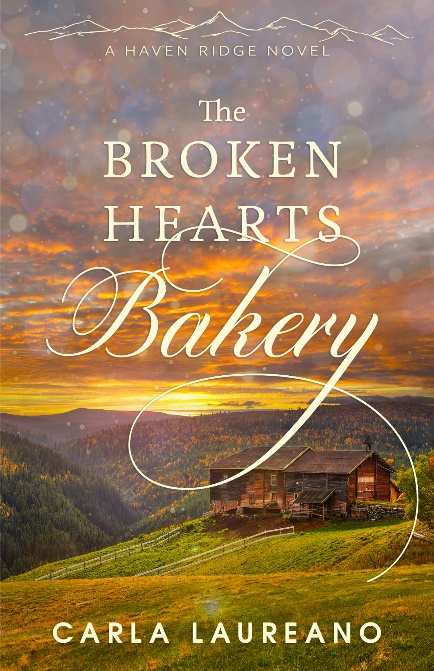
THE BROKEN HEARTS BAKERY

TITLE: The Broken Hearts Bakery

SERIES: Haven Ridge #1

AUTHOR: Carla Laureano

GENRE: Contemporary Romance

(Clean & Wholesome)

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**Fifteen years ago, the town of Haven Ridge failed its most important mandate—to be a sanctuary for heartbroken citizens in need. Now it’s getting a second chance to set things right ...**

When Gemma left her hometown of Haven Ridge, Colorado, years ago in a cloud of controversy, she swore she would never return. And she’s kept that promise, instead building her reputation as one of LA’s preeminent family law attorneys. But when her lifelong best friend begs her to come stay with her teen stepdaughter, Taylor, while she’s on a business trip, Gemma doesn’t have the heart to refuse. She’ll simply keep a low profile, do her honorary aunt duties, and be gone before anyone knows the difference.

But Haven Ridge seems to have a mind of its own, dragging Gemma unwillingly back into the community she’s tried so hard to leave behind, and she soon finds herself caught up with new friends and old rivalries. When Taylor is the object of an ugly bit of teen bullying that brings back far too many unwelcome memories, Gemma does the only thing she knows how to do: ply her honorary niece with baked goods and words of affirmation. Soon, her temporary digs are ground zero for teenage girls seeking sugar and consolation for shockingly adult problems—which the girls soon dub The Broken Hearts Bakery.

Complicating matters is an unexpected reunion with Gemma’s high school sweetheart, Stephen, who is determined to change her mind about him, the town, and the nature of love itself. Because as it turns out, her niece isn’t the only one nursing a broken heart…

**Q&A WITH CARLA LAUREANO**

(Select as many or as few as you like.)

*(Use Control+F (Windows) or Command+F (Mac) to see a full list of questions in the navigation pane)*

*QUESTIONS ABOUT CARLA*

Who or what inspired you to be an author?

I honestly can’t remember when I decided I wanted to write books. I was an early reader (according to my parents, I was reading at three and rather proficient by the time I started kindergarten) so I think the love of books was just kind of intrinsic to my personality. Making up stories was a natural pastime, and I’m sure the encouragement I got from my parents and teachers helped, particularly my eighth-grade English teacher, who helped me get a short story published in a small fiction newsletter. (She and I are still in contact—how fun is that?) By the time I was in high school, I knew there was nothing else I’d rather do with my life. It just took another twenty years or so to make that a reality!

What’s your writing process? How has it changed over time as you come up on ten years of publishing?

I used to be a dyed-in-the-wool pantser who just followed wherever the story took me and then revised in successive drafts, sometimes as many as nine or ten. It worked for me (my debut novel won an RWA RITA® Award!) but I soon learned that it took much too long and was far too unstructured when writing under contract with deadlines. Over time, I’ve turned myself into a hard-core plotter, using questionnaires and plotting tools that combine the best of my favorite plotting methods in one process. By the time I start writing, I know exactly where the story is going to go, and it normally takes me a first draft and one revision to get the book ready to go to my beta readers. After they’ve had a chance to read and comment, I do another draft to incorporate their suggestions or fix mistakes they’ve caught, and then it goes to my editor.

