

Carrie Aulenbacher describes herself as a secretary by day and a published author by night. Aulenbacher, 36, of Erie, is a newly published author and an executive administrative assistant for Lake Erie Logistics and Benco Leasing. Her romance novel, "Early Bird Cafe," hit shelves in June, published by Page Publishing.

"I believe writing chose me," she said. "I was creating stories with my best friend from the time we were eight and my imagination hasn't stopped yet." Getting her novel published, even after it was accepted by a publisher, was no easy task.

"Getting accepted was just the beginning of a long road to the finished product," she said. "I worked for well over six months and with two separate editors to polish my manuscript."

"The Early Bird Cafe" is available in Erie at Werner Books, 3514 Liberty St., and Barnes and Noble, 5909 Peach St., or online at Amazon, Apple iBooks, Google or the Barnes and Noble website.

The Basics

Name: Carrie Aulenbacher

Family: Married

Lives in: Erie

College/degree: Associate degree, Erie Business Center

Profession: Executive administrative assistant for Lake Erie Logistics and Benco Leasing in Erie and published author

Originally from: Erie

Favorite thing about Erie: I love the diversity of our region -- from woods to beaches, farmlands and industrial areas, everything I need is just a 5 minute drive away!

Website: www.carrieaulenbacher.com

Twitter: @Aully1

Facebook: facebook.com/carrieaulenbacher

Google+: google.com/+CarrieaulenbacherEarlyBirdCafe

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/carrieaulenbacher/

Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/aulenbacher1/

Right now, what are you:

Reading? "The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Perilous Journey," by Trenton Lee Stewart

Listening to? "Black Train Song" by The Doors recorded live at the Spectrum, Philadelphia, 1970 -- at least until Santa brings me the new Garth Brooks CD.

Watching? I've been enjoying Fox's "Sleepy Hollow" every Monday night (fanning myself thinking of Tom Mison)

Erie Times-News: Describe your career path.

Carrie Aulenbacher: I'm a third-generation trucker, so logistics is in my blood. My gramps worked for Lyons Transportation here in Erie as a dispatcher. My father works for E. L. Heard & Son in Waterford hauling fuel. It was natural for me to end up around trucking. My initial goal was to find a company where I could be a part of a team and just help out doing whatever they needed done. When I arrived here at Lake Erie Logistics, (then T.W.L Corp.) I was instantly attracted to the familiarity of trucks -- it felt like home. Now I can't imagine working anywhere else.

ETN: Why did you choose your profession or your area of work?

CA: Everybody has a ringing phone that needs answered and everybody has papers that need filing. I went through Erie Business Center and got a degree that provided me the flexibility to work at any company, which opened a ton of doors for me.

As for my night job, I believe writing chose me. I was creating stories with my best friend from the time we were eight -- and my imagination hasn't stopped yet. It's a great way for me to express myself and to find satisfaction in such a creative outlet.

ETN: How did you end up in Erie?

CA: I grew up here and I honestly can't imagine living anywhere else. I know we all have days where the lake effect is trying, but I really am in love with Erie.

ETN: How would you describe what you do on a daily basis to a complete stranger?

CA: Technically, I'm an executive administrative assistant and social media coordinator for the Transportation Investment Group family of companies. But by the time I got that mouthful out, I'm sure that the complete stranger would probably have crossed the street trying to get away from me as if I were a nut.

I'm a secretary, a mom and a published author. Not necessarily in that order.

ETN: Tell us a little bit about your newest book.

CA: "The Early Bird Cafe" is for those thirty- and forty-something women who feel that their career has become their lover -- for those who feel they might have missed out on that "one great love" of their life.

For as fast as life goes, many women feel that, if they haven't crashed into an amazing love affair like is shown in the movies by the time they're out of college, then it's never going to happen for them. I invite them to jump into my book and think about the possibility of love being no further away from them than right across the table. That's what sets my book apart from most other romance novels out there -- this isn't some "out of the blue" random meeting between two people. This is the story of two longtime friends who are way past puppy love and are at that point in their lives where they wonder if it's too late for them. In the spirit of "The Notebook," the tale of Jim and Eve will inspire the reader not to give up on the true love of their life.

