

# Paty Jager Podcast Dust Jackets

## Maggie Lynch

Hello, and welcome to dust jackets conversations with authors. My special guest today is Paty Jager. She's an author of mystery suspense and romance novels. Welcome, Paty.

## Paty Jager

Hi, thanks for having me.

## Maggie Lynch

Really happy to have you here. So let me just tell you a bit about her. I've actually known Paty for at least a decade, I can't quite remember when we met, I think it may have been around 2004 or so. We've spurred each other on through writing challenges. We've shared knowledge. Whenever one of us found something new, we would share it with each other. We've crossed paths at conferences and bookstore signings. And most of all, we've both just really cheered each other on in our careers. I'm so happy to have her here today. She's not only a great writer—I've read a lot of her books, which is usually not the case with many authors I've interviewed—but she's also just a really good person. So let me just take a moment and read a bio for you.

“Award-winning author Paty Jager and her husband raise alfalfa hay in rural eastern Oregon. On her road to publication she wrote freelance articles for two local newspapers and enjoyed her job with the County Extension service as a 4-H Program Assistant. Raising hay and cattle, riding horses, and battling rattlesnakes, she not only writes the western lifestyle, she lives it.

All of her work has Western or Native American elements in them along with hints of humor and engaging characters. Her penchant for research takes her on side trips that eventually turn into yet another story.”

And I can definitely vouch for her living out in the west. She lives in the eastern side of Oregon. I visited her once at her previous home; and she's now moved even further out into the country than then she was there.

For people who don't know, can you just kind of describe your home and your acreage because it's always amazing to me, being primarily a city girl.

## Paty Jager

Well, we have 280 acres, but only 60 of it is under alfalfa, which we cut for hay. And then the rest of it is sagebrush and rocks and dirt.

## Maggie Lynch

And so it's just there if you want to expand or just to keep you safe.

## Paty Jager

It's, it's just for us to have fun exploring.

My husband wanted a pivot and he wanted the alfalfa field. But he didn't want so much that he couldn't take care of it himself. So we only have the 60 acres, which is just enough to keep him busy during the summer.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Sounds good to me. So, um, let me get to the questions that we have here. I believe you just release or you're planning to release your 50th novel. Looking back, are you surprised at all that you've accomplished during this period of time?

I know, I'm surprised at what I've accomplished, and I only have half the books. Also, are there overarching themes that have continued in your books from the beginning of your career to now?

### **Paty Jager**

Okay, well, first, yes, my 50th book will be releasing in May. I had planned on releasing May 1, but one of my sensitivity readers hasn't been able to get to it yet. So, I may have to do a pre-order May 1 and then have it come out a little later in the month.

Yeah, I couldn't believe it when I was adding them up. I came up with the fiftieth that would be my release for the 15<sup>th</sup> coming up.

It's just a blur. I didn't realize that I've written that many. But, at the same time, I have so much. So many stories and things still rambling around in my head that I guess it makes sense that I've gotten that many out.

### **Maggie Lynch**

You just keep writing and writing.

### **Paty Jager**

Yeah. Every time a new idea comes to me, I just decide: Okay, that sounds good. Maybe I need to put that into a book and figure out if it's going to go into a series I already have, or if it's an idea that needs to be put into a new series. Which is kind of what happened with the new one I'm working on now.

As per the overarching arching themes, yes. Justice is a theme in every one of my books. Some kind of justice or injustice has been happened or been taken care of, or whatever, in my stories. It's just something that really hit home with me, I guess. So, I just put it in my books and I try to show how everybody can get along if they just understand each other. Because a lot of times the injustices come because they just don't understand.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Ah, well, I know in terms of finding justice in your, your mysteries, that makes sense. You have people whose job is to mete out justice. But in terms of, you know, some of your romances or your Spirit novels, can you describe how justice works in those?

### **Paty Jager**

Okay, well, the Spirit Trilogy is set among the Nez Perce starting in the 1700s, before the white man showed up, and it kind of shows a little bit about how they survived and how they were trying to keep themselves safe from other tribes. Then the white man shows up, and then it shows how things were taken from them during that time. In the third one, where they're actually being chased off their land, and trying to find safety, it shows the injustice of what happened to them.

In some of my Western romances, there's always a character that has been wronged or something has happened that needs justice. Or the books show how justice was dealt back then.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Right. And especially because a lot of your Western romances are more historical, right?

