THE BEACON STREET BOOKSHOP

TITLE: The Beacon Street Bookshop

SERIES: Haven Ridge #2

AUTHOR: Carla Laureano

GENRE: Contemporary Romance

(Clean & Wholesome)

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**Sometimes when one door closes, a bookshop opens…**

Ever since Olivia Quinn lost her husband to a plane crash, she’s been focused on one thing—making a stable life for her teen stepdaughter, Taylor, of whom she’s the sole guardian. But when she loses her job as a children’s book editor because she refuses to relocate to New York, three years of hard-won stability are shattered.

Then the opportunity arises to open Liv’s dream bookshop in Haven Ridge. The venture offers not only the solution to her financial problems, but a chance to bond with her stepdaughter and become a real family for the first time. Soon, the wild idea transforms into a thriving nonprofit, thanks to the generosity and enthusiasm of the town—and a handsome contractor who stirs feelings in Liv she thought might be gone forever.

But just as she begins to lean into the new life she’s made for herself, a figure from her late husband’s past puts the life she’s been building with Taylor in jeopardy. And Liv must face the possibility that following her heart might just cost her a daughter.

**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 the shuttle stop, where he rides a shuttle to his high school. When I get home, 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 or treadmill when it’s not) and then eat lunch. I’m back to work by 1:15, where I work on marketing, book production tasks, or client work until it’s time to go pick up aforementioned son from the shuttle stop. 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 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 series?

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 BEACON STREET BOOKSHOP 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 Beacon Street Bookshop* about?

I introduced Liv Quinn in *The Broken Hearts Bakery* as the catalyst that got Gemma back to Haven Ridge, and we got a little window into her struggles of being a young window and guardian of a teenage stepdaughter. We also saw she was facing a pretty big work decision—stay in Haven Ridge or move back to New York in order to keep her job. It probably surprises no one that she decided to stay in Haven Ridge, but this story is about how she deals with all the change in her life—not the least being how to incorporate romance back into it while raising her late husband’s daughter.

I love this story because it’s angsty and heartfelt, but it’s still got some delicious new-love tingles throughout. This is definitely the most romantic book of the series so far.

*The Beacon Street Bookshop* has some serious themes. Why did you choose to write about them in this book?

I’m in a similar phase in life to Liv—I have two teenage boys, a recent high school graduate who is continuing his education and starting his career, and one who is just entering the high school years. There are lots of feelings attached to this phase of parenting, not the least of which is figuring out where to draw the line between letting them have their independence and still remaining a strong influence in their lives. I channeled some of that uncertainty into Liv, made more difficult by the fact that she hadn’t raised Taylor since birth and has a bit of a complex about being the stepmom.

What was the easiest scene in *The Beacon Street Bookshop* to write?

I’ve had the meet cute between Liv and Charlie in my head since the beginning of the series, so I couldn’t wait to get it down on paper. “Love” at first sight is super fun to write, especially when the parties involved are completely determined not to acknowledge it.

What was the hardest scene in *The Beacon Street Bookshop* to write?

Believe it or not, the final chapter before the epilogue! And I don’t think it was all that successful initially, because my beta readers said it fell a little flat. So I had to rewrite that last chapter and the epilogue several times until I felt like I’d given readers (and the characters) enough closure to end the book. But I love the way it turned out in the end. Liv and Charlie’s happy ending feels really satisfying now.

What is your favorite scene involving Liv and Charlie?

There’s a particular scene where Liv is served up a gut punch and her first instinct is to ask Charlie to stay with her. Until then she’d been sort of resisting what he meant to her, but he’s the one that she wants for support when the chips are down.

Which character was the hardest to write?

Probably Taylor. She’s very mercurial, so I was constantly walking the line between her being sympathetic and irritating (like a real teenager, at times). I’m not going to say that I drew from some of the more difficult moments of my parenting journey, but let’s just say that I sympathize with Liv over Taylor’s bouts of snottiness.

Which character was the easiest to write?