ETN: What's your favorite thing about the job?

CA: What I love about writing is the chance for me to delve into other worlds and visit some really great characters -- and Jim and Eve are two really fascinating friends. Since I've spent a lot of time with them, they have taken on a life of their own. So, to write about them is not simply to chronicle what they do but to visit their end of town and have them tell me what's going on. I don't always know what they're going to do and that is what thrills me each time I begin to write.

ETN: Least favorite thing about the job?

CA: The flip side to that is that it's hard for me to storyboard and plan out to the nth degree when working on a book. I might try to sketch out a plot, but it always ends up changing as the characters take things into their own hands. Granted, this does end up taking longer, but it always makes for a better product in the end. It always feels more authentic to me when things come to life like that.

ETN: What's your funniest story/moment on the job?

CA: Oh, my day job never ceases to humor me. I've had calls on the switchboard of people asking me how to get to the front offices. When I asked them where they were at, they explained they were at the back of my building ... which gave me pause. To specifically ask for the front offices while knowing you're at the back of the same building (smirking to myself), let's just say it took a little tongue-biting to direct them to walk to the front of the building without laughing.

So far, the funniest moment of being an author was getting back the preliminary cover art for the book. My friend can attest to this as she was the only other person who saw it. The character on the front was completely different from anything the main character looked like. Let's just say that, after the shock wore off and I sent it back, we had a huge laugh about the creepy look to the cafe and the stranger on the cover.

ETN: Share a few tips to a successful career and life.

CA: Trust that you are good enough. Life is so short. People take too much time doubting themselves. Whatever you are thinking about trying in 2015, do it. Take that step and just try.

You'll never know if you don't try, which is exactly what my husband told me about submitting my manuscript. I never thought it was good enough to print. So when they called and told me they accepted it, my world changed. So change the world and do that thing you've been afraid to do. I'm just a regular gal and if I can do it, you can do it too.

ETN: As an author, how do you get a piece that you've written published?

CA: People have many options these days --- from uploading something free to the Internet, to vanity-publishing through do-it-yourself programs as provided by Amazon, to sending your manuscript to a publishing house and trying to get accepted. I tried the third route with Page Publishing in New York City. They are looking for new authors, but are not a vanity publisher as they have a rigorous review process. Getting accepted was just the beginning of a long road to the finished product, however.

I worked for well over six months and with two separate editors to polish my manuscript. Every round of edits helped me tighten my writing and helped me learn to be a better writer. By the time we got through working out cover art and formatting, my simple manuscript, a previous "shiny rock" had turned into a finished "diamond."

ETN: Is it an extensive or time-consuming process?

CA: The process, whichever direction you choose, can be as extensive or as simple as you want it to be. For those going the self-publishing route, they can upload their manuscript today and start selling their book tomorrow. Some choose to hand out the rough draft to beta readers to get feedback first.

As I said, I worked with two separate editors and four long edits. They started out editing my rough draft. I edited their edit, handed it back to them; they read through my changes and sent it back, etcetera. I wasn't simply looking for grammar errors, but plot inconsistencies as well.

The thought of having this on my shelf forever made me want to take as long as it took to be sure that it was as absolutely good as it could possibly be. I'm really satisfied with a yearlong process because I know that it's a really strong book that fans are going to enjoy. The love growing between Jim and Eve is just as consuming a process as creating their story was.

ETN: What are some challenges you face as an author and writer?

CA: Time is probably the biggest challenge in my day. As a full-time secretary with a young family at home, my day is already split between the five divisions of my company at my day job, caring for my family and household in the evening and finding time to write somewhere in between. But, by sticking to a schedule, I find that I can squeeze in time for five social media profiles, two newsletters, three blogs, two jobs and my sequel. Thank goodness I have a wonderful husband who is like my right hand. Together, we manage to get it all done so I can find that time to write stories my fans love.