### **Paty Jager**

Yes. I have more historical ones than I do contemporary. And with the two contemporary romances that are actual novels and not novelettes. They also have huge justice or injustice themes in them. It's just how the characters were treated before they showed up in the books.

### **Maggie Lynch**

You mentioned the Nez Perce. I know that a lot of the things that you write, they do feature prominently. Can you talk about what drew you to that specific tribe and, and why, you know, you're so connected with them and your novels.

### **Paty Jager**

Because I grew up in the northeast corner of Oregon, which is where the Nez Perce wintered and summered. Well, just the Hinsepu band of the Nez Perce wintered and summered there.

So, I've always found it interesting. And I didn't know why, until after I started doing all my research, that we never saw any Nez Perce in the county, except during Chief Joseph days, which is a big rodeo Carnival weekend. I always kind of saw stuff made them when they were for those days, but we don't see them [other times]. Then, as I did my research, I realized because they were banned from there because they were non-treaty Indians. So they were not allowed to go back to their homeland until oh, about the 1960s to 1970s. Then they started to come in a little more. And then and then, I believe it's the 80s, when they actually started having a powwow in the county. Now they have a yearly powwow. So, they are slowly coming back and they started buying some land and stuff.

### **Maggie Lynch**

It's wonderful that you have featured them, you know, having grown up in their native lands area. It is so indicative of certainly what's happening with a lot of Native American tribes that were just not allowed or not recognized for a long period of time, and they're starting to come back slowly all over Oregon and Northern California.

So, one of the things you mentioned in our previous little discussion was about having a sensitivity reader. That's because you're not Native American yourself, is that the case?

### Paty Jager

Right. I have zero Native American in me.

### Maggie Lynch

So, can you just kind of describe what a sensitivity reader does for you?

### Paty Jager

Okay, so like when I'm writing my stories that have Native American characters, I like to have somebody Native American who reads them to make sure they're right. I do tons and tons of research. For the Spirit trilogy that I have out, I had two Nez Perce women and a man who helped me. When I would do my research and find out: Oh, this, this is how they lived. This is what they did. And then I would write a scene. And then I would send them the scene and I say: "Okay, does this play right? Am I not being stereotypical? Am I not making it sound right? Sometimes I guessed what works and or what they would wear.

In one case I want to show a pregnancy or birthing. And I asked the woman, I said: "Well, how, what was the birthing method?" And she said: "We really don't talk about that." So, it was something that they just don't give us. So I had to just kind of make my own thing up. And then I sent that to her. And I said: "Is this okay, if I do it this way?" I didn't, you know, put too much into it...just kind of that it happened and and all that. And she said: "Yes, that will work. You're not giving anything away."

I didn't want to do anything that they would not like. And that's kind of what a sensitivity reader does. They just read the scenes or whatever that I write, and then let me know, yes, it could happen that way, or did happen that way. Or sometimes the way I worded it doesn't sound right, or something like that. So that's why I have them. Not only for the historical books, but I also have them for my mysteries, because I have Native American characters there, too.

### Maggie Lynch

And I think that's so important. You know, I've heard from other writers who have been really afraid to write a character that is not of their own race, or culture or religion, depending upon the kind of the writing. And I've often heard that that's the best way to do it. If you're truly interested [in being accurate] do a lot of research and then involve people who are from that culture.

That's probably why you do so well, because I absolutely love all of your books. And I haven't read every single one, but I've read most of them and at least some in every series. And I can really see that showing through, it makes really good sense to me.

So, we've talked a bit about the Spirit trilogy, which is, you know, takes place a long time ago, and revolves around some myths or beliefs of the Nez Perce. The other one of your series that I really loved, as you know, because I've raved about it so much, is the Isabella Mumphrey trilogy, which is really nice, contemporary, romantic suspense. And my favorite thing is that the protagonist is an anthropologist, but has kind of the instincts of a female MacGyver. And, you know, we've now had two or three MacGyver shows in my lifetime, and they're all men. And it's nice to see a woman in that role,

who's smart, who has a science background, and who can figure out things. So, can you just talk about how that came about? And how that perhaps, you know, set some of the groundwork for you eventually moving into mysteries? More than what you've done in the past?