Liv felt very natural to write, which is a surprise because she’s less like me than some of the other characters in the series. But I’ve always liked her combination of determination and self-doubt, which is something I think we can all relate to.

What would readers never guess about the writing of the book?

This is a much-abbreviated version of the first draft! I always find the second full-length books in a series a bit difficult to write because I have to incorporate everything that’s happened before as well as set up the books to come… and that was reflected in the fact that the book was about fifty pages too long! It took a very painful process of cutting and rearranging to get this into its final format. (Aspiring authors who aren’t happy with their first drafts take heart!)

Where did you get the idea for this book?

I knew that I was going to get Liv together with a down-on-his-luck contractor who was the polar opposite from her late husband as soon as I conceived of the empty accessory unit above her garage and the work-in-progress kitchen…long before the other books were written! But as I started to develop the Haven Ridge series, I decided to lean into all the businesses and features about small town life that gave me warm fuzzies. And small independent bookstores are one of the things I love best (along with bakeries) so it was natural to make Liv part of the book world and have her open a bookshop.

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 Cafe*) and fit with the actual history of the area was my first priority. From there, it was getting the architectural and topographical details right. Fortunately, my experience in publishing made writing Liv pretty easy, but I did have to email the very kind and helpful people at the Chaffee County Building Department about how contractor licenses worked in the area.

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 two 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 Larkspur House*. It will be the story of Will Parker, who we got to meet briefly in *The Beacon Street Bookshop*, his sister, Erin, and a brand-new heroine that we haven’t yet met! Plus lots of historic-mansion vibes and a century-old mystery. I think readers who enjoyed *Provenance* are going to like this one!

LIGHTNING Q&A WITH CARLA LAUREANO

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Desktop or laptop?** | Laptop |
| **Give a speech or write a paper?** | Write a paper (naturally) |
| **Take a class or learn from a book?** | Learn from a book |
| **Play or musical?** | Musical |
| **Paperback or hardcover?** | Hardcover |
| **Audiobook or e-book?** | E-book (I can’t do audiobooks!) |
| **TV series or movies?** | TV series |
| **Board games or card games?** | Card games |
| **Fantasy or drama?** | Fantasy |
| **Arctic vacation or tropical vacation?** | Tropical |
| **Hot weather or cold weather?** | Cold weather to live, hot for vacation |
| **Snowball fight or water balloon fight?** | Snowball fight (no plastic to pick up!) |
| **Roses or lilies?** | Lilies for cut flowers, roses for planted flowers |
| **Fresh flowers or potted plants?** | Potted plants (as long as my husband takes care of them—I kill plants!) |
| **Pancakes or waffles?** | Waffles |
| **Cupcakes or donuts?** | Donuts |
| **Cadbury or Hershey?** | Cadbury |
| **Mexican food or Lebanese food?** | Lebanese (mmm!) |
| **Tacos or burritos?** | Tacos |
| **Shopping in-store or online?** | Online |
| **Hotel or camping?** | Hotel! |
| **Workout at home or at the gym?** | Workout at home |
| **Travel constantly or never leave home?** | Never leave home |
| **Travel alone or travel with friends/family?** | Travel with friends and family |
| **Foresee the future or change the past?** | Foresee the future |
| **Stop using paper or stop using plastic?** | Stop using plastic (I mostly have anyway!) |
| **Do the laundry or do the dishes?** | Do the laundry |
| **Silly socks or funny t-shirts?** | Silly socks |
| **Antique trinkets or used books?** | Antique trinkets |
| **Fireplaces or comfy sofas?** | Can’t I have both? (Fireplaces if I must choose…) |
| **House or condo?** | House |
| **Front porch or back deck?** | Back deck |
| **Cat or dog?** | Cat (sadly, I’m very allergic to dogs) |
| **Bunny or squirrel?** | Bunny! |
| **Day or night?** | Night |
| **Sunrise or sunset?** | Sunset |
| **Climb a mountain or run a mile?** | Climb a mountain |