The second biggest challenge is one you're helping me with today and that's getting the word out. People might not think they can make a difference, but having a timeless story on a subject everyone can relate to is only half the equation. The support of this local community is the secret ingredient for 2015. Having fans follow me and share through social media and word of mouth truly helps spread the word about "The Early Bird Cafe."

ETN: What are your expectations of yourself as an author?

CA: My expectations are to make the most of this opportunity and strike while the iron is hot. Not many people get the chance to have a company take on their book, like Page did for me. And when I was invited on to their radio show earlier this year, I saw it as a chance to build momentum. I went from there to "The Authors Show" with Don McCauley and then "The Michael Dresser Show." I hope to do more radio in 2015, maybe even local.

I expect to work hard daily to put my all into my book. I might not have another chance like this, and I only have today but once, so I've been learning about verifying sites, inserting meta tags, studying keywords, reading my analytics reports and bringing my fans what they want to hear. I certainly don't expect to sit back and selling anything without putting a lot of work into it.

ETN: What's the best advice you ever received pertaining to your career and life?

CA: The absolute best advice that I always carry with me is from my mom, who has always told me that I can be anything I want to be and that I shouldn't listen to anyone who ever tells me that I can't do something. It's a philosophy I live by -- and people have challenged me over the years. But I am blessed to have found my husband, who totally agrees with that and who supports me in everything I do. Any time I start to doubt, I turn to them and remember that I can do it.

As for my career, Mr. Benacci once told me, "Do what you need to do in order to do your job." At the time, we were discussing something little, but I kept that with me as the years have passed. He's a fantastic boss who is willing to work with employees if they're willing to work just as hard. I find that, over the years, if I'm trying to accomplish a project at work, and I'm meeting a roadblock, I don't let that stop me. I find a way to do what I need to in order to get the job done. It's served me well these past 15 years with the Benaccis and I certainly hope it keeps working for another 15.

ETN: How does your career as an author fit in Erie? Does the public respond well?

CA: This is going to be the burning question in 2015. So far, I've been hearing a lot of good feedback online from fans who are spread out across the world. The U.K. is very kind and I'm sending over three signed copies to one buyer (this past) week. Now that I am available in Werner Books in the Liberty Plaza and at the Peach Street Barnes & Noble, I hope to come in contact with many more Erie readers who are looking for a great romance. They'll find that this isn't erotica, but a complicated and fascinating love story that resonates with what they might have been going through in their own lives at some point.

I feel that my writing career benefits from the Erie atmosphere because I have a real plethora of scenery and settings from which to gather inspiration. I am surrounded by gorgeous woods, I'm a mile away from the beach, I'm five minutes away from the opportunity to people watch at our local shopping centers, and I don't have to explain just how inspiring our ever fluctuating weather can be! Many times, the unexpected weather changes have provided me with excellent inspiration for that next plot twist. I'm blessed to be in Erie, and I'm always finding new things to write about just by living here.

ETN: What's something many don't know about being an author or writer?

CA: These days, no matter which company you work with, the term author no longer means sculptor of words. Whether traditionally published or self-published, author means salesman and marketer too. By definition, a publisher's job is to get the book made. Many authors expect the publisher to then turn into their agent and sell the book as well as make it. But that's not their job; that's our job.

No author should expect to take their brand-new book baby home and expect it to stand up and run any more than they'd expect that out of a newborn baby. Book babies have to be nurtured by their parents just like little kids. We have to take the time to broadcast this new creation, to notify reviewers, to schedule interviews, create the buzz that the book baby needs so that it can learn to walk. All authors these days work endlessly to get in contact with their target audience in whatever way they can. And, after a lot of hard work, there's nothing more satisfying than seeing that book baby take off and run.

ETN: What is something people may not know about you?

CA: People may not know that I challenged myself with a project this summer to try and work on my microphotography through cataloging the insects and arachnids in my backyard. Those two albums on my Facebook are currently at 100 and ever growing. To get an up-close look of some of the local arthropodology is so fascinating -- there are more varieties locally than one might think. While I'm waiting for spring, I'm going to try my hand at close-ups of snowflakes.