### **Paty Jager**

Okay, yeah. I kind of started the series on a dare of sorts. Someone had written a book and they said it was a female Indiana Jones book. And I read it and I was like, no this doesn't seem like it. So somebody else said: "Well, if you don't think it is, then write one that you think is. So, then I started brainstorming with another author. We were riding together to a conference—or we were having a retreat over on the coast. So yeah, you know, three hours in the car, and I was telling her about it. She goes: "So if you were to do it, what would your main character be like?" And I thought she would be kind of like my oldest niece, who's very smart. And then you know, I just kept going on with how this and that and, and then I said: "I know what her name would be." The name just came to me and I told her the name and she goes: "Oh, I like that." She was kind of funny and quirky, but at the same time, it sounds kind of scholarly.

So anyway, I just kept talking about it. And by the time I came home from that retreat, I knew my character and I knew the story I was going to write for the first book. So, I just kind of based it off this kind of wandering Indiana Jones, MacGyver type of character. I gave her some flaws, which she's naive because she's a child prodigy. So she didn't get out in the world that much. And that kind of helps play into some of the scenes, which makes it fun to write.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Oh, I hadn't heard that Indiana Jones type from you before. Or if I did, I'd forgotten. Because it's so true because she's an anthropologist. So, you know, she understands these ancient artifacts. But the MacGyver part is more of how she gets out of situations very cleverly. So, that makes for a great character. And I really enjoyed the books.

I know that you haven't continued past the three but I'm gonna, you know, put a push out here during this saying everyone needs to go buy them and, if they take off, you'll write some more.

So, so that series was suspense, as well as some mystery. And then the next thing that you started to write were what I would call a Cozy Mystery with a Native American character. Which you have, how many books in that? And you finally stopped writing that series, right?

### **Paty Jager**

Yeah, the Shandra Higheagle Mystery Series has 16 books.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Wow.

### **Paty Jager**

So, yeah, yeah. And that number 16 was the end.

I was a little worried because I had so many people that really enjoyed this series. But I was kind of like, because my daughters kept bugging me. They said: "Well, when are you going to end this? You don't want it to go too long." And, and I said: "Oh, when I can't think of any more stories, you know, that kind of thing. But then after I wrote the 15th, which added children to the story, it kind of felt like the 16th needed to be the end. Shandra needed to quit snooping around and getting herself in danger when she had children to take care of. So, I just decided that was a nice way to end the series. And because it's kind of a paranormal, where her grandmother came to her and dreams, I had the plan that in the sixteenth book, the grandmother stops coming in our dreams, too. So I just kind of wrapped it all up.

### **Maggie Lynch**

That's a great idea. And 16 is plenty. Although, you know, some people like Sue Grafton did the whole alphabet, which was 26. So yeah. But Shandra Higheagle is a wonderful series. And again, I haven't read all sixteen, but they're all slightly different. And yet, they have an overarching thing that happens because you're following the protagonists, you know, through her life, really, and all the things that happened in her life, as well as her being a great detective.

So, I will tell people listening here, you could start anywhere in this series that you want. But, certainly if you start at number one, you're going to see that overall character arc. And they're not that expensive. So, you should read them all. And if you want them to be even less expensive, get her box sets. Because then you can get a whole bunch of them at once for a good deal.

So, after that mystery series was toward the end, I think is when you started the Gabriel Hawk series, which features a Native American Fish and Wildlife state trooper who has special skills in tracking. And this just seems to have really taken off; and you're doing quite well with it. So, can you tell us a bit about how that concept came to you? And, you know, what you love about it and kind of where you are and where you think you're going with that series?

### **Paty Jager**

Okay, yes, Gabriel Hawk. I came up with the idea of having a state trooper in the county where I grew up. So, a Fish and Wildlife state trooper in Wallowa County, Oregon, which is where I grew up. And I thought would it be unique to have someone of Nez Perce heritage come there and work. He's not only doing his job as a law man, he's also protecting his ancestors' land. So, it kind of gives him a dual purpose for being there. Once I decided I wanted to do that, I just asked my son in law, who's a state trooper, who he knew over there that was in fish and wildlife. He set me up with a ride-along so I got to do a day long ride along with the Wallowa County state troop with fish and wildlife.

I was so excited because it just helped me see what they do all day long. He told me stories about things that he had to do or has done in the past. When I told him I was planning on writing murder mysteries, he then told me about this spot over here where we had investigated such and such. Then he'd go: "By the way, we had such and such over there." So, it was really nice to get a firsthand look at it.

