in the Pool! Eats Too Much Candy! Gets Stuck in a Tree! ...and so on.

14. What are your goals as an author with your work?

When they finish my books, I want my readers to be able to say, “WOW! I feel like I was on a journey! I was truly transported back in time! Incredible! As good as any of the “big name” authors! I want more!” Fortunately, this has happened with both

novels. I hope I can continue the high quality—and I feel that as long as I let research drive the story, I can do this. But I want broader recognition and many more “passive sales” to supplement my touring and direct sales. My ultimate goal is to have the novels made into motion pictures or miniseries.

15. For those who aren't Kentucky natives, give us some insight as to what would intrigue us about your programs and books?

These books are about life. People in 1811-1815 were people—with the same needs and problems, with good and bad characteristics. In making my characters “real” I draw my readers in to the history of early America and allow them to envision it through the characters’ eyes and experiences. We are all one country and should know something about our heritage. Kentucky was a prominent state in the union and it has a rich and intriguing history. *Widder's Landing* is not limited to a Kentucky setting. It begins in Pennsylvania (one of the original thirteen colonies) and ends in Louisiana (then the newest state in the Union.) The story provides a lot of insight into America’s mindset and how it overcame adversity in troubling times. *One Drop—A Slave!* begins in Louisiana and looks at the slave laws of that day—and the intrigue will engulf my Kentucky family. This book takes the reader on the high seas to the barracoons of Bahia da Salvador in Brazil, the pristine harbor of Sainte Pierre in Martinique, the murky bayous of lower Louisiana...and Kentucky.

The new novel confronts many issues that we have in America today—racism, tariffs, improvements to infrastructure, voting, economic and banking issues, politics and more. These problems were front and center in 1815-1818. *One Drop—A Slave!* provides insight into human foibles—greed, infidelity, making bad investments, revenge. Good qualities are also on display—helping others, working hard, caring for family, working to overcome hardships. Subjects like Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, dementia, influenza, childbirth, amputation, medicine (of that day) are treated—but many of the terms we use today were called something else.

In an age of jet travel, electricity, instantaneous communication, advanced medicine, modern food cultivation, preparation and preservation, pure drinking water, and more—Americans stand to learn a lot about early life and hopefully gain an appreciation of what they have today.