

Carol Weston's highly anticipated new novel *Speed of Life*, published earlier this month (9781492654490, HRD, \$16.99), has received three starred reviews. Author Richard Peck had this to say "A wonderful book that takes us from loss to laughter."

Enjoy this candid interview with the author of, a CATS in-house favorite, *Girltalk: All the Stuff Your Sister Never Told You*.

**Q: Please give our readers the quick version of *Speed of Life*.**

A: *Speed of Life* is a novel about a fourteen-year-old who thinks her life is over when really it is just beginning. It was not speedy to write. It took almost ten years! But I kept polishing and polishing until I knew Sofia, Gregg, Kate, Alexa, and Sam inside out.

As for that first kiss in the windmill? You're welcome.



**Q: *Speed of Life* seems fairly biographical since you are the advice columnist at *Girls Life*. Are there other parts of your life you've put into this book?**

A: Dear Kate comes from Dear Carol. I've been answering letters from girls ever since my first book, *Girltalk*, came out in 1985, and more officially at *Girls' Life* since its first issue. So for 23 years, I've helped girls, but they've helped me stay up-to-date for which I am grateful.

And yes, busted, there's lots of me in Sofia too. Thank heavens Kirkus calls her "completely likable"—in a starred review, no less. My dad died when I was 25 so I do know what it's like to lose a beloved parent.

Even the geography of *Speed of Life* comes from my heart. I grew up in Armonk, studied in Madrid, and live in Manhattan. (Ava and Pip's home is in "Misty Oaks" and I never specify a state.)

**Q: Is it harder to write a standalone novel like *Speed of Life* or a series like *Ava & Pip*?**

A: Hmm. With a standalone, you have to make up a whole world and... walk away. With a series, once you've established your characters, you can stick with them so you don't have to struggle as much with dialogue or description. But the drawback with a series is to stay consistent. Ava and Pip's mom works for a vet and the family loves palindromes, so I had to keep finding animal stories and palindromes for Ava and Pip, Ava and Taco Cat, and Ava XOX. That said, a ten-year-old could pick up any of the three Ava diaries and read it as if it were a standalone.



**Q: What is your writing process, do you put time aside every day?**

A: I wish! Some days are for family, some for book stuff that is not writing, and some get "frittered away," as my mom used to say. Overall, I'm pretty disciplined, so you might find me at my desk early or late and on weekend afternoons too. Once I've got a draft down, I revise a lot and read my pages aloud and solicit feedback. When the writing is flowing, I try keep going rather than get caught up with research. My desk is a mess, so sometimes I take my manuscript to another room or the library. I also print out drafts on pink or yellow paper in order to have a sense of progress. Is that odd? Maybe!

**Q: You come from a family of writers. Did you always want to be a writer?**

A: I didn't consciously think about it. Like Ava, I was just a kid with a pencil. But after studying French and Spanish comparative literature at college, I realized I did want to write a novel. It's no surprise that my first novels were diaries—fun for kids, and comfortable for me. With *Speed of Life*, I feel as if I finally broke through a barrier and wrote a "real novel."

When I was younger, I also considered becoming a teacher or psychologist. Now, when I visit schools, I get to be a teacher for a day, and when I write my Dear Carol column, I try to help girls with problems. (Note: a novelist's job is the opposite—I have to keep stirring up trouble for my characters.)

**Q: Do you have fond memories of particular novels or going to libraries growing up?**

A: When I was a child, I loved Aesop fables and Greek myths. In sixth grade, when I stumbled upon *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, I was off and running. I wrote my first article for Seventeen in the North Castle Library in Westchester, New York. In college, I loved holing up in the many large and small libraries. (Yale has fifteen!) Now my favorite library is the New York Society Library; Herman Melville and Willa Cather were members! I teach writing there too.

**Q: What do you hope readers of any age will take away from reading *Speed of Life*?**

A: I hope they'll close the book and feel that they've been somewhere far away with people they care about. *Speed of Life* has no dragons or wizards, no terrible bullies or crazy drama queens. The characters are decent people who have been bruised and have to figure out how to keep on going.

I hope that middle school readers will gain empathy and understand that you can't rush grief or expect families to blend without friction. Over the years, I've gotten letters from lots of girls who worry they are taking too long to "get over" something painful. That's why I included the conversation between Sofia and Kate. Sofia asks, "How long did it take you to get over it when your parents died?" Kate replies, "Oh honey, I'll let you know when I do."