How long does it take you to write a novel?

It really depends on the book and the genre. For contemporary romance, since the world-building and research are less involved than something like fantasy or science fiction, I can have the book done from premise to written (not counting professional editing) in about eight weeks. That doesn’t count a few weeks here and there to incorporate editorial comments.

Compare that to a fantasy series I’ve been tinkering with for the last two years, and you can see why I publish way more romances than I do fantasy!

What’s a typical day like for you?

I get up relatively early (about 6:30) to get ready and make my younger son’s lunch. I then spend half an hour trying to get him out of bed once he’s ignored three alarms (teenagers!) and drive him to school, which is across town. By the time I get home, it’s closing on nine, so I eat breakfast and do my daily devotions, then get started on writing or editing my current WIP. At noon I take a break to work out (I alternate daily between Pilates and a walk around the neighborhood when the weather is nice or some time on the rowing machine when it’s not) and then eat lunch. I’m back to work at 1:15, where I work on marketing, book production tasks, or client work until it’s time to go pick up aforementioned son at school. After we get home, I try to squeeze in an hour or two of work on random tasks that don’t fit into the other categories, like returning emails, accounting, invoicing, etc. And then I move on to personal stuff like making dinner and spending time with my family! If I’m lucky, I might even be able to squeeze in an hour of reading before bed. My schedule is pretty packed, but because I’m strategic about how I approach my tasks, I can get a lot done each day.

You run an editing and coaching business on top of your writing. How do you manage your workload, especially with book deadlines?

I schedule every hour of my day. I’ve always been a list-maker and years of project management in my previous life as a corporate marketer gave me a good foundation for breaking down tasks (like writing and publishing a book) into achievable chunks under a deadline.

What really turned things around for me was a book I stumbled across thanks to a Facebook ad, called *Winning the Week* by Demir and Carey Bentley. Unlike other productivity gurus, they acknowledge that there will always be too much work to accomplish in any given time period, whether it’s a day or the year. The key to success is to determine what tasks will get move you forward to achieve your goals and prioritize those, while scheduling time for the urgent things that have to be done to keep your business and life moving forward. For me, those two priorities are writing good books and delivering value to my editing and coaching clients. So in the morning, the first thing I work on when sitting down at my desk is my word count, and in the afternoon, it’s one of my current client projects, whether that’s editing a novel or coaching an author through the publication process.

At the end of every week, I take an hour to plan out and schedule my next two weeks based on deadlines and current/upcoming projects. Knowing what I’m supposed to be doing every hour of the day cuts down on all that wasted time trying to figure out to tackle next! I thought I would find it stifling, but surprisingly it’s been very freeing to my creativity. I guess it’s a bit like wearing a “uniform” so you don’t have to waste precious decision-making power on choosing your wardrobe.

What comes first when you start a book: plot or characters?

It’s different with every single book! In the case of the Haven Ridge series, I actually started out with all the book titles in the series and then created the characters from there. But in almost every case, the characters come before the plot. I decide who they are, what they want, and who their love interests will be, and then I develop the plot points that will make them grow most as people (and pose as many challenges to reaching their goals as possible!). That probably sounds really unromantic, especially to writers who like to discover their characters as they go, but I definitely “construct” my books rather than let them happen on their own. The joy and the artistry comes in on the detail level as they come to life on the page. I feel like having the framework of the story already laid out gives me the freedom to focus on character development and emotion, whether it be humor or drama.

What’s your favorite thing about writing?

I love that first delicious inspiration of an idea, when all the various possibilities are spread out before me. I know the hard work comes after, so it’s really fun to just daydream and consider all the different ways the story could unfold.

What’s the hardest thing about writing for you?

I always say whatever aspect I’m currently in, but right now I think it’s the final editing passes. I like the first draft, I like the first edit, and I don’t even mind incorporating the changes from my beta readers! But by the time I get to the final draft from my editor(s), I’ve read the book so many times I just want to move on to the next one. Persevering to get it that last 10% toward readiness is always a challenge. (Though, when I think about it, that’s *always* my challenge… even with home improvement projects, I tend to get distracted and bored before I put the very final finishing touches on them!)

