

CARL COTA-ROBLES

Author Story:

It was 2002. I was out of town when my parents decided to get a divorce. I was playing chess with a friend in the national tournament in Tennessee, and when I returned to my hometown of Portland, OR, my parents told me 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 my sisters and I to separate the house into his side and her side so that mom and dad couldn't fight. The divorce brought pain for me, but it also brought me something else: my love of writing.

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

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

bookstore. I 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 me a way to escape, and I wrote stories about vampire thieves, intelligent mice, and time travelers exploring a future with giant insects. None of the stories I wrote were particularly good reads, however. They were fraught with plot holes, deus ex machina, and generally novice mistakes. I knew this, though, and I knew that I needed to get better. I wanted to get better so I could make my stories the best they could be.

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

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

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

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

I remembered something my senior thesis professor had told me 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. I had realized after that interview that being a writer was the only thing that I could do.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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