

Surf City Author's Debut Novel, 'Aviona,' Takes Flight

Corinne Ruff Has Set Her Creative Wheels in Motion Once Again

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By Victoria Ford

Surf City resident Corinne Ruff has written and published the first “fairy tale” with Long Beach Island as its setting.

Ruff's debut novel, *Aviona*, in the genre of upper-middle-grade magical realism, about a carousel horse that comes to life and flies around the world having adventures, was released Nov. 28, holding the distinction of No. 1 New Release on Amazon for a week and No. 3 on Amazon's Best Seller list for a week. A book signing event is scheduled for Dec. 19 from 1 to 4 p.m. at Fantasy Island Amusement Park, outside, socially distanced. *Aviona* will be available to purchase at the Fantasy Island Arcade when the books arrive around Dec. 12, and at Firefly Gallery and Swell Colors in Surf City.

The idea for the book – the name and certain chunks of the story – hit her “like a lightning bolt” one summer night in 2009, Ruff said, while walking through Fantasy Island Amusement Park with her then 5- and 7-year-old children and all of their cousins. In a moment of intense inspiration as she watched the carousel spinning, everything around her seemed suddenly to go quiet in the packed park.

She wrote and rewrote the story about nine times before fully committing to it in 2018. The result is a story of metamorphosis, with the main themes of belonging and becoming. The takeaway message: Be courageous and remember your power.

The author's previous creative publishing endeavors have included *The Sea*, a collaboration with printmaker Julie Goldstein, in 2015, and *Island Child*, a collection of essays illustrated by Lisa Benjamin, in 2012. She has also written articles for Rebelle Society, Barnacle Babe magazine, BreakerZine, and others.

Her full-time profession is commercial airline pilot. Her top three passions are feeding her curiosity, self-improvement and nurturing relationships.

“I wrote *Aviona* for the 12-year-old me,” Ruff said. “I never had a female flight mentor. *Aviona* showed up late, but she showed up. After not flying for five years due to spine issues, *Aviona* made me write my way back into the sky. She also gave me a mission – to get more girls into the sky. When I started, fewer than 1 percent of airline pilots were women. Someone estimated I was the 111th female hired at Delta. It's up to 5.4 percent now. I'd like to help that number climb.”

In the end, Ruff said, the book taught her a lot about courage, hope and joy. But *Aviona* may have said it best: “Believe in your magic, and let your dreams take flight.”

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the golden age of carousels, according to Ruff. So she decided to weave some historical fiction about classic carousels through the story.

“Before 2009, the only carousel I knew about was the one at baggage claim at the airport,” she said. “Carousels have had a tremendous impact on growing the tourism and settlement of our New Jersey towns. We had 150 spinning at one time. I have read every book written about carousels and have visited almost every one (that appears in *Aviona*) and many around the world. I’ve been a National Carousel Association member for years and loved picking up storylines from the carousels. Every carousel in the book is real. The lead horses are real. Actionable takeaway from the book is to visit and support classic wood carousels; they are our American history.

“Spoiler alert – you may feel the need to hop on a carousel and fight to preserve these old gals. They are an endangered species.”

Ruff asked longtime friend Dawn Simon of Swing Graphics to design the book cover for *Aviona*. “I wanted to mimic the whimsical carousel font on classic carousels. She had to create it,” Ruff explained. “I wanted an 1870s book cover to match the Golden Age of the Carousel (1870-1930) and fairy tale covers of yesteryear. The border is a frame of a gilded carousel mirror. It’s magical.”

Over the years Ruff has collaborated with some of the LBI region’s best-known artists. Cultivating creative partnerships in the community is important to her, she said. She enjoys working with “artists, filmmakers, writers, community activists, environmentalists and businesses who drive messages of positive social impact and issue a call to action, e.g. Jetty and Tide Table Group,” on projects that create ripple effects.

Ruff wrote, directed and narrated the film “The Oyster Farmers,” a collaboration with Angela Andersen, the Jetty Rock Foundation and Oakleaf Media, now available on Amazon Prime Video. Ruff won Best Aspiring Female Director at the Asbury Park Music and Film Festival.

“The thought of writing a novel never crossed my mind. I didn’t know I was writing a novel. I just started writing,” Ruff said.

“Once I gave up control and let the story guide me, instead of forcing it in the direction I thought it should go, it was an exhilarating ride,” she said. Her editor, Taylor Morris, told her to focus on *Aviona*’s emotions and the journey. “I knew I could do that – I’ve been taking people on journeys for 30 years.” As the story builds momentum with each chapter, her hope is the reader feels like they have stepped onto a carousel and start spinning and don’t stop until the ride is over.

Ruff is what is known as a hybrid author because she has published through traditional and self-publishing routes. *Island Child* was put out by Down the Shore Publishing, but *The Sea* and

Aviona were published as Sea Cottage Press, Ruff's own publishing company, created in order to print on demand through distributor IngramSpark.

“The books are printed in the USA and are carried by all major retailers, Amazon, libraries, independent book sellers and all e-book platforms,” she explained. “Nothing is printed without a specific order going somewhere. There are no warehouses full of books. If done correctly and professionally, (self-publishing) is also a way to get on the radar of traditional publishing houses.”

The self-publishing process was one of the most challenging experiences of her life, Ruff said. She made an analogy to athletic endurance races. Publishing traditionally is like running a 5K with a coach and supporters on the sidelines. Self-publishing is like attempting to complete an ironman solo – the three events being writing, editing and marketing.

“I know why people run off to cabins to write in solitude and spend time with their ‘book family,’” she said. “It’s so much harder at a kitchen table in quarantine, with a packed house, during a pandemic.”

Her philosophy is “write local, with a global voice.” Her hope is that *Aviona* will be for LBI what *Misty* is for Chincoteague.

Follow her on Instagram @c.g.ruff.

— **Victoria Ford**

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