What advice do you have for someone who wants to write a novel for publication?

My best advice is to write the novel, put it in the drawer, and then write another one. Maybe even another one after that. Novel-writing is a skill—a teachable, achievable skill—but one that takes practice to master. There’s such an emphasis on the business aspect of selling a novel, especially with self-publishing being such a viable option, that new writers are often worried about covers and readers and advertising before they ever have a finished draft! Consequently, I think they’re missing out on the apprenticeship period we pre-internet old timers got: writing books, sending out physical copies to agents and editors, and working on new projects while we were waiting for responses by snail mail! I’m grateful for the modern convenience of email (and even more grateful for tools and platforms that allow us to publish ourselves, if desired) but there’s something to be said for that slow development of skill from necessity. We couldn’t rush things because we didn’t have the option. Give yourself time to become really, really good at writing novels before you start worrying about the rest.

What’s the best writing advice you’ve ever been given?

I was considering a creative writing minor in college, but my faculty advisor dissuaded me from it. He told me that I already had a distinct, recognizable voice, and my time was better spent learning to hone that through reading good books and writing new works than in learning how to write like someone else. While I do think creative writing classes can be useful to teach the mechanics of novel-writing (and grammar! don’t forget grammar!), I definitely appreciate the reminder to hone my own unique voice rather than waste time wishing I wrote like someone else!

Have you ever traveled as research for your book?

Yes! We actually took a family trip to Salida, Colorado a little over a year ago as research for this book series… and a few years ago I seized the opportunity to meet my husband in London (he was in Europe on business) so I could do some research for my novella *Starstruck*. To be honest, I would have gone anyway, but being able to do double-duty for research just made it better.

What’s your favorite writing snack or drink?

I try not to snack too much while I’m writing, but I typically have a cup of tea at hand for most of the day.

How do you celebrate when you finish your book?

Oh, I really should do that, shouldn’t I! I’m very task-oriented in my daily life, so I usually forget to celebrate the completion of a first draft or publication day. I need to schedule those special treats into my calendar!

Do you have a writing mascot?

Our eight-year-old cat, Willow. She’s a blue-cream dilute tortie with every bit of personality you would expect from that breed. She’s starting to get older, so she spends the morning sleeping in one of the kids’ rooms, but she’ll come visit me in my office each afternoon to walk across my keyboard, knock things off my desk, or wiggle her way into my lap. Sometimes I end up typing with her draped across one arm.

Your past couple of books have been clean contemporary romance instead of Christian. Why did you decide to make the change?

I’ve always been on the border of clean and Christian; because my first ten books were with Christian publishers, I naturally chose to write stories that had a clear, if light, spiritual message. But not all the ideas I’ve had neatly fit into the Christian fiction mold, and at times I’ve wanted to tackle issues or write stories that didn’t lend themselves to an overt Christian message. I’m writing those stories now. That doesn’t mean I won’t continue to write Christian fiction in the future, but for now I’m focusing on stories with a positive message to reach readers who might bypass Christian fiction strictly because of the label.

Up until now, you’ve published your books with a traditional publisher. Why did you decide to indie-publish this time around?

I don’t think there’s anyone in the world that can’t say the last three years have been difficult, but for me, the last decade has been especially difficult because of health problems and life changes and family challenges. It’s been a constant state of feast or famine: I’ve felt like either I have time to write a lot more books than my publishers can/want to publish or I’m struggling to even meet the deadline for one. It made sense to pursue indie publishing for the flexibility. And I really love the business aspects of publishing, so it’s fun to take on everything from book design to marketing plans myself.

*QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BROKEN HEARTS BAKERY AND THE HAVEN RIDGE SERIES*

What is the Haven Ridge series about?

The Haven Ridge series is a small-town romance series with a magical realism twist: the town has gotten away from its founding mission to provide a haven for people who needed a fresh start and a community, and as such, it’s slowly dwindling away. The prequel novella, *The Brick House Cafe,* goes into the history of the town and its goal to rebuild itself by drawing back the people it needs and who in turn need it. Each full length shows how the town draws people together and how the people in it contribute to the new life of the town!

