



Chasing Castles
Nineteen Years
Living & Teaching
Ballet in Italy
Barbara File Marangon
 (Ogham Books)

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A Life of Ballet

by Phil Jason

THIS MARVELOUS STORY of nearly two decades of perseverance is filled with colorful vignettes and valuable life lessons. The author takes her readers through a highly creative period of her life, running from her early 30s through her early 50s.

What is success as a ballet teacher? How does one manage to turn craft and teaching skills into a successful business? Most of the book details Barbara's struggle to answer these questions.

As a young woman Barbara File Marangon had prepared for a career in ballet. We meet her during a time when the ex-New Yorker is dancing and training others in Los Angeles. But something is luring her in another geographic and cultural direction. She has fond memories of friendships made in Europe, of refinement of her skills there, and of European performances in which she participated. Ready to live in a kind of exile, and hardly speaking any Italian, she is determined to live and work there. Another motive is the need to withdraw from her doomed, painful relationship with her father.

Venice is the first stop.

What she didn't realize was that she would be a victim of a deeply-rooted European prejudice against foreigners. This affected where she could live, what amenities she could obtain, work opportunities, and many other areas of life. Her Venice experience of feeling like an outsider was offset somewhat by the romance that ended in a marriage to her first husband and her gradual, hard-won successes in developing a career as a ballet teacher.

More opportunities arose outside of Venice – in small towns in which ballet education was well established and in which she was able to make her mark even while dealing with the resentment for an outsider to flourish. Barbara made at least two of those small towns her home.

A successful ballet teaching venture is one in which the students not only perform well but win recognition for the caliber of their performances. This means that the person running the school needs access to performance space that is much more than teaching space.

Barbara had to work her way into a system by which her ballet productions could be witnessed at popular, prestigious venues. It's essentially a patronage system; influential people and businesses would sponsor ballet schools' performance opportunities.

The best musical recordings for the ballets had to be selected, and professional sound and light companies were hired to produce high quality registration for the theaters. Skillful casting is essential to success. Costumes and sets were a whole other crucial world of concern. Who designs and builds them? Where does one store them?

Barbara handled it all.

The life of Barbara's book is in the author's detailed descriptions of the many, many ballet programs that she brought to the public and the many young people she taught. The castles in the memoir's title are important symbols representing steps along Barbara's path to self-discovery. Following that path vicariously will bring readers excitement, elation, some disappointments, and a share of Barbara's sense of accomplishment. With intensity and honesty, she opens the doors to a world unfamiliar to most people.

Barbara File Marangon is a writer, teacher, choreographer, and painter. She holds a BA from Empire State College and an MFA in Dance from the University of Oklahoma, where she received a Ballets Russes Fellowship. Her previous book is *Detour on an Elephant: A Year Dancing with the Greatest Show on Earth*.

Now Barbara and her second husband Gianni, along with two dogs, enjoy life in Port Charlotte, Florida.



Phil: *What led you to commit yourself to this memoir project?*

The castles in the memoir's title are important symbols representing steps along Barbara's path to self-discovery.

BARBARA: As with *Detour on an Elephant*, friends encouraged me to write about the experiences I had in Italy. I felt the urgency that comes with age to write my memoir.

Aside from your memory, what other sources did you need to engage?

I used photos to remember some visual details, and ballet programs and newspaper articles for dates.

Are you an outliner?

Yes. I outlined the shows first. I built the memoir around the memories of that particular year and show.

How do you mix drafting and revising?

I can't resist revising as I am drafting. This is the perfectionist in me! I usually reread what I wrote the day before, make changes, and then continue with the draft.

What was the most difficult or unpleasant part of the endeavor?

Deleting an event that I wrote about after coming to terms with the fact that it no longer had importance for me. It was difficult to remember painful episodes in my life, like the death of my dogs and saying goodbye to my students.

What gave you the most enjoyment?

Reliving on paper some wonderful and funny experiences. The ballet dressmaker comes to my mind. When she wasn't killing chickens, she made costumes for the show. Her final project was making my wedding dress from silk curtains. The curtains were my idea from reading *Gone with the Wind*!

What kind of assistance did you need during the writing and publishing process?

I have the greatest editor, Nancy Whalen, for editing and proofreading. A company in Australia does my formatting and a designer in Oregon produced the cover from my painting.

What kind of person do you imagine as your ideal reader?

Readers who fantasize about living in Italy. I wrote about the Italy that most people don't imagine. Also, readers interested in the making of musical theater and ballet productions in a small Italian village are another audience for the book.

How did this endeavor enhance your self-knowledge?

I searched for famous quotes that helped me to clarify what I learned from my life experiences in each chapter. Also, I feel that sometimes we don't appreciate people or places that had a profound impact on us until we begin writing a memoir. Everything becomes clearer.

Of the experiences you write about in the book, which were the most traumatic? Which gave you the most pleasure or sense of accomplishment? Which were most surprising?

Being beaten and almost killed by my first husband was the most traumatic experience. I felt an enormous sense of accomplishment when I sailed on the Grand Canal in a banana boat filled with scenery, after performing the 'Nutcracker' at the Teatro Goldoni in Venice. The most surprising event was when my dancers won Best Ballet in Barcelona, Spain.

What are the main things you hope your readers come away with?

Pursue your dreams and never give up. Follow the road less traveled and you will find the rewards are great. •