

Carla Carlton, B.A. English, 1988

By Sarah K. Miller & Madelyn Chambers

Director of Development Communications, Bellarmine University

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Carla Carlton (née Harris) graduated in 1988 with a double major in English and Journalism. She is currently the Director of Development Communications at Bellarmine University, a private Catholic university in Louisville, Kentucky.

Carlton always loved writing, so she chose to double-major in two writing disciplines. "It wasn't always easy majoring in both English and Journalism at Western," said Carlton. "For every English professor who said, 'Your paragraphs are too short!' there was a journalism professor saying, 'Your paragraphs are too long!' But thanks to my dual majors, I have been able to make my living from words for my entire professional career."

After graduating from WKU, Carlton worked in Louisville, Kentucky, at [The Courier-Journal](#) for 19 years. "My skill at editing, which I learned from the great Jim Ausenbaugh at WKU, landed me a job on the copy desk of *The Courier-Journal* directly out of school," said Carlton. "After a few years, I was promoted to assistant regional editor and then assistant metro editor—positions in which I assigned stories and helped writers craft them from the beginning." Carlton also wrote for the paper's Neighborhoods desk and served as Arts & Entertainment Editor, Assistant Suburban Editor, Night Assistant State Editor, and Copy Editor during her career at *The Courier-Journal*. In 2007, Carlton decided to "try something new," so she joined Bellarmine University's Office of Communications & Public Affairs.

One of Carlton's main responsibilities at Bellarmine is serving as the editor of the [Bellarmine Magazine](#), the university's quarterly publication. "As editor, I write and/or edit all of the stories that appear in each 52-page issue," said Carlton. "I also write and/or edit all fundraising pieces for our development staff—where I'm referred to,

somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as ‘the grammar guru.’” Carlton also drafted speeches and remarks for the university’s previous president, Dr. Joseph J. McGowan, who passed away in 2016. She does the same for current president Susan M. Donovan. “This is where the English major part of my brain gets to cut loose, using those adjectives and adverbs that the journalist holds at bay,” said Carlton.

Carlton believes her English major prepared her well for her current career. “Going into this job, I knew that I’d be able to handle the university magazine, [but] I wasn’t as sure about the other types of writing that might be required at a university,” said Carlton. “But what I’ve discovered is that my Western education prepared me well for every writing assignment that’s ever been thrown at me, from commencement speeches to honorary degree citations to t-shirt slogans – even eulogies.”

Carlton continues to write in her spare time, and much of her writing passion centers around a Kentucky specialty: bourbon. “I have a website, [*The Bourbon Babe*](#); published my first book, [*Barrel-Strength Bourbon: The Explosive Growth of America’s Whiskey*](#), in 2017; and serve as managing editor for a new national magazine, [*Bourbon+*](#), that debuted in 2018,” said Carlton. “I’m also married to another WKU alum, Chad Carlton ’87 (we met on the staff of the College Heights Herald), and we have two children, Harper and Clay.”

Carlton advises current students to read and write often in their free time. She believes that this extra practice has helped her succeed. “Seek out great writing, whether it’s in a classic novel or *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, figure out *why* it’s great, and learn from it,” said Carlton. “Know that if you can clearly communicate complex ideas to a given readership, you are in the minority, and your talent will be marketable in many fields.”