Some people have said that I stereotype the Native American as a tracker. That was never in my thoughts. My thoughts were that I get so wound up when I go on my walks out here and I start following

tracks of animals. That I just I got really excited about learning and writing about that. Then I went and bought a book on tracking. And it was just like, oh, they [trackers] have this mindset, this focus. I don't have the focus, but they have this really deep focus when they're doing this tracking. And I thought, oh, that would be a really great good thing, but also a flaw for my character to have to have that kind of one track mind when he's doing these things. And so that's why I made him a tracker. It wasn't because of his heritage, it was because I thought it fit well for how I wanted my character to be.

And I'm having a blast writing the stories. For one I actually took a ride on the raft down the Snake River so I could see the area that I wanted him to be in where he's doing some tracking. And then I just got lucky to go take a trip to Iceland. After I was there, I discovered they have a huge Search and Rescue convention there every other year. And I thought, oh, that would be great to take Hawke there. So I did that in one book.

But that one, it's kind of funny. Everybody loves the books that are set in Loudoun County. But the ones where I take him other places, they want him back in the county where all the people they know live. You do meet all the people, the residents of the area that I've made up. That was another thing. I made up towns and gave them different names, but kind of put them in the same areas, the real towns, because I didn't want anybody I grew up with thinking I was writing about them. So I made sure that all the different businesses, different names of towns, and I tried really hard not to put any of the same last names of anybody I know that lives there.

But I already got caught. Once somebody said: "Oh, that was such a nice tribute to my uncle in your book." And I'm like: "I didn't." So I had to explain to them that I just picked that name out of the blue. It was not anybody in particular. But she said it sounded just like him. So that's what you run into.

### **Maggie Lynch**

I hope he was a good guy.

### **Paty Jager**

Yeah, yes. He was a good guy.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Yeah, I think the problem is when you make a bad guy the name of someone who lives there. That could definitely get you into deep water. So, it's funny how I think—particularly in series—that readers like to get to know an area, you know, both the settings as well as the town and the people. And so I can understand why they would prefer that you stay there with your books. But, as a writer, you know, sometimes you just would like to take a little trip.

### **Paty Jager**

Yes, exactly.

### **Maggie Lynch**

So um, in terms of Gabriel Hawke, how many books are you in now? And is this going to be, you know,

you're just going to continue writing as long as they're still working for you? Or do you have a set number of books that you've planned?

### **Paty Jager**

Gabriel Hawk number seven, *Stolen Butterfly*, will be my 50th book. That will be out in May. At this time, I can see continuing with him for quite a while. There's so many scenarios I could come up with. Not only because the last book is actually set on the Umatilla Reservation, which is outside of Pendleton, where he [Gabriel Hawke] grew up. So, I can keep going back to there. And I mean, because people will still get a sense of place, because he's been there a couple of times. Not for the whole book, but for, you know a couple of chapters. So, they're starting to see that area, as well as his home and our county.

So, I'm thinking I can keep this up for a while. Yeah, and I have collected a lot more readers with this series. More than I have any other series. Lots of men. They really like the male character.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Oh, that's great. It's always good to expand your readership for sure. And I can really see, to me it's distinctive enough that I can really see perhaps a film or TV series being made. Just putting it out there in the universe in case anyone watching this wants to check it out. Because it is unique in that it takes place in a part of Oregon that not a lot of people know about, which means that, you know, most people in the US don't know about. I think the closest series I've seen to it Yellowstone. But this series is much interesting than that and has a Native American protagonist.

There are some Western set series, but I just think that this is unique being a wildlife state trooper and the tracking aspect, and all the different things that he gets into. So, putting that out in the universe, all you film people who might be watching.

### **Paty Jager**

Thank you for that.

### **Maggie Lynch**

So, um, I'd like to kind of close just by asking, you know, what is next in your career? I know that you never just write one series at a time. So, you know, what ones are you continuing or are you starting new ones? You know, what's coming up next.

### **Paty Jager**

Okay, well, I have the last Hawke book, *Stolen Butterfly*, that was set on the Umatilla reservation. I did bring in a new character there that will be the protagonist in a new series I'm starting. It will be set on the reservation at the casino. However, I renamed the casino a different name and I have it my own little world instead of trying to replicate theirs. It just was easier for finding information and getting it written.

