

Meet our staff! This month, we are profiling Baker & Taylor's Bobbie Bensur, Children's and Teen Services Manager for the Eastern Region. Bobbie hails from south Florida originally, and spent time in Boston for college and New York City as a young professional in the children's publishing industry. She now lives in her favorite place—Maine—with her husband, Michael, and their adorable black cat, Hades Mercedes. Bobbie is passionate about children's & teen lit, and has a similar passion for folk music, baked goods, Irish history and language, Monty Python, and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*.

Q. Hi Bobbie. First off, tell us a little bit about what your role entails at Baker & Taylor.

I have the honor and privilege of working with children's and teen librarians around the eastern part of the US (pretty much east of the Mississippi River) on their collection development and programming goals and initiatives. I help to streamline their workflow, develop solutions to their day-to-day challenges, and answer any questions and/or training needs they may have regarding our resources at Baker & Taylor and the Children's & Teen Services (CATS) department. I also help them with special projects, like summer reading orders, makerspace orders, and weed and replace initiatives. And, of course, we chat books, their patrons, and what titles may be good to keep top of mind as they look to build their collections. I absolutely love what I do, and the libraries I work with!



Q. What inspired your love or reading? Or, what inspired you to work with libraries?

Gah! I love this question. I'd been reading and writing short stories from as long as I can remember. Some of my favorites as a kid were from Dr. Seuss and then the Nancy Drew books, and then, when I was twelve, I read every single Agatha Christie novel. I love a good mystery, and was absorbed by Christie's use of dialogue. That's when I knew I wanted a life with books. Later that year, my English teacher gave me *Stargirl* (It had just published) and that cemented things for me. It's still one of my favorite books to this day, and one of the best moments of my life was when I got to meet Jerry Spinelli, years later when I worked at Random House Children's Books, and got to recite my favorite passage to him. It was a total fangirl moment and he was so lovely about it. So, my love for books started young like many book people. For college, I moved to Boston and studied creative writing and book publishing at Emerson College. From there, I interned and worked for various publishers in Boston and NYC. Eventually, I found myself in Maine and was delighted when the role at Baker & Taylor presented itself, because it was a perfect way to leverage my passion children's & teen literature, and champion librarians (some of my favorite people) and early



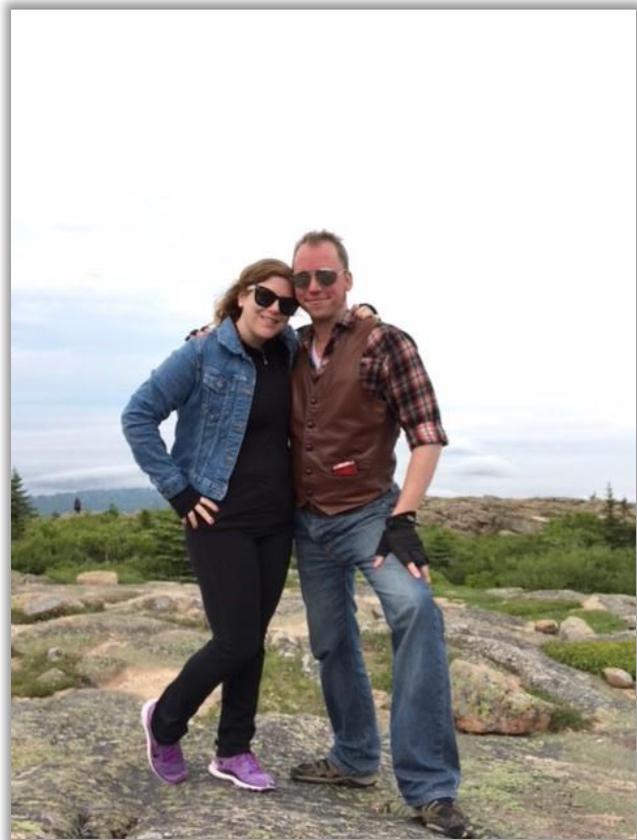
literacy. It also felt like things were coming full-circle because I got all those Agatha Christie books from my branch of the Broward County Library as a child.

Q. Since you've admitted to studying creative writing, is there more to that story?

Yes! As I mentioned above, I've been writing short stories since childhood, and I studied creative writing during both undergraduate and graduate school. I've written for magazines and continue to submit short stories to literary journals, but I am not the most disciplined of writers, unfortunately. It's something I continue to work on, and I fit writing in when and where I can (like on plane rides to visit libraries!) My big goal this year is to finish a Young Adult novel I've been working on since grad school, which I am really excited about. And every time I have a conversation about teen lit with a librarian customer, it inspires me once more to keep going.

Q. In your many travels across the eastern US, we know you see a lot of libraries! Would you care to share a unique library or two you've seen, and what was so unique about them?

There are so many beautiful and unique libraries in this country—big and small—so hard to pick just a few. Lately, what I've admired most, are the various Makerspace studios I've come across—especially now that we provide makerspace items for libraries. Nashville Public Library, Erie County Public Library, Boston Public Library, Hamilton East Public Library, and Charleston County Public Library quickly come to mind as libraries that I've visited and have gotten to tour their comprehensive maker areas—3D printers, sewing machines, green screens, recording studios—so many wonderful and creative opportunities for their patrons and community. Very cool. I will also say, one of the most memorable things I've seen during my library visits was at Bexley Public Library in Ohio—they have a pet bunny in their children's room! The kids can admire and even feed the bunny. So cute.



Q. When you're not in a library or traveling to one, what do you like to do?

Other than writing and reading, I really enjoy just hanging with my friends and my husband, and relishing living in Maine. We like to hike, kayak, and camp when it's warm. When it's cold, you'll find us at a bar singing Karaoke or watching guilty pleasure TV. I also dabble in baking and love playing with my cat--one of my most favorite things to do is play the "make the bed" game with her (she cracks me up!). Also, lately, I've been volunteering at a nonprofit in Portland, Maine

called The Telling Room, which aims to empower kids and teens through writing. It's a great organization!

Q. Any favorite reads you'd like to tell us about? And what are you reading now?

Right this moment, I am reading Elana K. Arnold's *Red Hood*, a feminist YA novel, using elements from the Red Riding Hood tale. It's really cool so far. Recently, I finished E. Lockhart's forthcoming title *Again, Again* and loved it—she's so masterful and experimental with her work. Some middle grade novels I recently finished and loved was Rebecca Stead's *A List of Things That Will Not Change* (which was awesome, but I am not surprised, as I love everything she writes) and *Chirp* by Kate Messner, a contemporary novel that I think is important for today's tweens. I'll also say that I am super thrilled that A.S. King's *Dig* got its due and was given the Printz award this year! I loved that book and am so excited that I'll be able to tell A.S. King this in person at an event we're hosting at Bucks County Public Library this spring, at which she'll be speaking.

Q. And finally, if you were to choose an adventure for our favorite furry mascots, Baker and Taylor, what might that be?

I'd fly those cute kitties out here to Maine. I know they'd love the libraries here, and the pretty scenery, and the people! And I also know they'd love to play and snuggle up with my cat, Hades Mercedes. Hades would love to have them here!

Stay tuned for future Meet the Staff introductions, and if there's anyone you'd like to see gracing the pages of the *CATS Meow*, let us know at CATS@baker-taylor.com.

We hope you enjoy them! -*Baker & Taylor CATS*