

Teacher-turned-magician authors children's book

[KEITH ARNOLD - The Daily Reporter](#)

*A former language arts teacher, Erica Carlson has written her first children's book, *Sedgie the Hedgie Finds the Treasure*, which was inspired by Carlson's pirate-themed magic show. (Photo: Cathy Blackstone, Associated Press)*

It should come as no surprise to anyone who has seen one of Erica Carlson's performances for kids that she one day would write about the exploits of her two favorite four-legged friends — a hedgehog named Sedgie and the family dog Clover.

The opportunity presented itself in the fall of 2020 at the height of pandemic uncertainty, she recalled.

Upon learning about a neighbor's experience working with a specific self-publishing firm, Carlson, who lives in Hilliard, said she signed with the company and began writing.

The result of her first efforts is the children's book, *Sedgie the Hedgie Finds the Treasure*, which was inspired by Carlson's pirate-themed magic show.

With a target audience of pre-K-aged kids through fifth

graders, the story includes messages about teamwork, courage and enjoying simple treasures.

The former language arts teacher admitted she had planned to wait until her own children were a little older before taking on the task, but the moment was right, she said.

"It's been a serendipitous learning process to write and publish my first children's book," she said. "I hired Gatekeeper Press, which gave me access to an author manager to guide me, but I was able to maintain a great deal of control with the creative process."

The publishing company helped her with obtaining an International Standard Book Number, formatting the book and distributing it to Amazon and Barnes & Noble, she said.

As for finding the right artist to illustrate her first work, Carlson said serendipity played a role in that development, too — artist Drew Dittmar worked at the local library where Carlson had been performing since 2012.

"When I mentioned writing my own children's book in 2021, a few librarians asked about the illustrations and recommended Drew as a talented artist," she said. "I saw his coloring pages scattered about the children's area and loved them."

She described his style as playful and cute, yet realistic.

"The facial expressions and movement in his drawings pulled me in," she said. "I had originally intended to do 'felt art' pictures for the book, but I quickly realized I couldn't magically create more time and was not seeing much progress. Before a magic show in July 2021, I asked Drew if he'd be willing to make my words come to life with his illustrations. He read my rough draft during the show, approached me after Sedgie the Hedgie had been magically revealed, and said, 'Yes!'"

She said Dittmar later told her that the project appealed to him because of the opportunity to collaborate with another local artist, contributing to a sense of community.

"My children love to say, 'Drew drew your book,'" she added.

She said Dittmar already has agreed to illustrate another book, so the plan is in the works.

"I think the next one will focus on my 'Balloon Mystery' magic show," Carlson said. "Kids love detectives, spies and all things involving a mystery. I would love to incorporate balloons into this one as the relationship between hedgehogs and balloons is an unusual, delicate one."

Carlson began balloon sculpting — a skill she obtained from her brother-in-law, Dan — when she was 14 years old.

“His parents were self-taught and passed down the trade,” she said. “I worked through high school at various restaurants and then got my own business cards and began working at birthday parties along with restaurant and community-event gigs in college.

“I’ve been twisting balloons for over 23 years now. I love saying ‘yes’ to new requests from kids; their eyes light up. It’s a beautiful thing to see.”

In 2011, when Carlson decided to give up a full-time teaching job to focus on her children’s entertainment business — www.EricaEnter-tainment.com — she looked to her brother-in-law and his parents who had operated their own children’s entertainment business. She also consulted with her sister.


“My sister, Lea, performed magic shows featuring her box turtle, Picasso — a.k.a. the fifth Ninja Turtle,” she explained. “This magical turtle had been in their family for many years and was grandfathered into being ‘allowed’ as a pet, as I understand it’s not OK to get box turtles as pets anymore. I decided I wanted to learn magic to expand my business from just balloon sculpting and face painting and connect with children and families through summer programming.”

She said another sister, Emily, helped brainstorm possible candidates.

"We settled on a hedgehog as it seemed cute, tiny, quiet and a bit exotic, so it wasn't just a 'rabbit out of a hat' and would pique people's curiosity," Carlson said. "I found a breeder near Toledo. Gail Smith with Millermeade Farms Critter Connection has been a valuable resource for learning the best care and practices for having healthy, happy hedgehogs over the years."

When asked about a favorite childhood book, Carlson recalled loving when her parents read author Roger Bradfield's Pickle Chiffon Pie to her.

"It has fantastical creatures in it with a big-hearted message," she said. "And my mom makes a pretty amazing apple pie."



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