What is *The Broken Hearts Bakery* about?

When Gemma left her hometown of Haven Ridge, Colorado, years ago in a cloud of controversy, she swore she would never return. And she’s kept that promise, instead building her reputation as one of LA’s preeminent family law attorneys. But when her lifelong best friend begs her to come stay with her teen stepdaughter, Taylor, while she’s on a business trip, Gemma doesn’t have the heart to refuse. She’ll simply keep a low profile, do her honorary aunt duties, and be gone before anyone knows the difference.

But Haven Ridge seems to have a mind of its own, dragging Gemma unwillingly back into the community she’s tried so hard to leave behind, and she soon finds herself caught up with new friends and old rivalries. When Taylor is the object of an ugly bit of teen bullying that brings back far too many unwelcome memories, Gemma does the only thing she knows how to do: ply her honorary niece with baked goods and words of affirmation. Soon, her temporary digs are ground zero for teenage girls seeking sugar and consolation for shockingly adult problems—which the girls soon dub The Broken Hearts Bakery.

Complicating matters is an unexpected reunion with Gemma’s high school sweetheart, Stephen, who is determined to change her mind about him, the town, and the nature of love itself. Because as it turns out, her niece isn’t the only one nursing a broken heart…

*The Broken Hearts Bakery* deals some heavy subjects. Why did you choose those to write about?

I’ve witnessed several friends extricate themselves from abusive marriages over the last couple of years and I’ve seen how difficult it was for them to find attorneys who believed them and would take their cases—which is in part how the character of Gemma came about. Likewise, I’m the moms to two teens and hearing the kinds of issues they and their friends are dealing with can be heartbreaking. Over the course of writing, those two things wove together into one of the central messages: that everyone has the right to feel safe and to make their own choices without threat or coercion.

What was the easiest scene in The Broken Hearts Bakery to write?

There’s a scene with Gemma’s honorary niece and her friends where they’re talking about tough relationship issues. That was inspired by my own conversations with my older son about some of the things that were going on in his friend group. Writing the teens felt very natural because my house is always full of them!

What was the hardest scene in The Broken Hearts Bakery to write?

This story actually came together fairly easily compared to some past books. But for some reason the kissing scenes took me *forever* to write, and I’m not sure why! Maybe because these are just slightly spicier than the scenes in my previous books, and I wanted to strike the balance between realism between two characters who had a prior relationship and not crossing the line into *too* spicy.

What is your favorite scene involving Gemma and Stephen?

I love the Capture the Flag scene where a playful, impulsive gesture turns serious. I’m not giving away anything else because I don’t want to ruin it … but it was one of my beta readers’ favorite parts too.

Which character was the hardest to write?

Gemma was actually somewhat tricky. On one hand, she’s very businesslike and hyper-rational; on the other, she’s deeply wounded and trying to paper over those feelings with professionalism and denial. Being authentic to her experiences while still making her likeable and relatable was challenging.

Which character was the easiest to write?

Gemma’s best friend, Liv! She’s fun and sunny, and while she doesn’t have a ton of page time, she’s still an important character. (It’s a good thing I feel this way, because I get to write her story next!)

Did anything surprise you as you were writing the book?

I started out with a couple of different subplots for different side characters, and I wasn’t really sure how I was going to make them all work together, so I was surprised that they actually did dovetail together under a single message/theme by the time I was done.

Where did you get the idea for this book?

The title came first, and I thought it up several years ago. I had absolutely no intention to write any more food-related books, but the phrase just kind of popped into my head and wouldn’t let me go. There have actually been a couple of different iterations of this book with different plots and Gemma and Stephen underwent a major transformation over time—it took me a while to find the right story to tell.

What kind of research did you do to write this series?

The majority of my research involved the setting: Haven Ridge is set rather vaguely in a real area of southern Colorado, between Salida and Buena Vista. It has a colorful and interesting history, so coming up with a founding story that was plausible (as detailed in the prequel novella, *The Brick House Café*) and fit with the actual history of the area was my first priority. From there, it was getting the architectural and topographical details right. And then there’s the usual character-based stuff, like the handful of legal details that came into play in Gemma’s point-of-view! (By total coincidence, one of my beta readers is a law professor, which was super helpful.)

