

CARL COTA-ROBLES

Author Story:

It was 2002. Carl was out of town when his parents decided to get a divorce. He was playing chess with a friend in the national tournament in Tennessee, and when he returned to his hometown of Portland, OR, his parents told him the news. All the signs had been there. The arguing, the throwing of dishes until they shattered against the kitchen walls, the drawing of lines by Carl and his sisters to separate the house into his side and her side so mom and dad couldn't fight. The divorce brought pain for Carl, but it also brought him something else: his love for writing.

In 2003, Carl read *Eragon*. Inspired by Christopher Paolini, who Carl had heard was only 15 when he wrote the book, Carl became determined to write a similar book. Around the same time, his mother went on a work trip to New Orleans and brought back a red mardi-gras mask. He used that as inspiration for his first book, which he wrote in 6th grade, in 2004, rewrote in 8th grade, in 2005/2006, and pitched at the Willamette Writers Conference all throughout high school.

Carl was also inspired by other books along the way. He read all of D.J. MacHale's *Pendragon* series, and even met the author at a signing at his local

bookstore. He also read and enjoyed *Harry Potter*, *The Ranger's Apprentice*, *Percy Jackson*, *The Bartimaeus Trilogy*, *The Guardians of Time*, and many more books. Reading, and writing, gave him a way to escape, and he wrote stories about vampire thieves, intelligent mice, and time travelers exploring a future with giant insects. None of the stories Carl wrote were particularly good reads, however. They were fraught with plot holes, *deus ex machina*, and generally novice mistakes. Carl knew this, though, and he knew that he had to get better. He wanted to get better so he could make his stories the best they could be.

So in 2010, Carl went to NYU Tisch School of the Arts, but instead of studying creative writing, he got sucked into TV writing, and screenwriting. Carl learned all about how people in Hollywood wrote, and finally he felt like he was in the zone.

But by the time Carl was ready to graduate, he was experiencing a lot of pressure to get a job, and a lack of jobs available in doing what Carl loved - writing stories. Carl could barely focus on his senior thesis, and it would up being one of his worst pieces of writing to date, because he was so preoccupied with what he was going to do after graduation. He even thought he might give up writing.

But in August of 2014, after months of fighting for a job, and almost giving up on his dream of writing, Carl managed to get a full-time job writing at Fabled Films, a new company in NYC that was creating a series children's books. Carl worked there for a year, and though it was hard, it was exactly where he wanted to be and what he wanted to be doing. Unfortunately, it wasn't meant to be, because his contract, which had only been for one year, wasn't renewed after that year, and Carl left the company in 2015.

Carl then thought that he'd have to give up writing for good. He thought that there weren't any other full-time writing jobs, and he interviewed for software engineering positions, something he'd also studied extensively in college. One of the people who interviewed him during this time asked: "where do you see yourself in five years?" and Carl couldn't answer. In that moment, Carl realized he just wanted a job, and he didn't want that job. It was one of the first important lessons he learned.

Carl remembered something his senior thesis professor had told him once, that nobody becomes a writer because that's what they want to do, but that they do it because it's the only thing that they can do. Carl had realized after that interview that being a writer was the only thing that he could do.

So in August of 2015, he went to where he thought was the only place to make writing work: Los Angeles. He still, perhaps naively, thought that getting a job was the way to go, and since he had studied screenwriting, he thought that Los Angeles was the place to get a job.

Unfortunately, Carl still couldn't get a job in Los Angeles. He got gigs working on film sets, and he made some friends and connections, but ultimately he moved back home, to Portland, a year later in July of 2016, and \$10,000 poorer.

Carl was desperate for work by now. He renewed his efforts, concentrating on tech support, which he had done in college, and landed a job doing phone sales at Conduent by March of 2017. Eventually, he transitioned from phone sales to tech support at the same company, but after more than a year of working there, Carl started to realize he couldn't work there forever. He was dying without the time to write, like he'd always had in the past, and he felt as if nothing he did meant anything.

That's when Carl remembered his love for books. Carl's first professor in college had once asked him why he was studying screenwriting, if books were what made him interested in writing. Carl hadn't had a good answer then, but in this moment Carl knew he needed to go back to writing books. Back to his meat-and-potatoes.

At the same time, Carl realized that writing would have to be a business, and he would have to be a businessman. He couldn't rely on getting a job anymore, and having someone else deal with the business side.

In August of 2018, Carl paid off his student loans, then quit his job at Conduent. He used his savings from working at the job, as well as all of the privileges he had, from family, friends, and everyone he knew. He also realized that if he were going to succeed, his business had to provide value to its customers. That meant he would have to write for other people, not for himself. The writing might still be about himself, and things he liked, but Carl determined that he would make his writing for his readers.

And thus was born *The Time Twins*, Carl's first book. It was written for Carl's closest friends in college, and for his grandfather, who passed away in 2012.