So that will be the Spotted Pony Casino mysteries that will be coming out. I still have three books to write in my Silver Dollar Saloon series. I'm hoping to get one more of those out here after I finished the

Spotted Pony Casino first book. And then, I still actually have three more novellas I need to write in the Tumbling Creek Ranch series. But those have not been knocking at my head like the Silver Dollar Saloon ones. So, just this year, I'm hoping to get the Spotted Pony Casino one out; and then the Silver Dollar Saloon one; and then another Gabriel Hawke before the end of the year.

### **Maggie Lynch**

So, can you just talk a little bit about the Spotted Pony Casino series? I assume it is definitely mystery like Gabriel Hawke. Will it be cozy mysteries—more like Shandra Higheagle—or are these more along the Gabriel Hawke type of mystery?

### **Paty Jager**

I'm hoping to make them more along the Gabriel Hawk line. Even my Shandra Higheagle mysteries weren't pure cozies. I tend to write with a little darker subjects than cozies do. So I tend to like the length of the Gabriel Hawk ones and I'm hoping to make the Spotted Pony series about that length.

She [the protagonist] is the head of security at the casino. So, she's not really law enforcement. But she's not really an amateur sleuth either. You know, I never write in an exact genre. I always mishmash them, which makes it really hard.

### **Maggie Lynch**

I hear you I have the same problem. The Silver Dollar Saloon series are historicals, correct?

### **Paty Jager**

Yes, they're historical romance. They're set in North Dakota.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Okay. And how many books do you have there so far?

### **Paty Jager**

I have three so far. So it's gonna end up being a six book series.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Oh, I think I only read the first one. I'm not sure. But I do remember that once again, you deal with some issues that people had during that time. You know whether it was issues of race, racism or the fact that certainly women, in that time period, didn't have a lot of rights. And, you know, so what their lives were like. That's one of the things I love about your writing. You're not afraid to take on those issues. And yet you don't go so dark, that, you know, you feel like you're going to be really depressed before the end of the book.

You do see things moving forward in the story, and people taking agency and making sure that, you know, there's not someone coming in to save the poor little woman. The woman's taking agency for herself and, and moving forward. I really liked that about your writing as a whole.

### **Paty Jager**

Thanks. Yes, I like strong women,

### **Maggie Lynch**

As you are yourself. So that makes perfect sense.

We have just a little bit of time left so I'd like to ask you: Is there anything that you thought of, as an author, that you thought, boy, I'd love to write a book like this one that I loved or like that. But you didn't pursue it for some reason.

### **Paty Jager**

Um, I have had a book in the back of my head knocking around for probably 10 years, that would be probably geared toward Middle School, maybe High School. But it deals and again, it's kind of the justice and injustice theme. It deals with how the world all goes one way and it ruins things. And there's a small group over here that's trying to bring it back the way it was. Its kind of it would be where they have to learn to work together and figure out how to get back to the normal or the...I always say the right way. It's not the right way; it's the way that everybody will survive. They have to get back to how everybody can survive. Their way is not working. And they need to go back to this other way.

It's kind of like farmers versus city people. You know, you need to grow your food, you need to do this, you need to do that. And these people will say: Oh, no, we don't. We've got this in the store, we can just go buy it. No, no, no, it comes from here. You know, that type of thing. And so I had this idea, you know, floating around in there for quite a while. I keep remembering it but haven't pursued it.

Years ago, it would have been in the early 80s, I went to a Highlights for Children conference for authors. I was just a brand new newbie, and I thought I was gonna write children's books. And I went back there. And I kept getting told over and over again: You write adult. You write adult. So that stuck in my head. Maybe I can't write this for the younger people. Maybe I need to write it as an adult type book. But yeah, you know, I don't know, it's just one of those things that, you know, you get something stuck in your head, or somebody tells you something, and you just kind of let it keep.

### **Maggie Lynch**

Yeah. Well, that's, that's really interesting. You know, I think a lot of authors, particularly anyone who's had children or grandchildren, at some point think I really should write books for them. At least that's, you know, I've been thinking that lately myself. I did write one children's reader, way back in the late 70s that was published by a University Press. And that was the last one. But I know what you mean, and you write adult so well. It is hard to get that children's voice. But you never know Knowing you, Paty, if you really want to do it you'll find a way to do it somehow.

Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this interview. And for my listeners out there. You can learn more about Paty at her website, which is Paty Jager dot net that's patyjager.net. But I'll put all the links in the show notes for her website, links to her books, and any social media contacts I can find for her.

Thank you for listening and I'll see you next time with another episode of Dust Jackets: Conversations with Authors.