Why did you choose the professions for your characters that you did?

With a title like *The Broken Hearts Bakery*, I asked myself who would be the most unlikely romance novel heroine I could write. Clearly, the answer has to be divorce lawyer! Someone who has seen her share of broken hearts and has good personal and professional reasons not to believe in love. But she had to be someone who secretly *wanted* to believe in love and didn’t delight in the idea of divorce, hence her determination to only take clients who were being taken advantage of by their spouses.

On the other side, I needed a hero who would be Gemma’s opposite in a lot of ways … who better than a high school literature teacher? I have the greatest respect for teachers and I’ve been so grateful for those who have been a positive force in my children’s lives. A guy who loves books, has a desire to help teens, and believes in true love was the ideal foil for my battered and disenchanted attorney.

Make him the one who helped sour the heroine on love in the first place? Absolute dramatic gold. This is one of my very favorite pairings out of all the heroic couples I’ve written.

Most of your books are set in Colorado. Is Haven Ridge based on a real place, or is it made up?

Haven Ridge is completely made up, but it’s heavily based on Salida, Colorado, which is in the same area. Given the fact that they were founded about the same time and sit in the same general area, it made sense to model the architecture and hot springs on the real place.

What can we expect next from you?

I’m planning for the Haven Ridge series to run for at least four books, not including the prequel, so you can expect three more after this one! I’m hoping to finish up the series with a Christmas novel, which will be the first one I’ve ever written.

What can you tell us about the next book in the Haven Ridge series?

The next book in the series is *The Beacon Street Bookshop*, and it will be the story of Gemma’s best friend, Liv, who has been widowed young and is not in any way looking for love again. I’ve been wanting to write a second-chance-after-tragedy story *and* a bookshop story for ages, so I’m very excited to get to write this one!

LIGHTNING Q&A WITH CARLA LAUREANO

(Select as many or as few as you like.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Texting or talking?** | Texting |
| **Letter or email?** | Email |
| **Favorite city besides the one you live in?** | London |
| **Favorite holiday?** | Christmas |
| **Favorite season?** | Autumn |
| **Favorite day of the week?** | Friday |
| **Dogs or cats?** | Cats, because I’m allergic to dogs |
| **Climb a mountain or jump from a plane?** | Climb a mountain |
| **Favorite junk food?** | Any Starbucks drink |
| **Guilty pleasure food?** | Laffy Taffy |
| **Coffee, tea, or hot chocolate?** | Tea |
| **Cake or pie?** | Pie |
| **Favorite ice cream flavor?** | Coffee Heath Bar or Butter Pecan |
| **Favorite muffin flavor?** | Blueberry |
| **What type of milk do you put in your cereal?** | Whole cow’s milk from our local dairy (though I don’t eat cereal) |
| **What’s something you could eat for a week straight?** | Tacos |
| **Dark chocolate or milk Chocolate?** | ALL THE CHOCOLATE |
| **Polka dots or stripes?** | Stripes |
| **Paper or electronic calendar?** | Electronic |
| **Movie or book?** | Book |
| **First romance novel?** | *The Conquest* by Jude Devereaux |
| **Favorite author?** | Naomi Novik |
| **Favorite Harry Potter character?** | Luna Lovegood |
| **Favorite Star Wars character?** | Han Solo |
| **First concert?** | Prayer Chain (Christian rock) |
| **First CD/album?** | *Tell It To My Heart,* Taylor Dayne |
| **Lipstick or Chapstick?** | Chapstick |
| **Jeans or skirts?** | Jeans |
| **Early riser or night owl?** | Early riser by necessity, night owl by nature |
| **East coast or west coast?** | West coast |
| **Europe or Asia?** | Both |
| **Walk or bike?** | Walk |
| **Plane or train?** | Plane in the US, train in Europe |
| **Campground or vacation rental?** | Vacation rental |
| **Mountains or beach?** | Beach…no, mountains…no, beach! I’d take either. |
| **Bowling or miniature golf?** | Bowling |
| **Museum or concert?** | Museum |
| **Theater or ballet?** | Ballet |