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This interview was conducted with Rebecca Davis on June 24, 2017 at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Chicago Illinois. The interviewers are Nancy Johnson and Sylvia Tag.

ST: We are here, myself Sylvia Tag, Nancy Johnson, with Rebecca Davis, the senior editor at Boyds Mills, and WordSong imprint, the only imprint in the United States dedicated to children's poetry. We

are going to talk with Rebecca today about your work at Boyds Mills, and specifically WordSong. So let's dive right in, and maybe you could tell us a little bit about the history of WordSong, and maybe something about the origins that you have some particular experience and insight about.

RD: Well, I think WordSong was founded by Bernice Cullinan in 1990, I think. I think we sent you information about that, so I'm not sure exactly of the date. She was working with Kent Brown at the time and they wanted to found an imprint devoted just to children's poetry, and the word "wordsong" comes from the Japanese word for poem. I didn't realize when I first started there, but I loved it when I found out.

Rebecca Davis Edited Transcript – June 24, 2017
Children & Teen Poetry Collection (PoetryCHaT)

ST: Yes.

NJ: It's cool.

ST: And did you know Bea?

RD: I did not know Bea, no.

NJ: And do you know, did she approach Kent with this idea? Do you know where --

RD: That, I don't know. If you want to know about that, I don't know if there would be information in our resources. I suspect Lee Bennett Hopkins would know the history, because he's talked to me about it, but I don't know, myself.

ST: Okay, good enough. So, tell us a little bit about your experience, about when you entered and your first books that you started working with in WordSong and a little bit about your journey.

RD: Well, I started as an editor way back in 1990/91 and at first did not know that I liked poetry. Like many people, growing up I thought I didn't like poetry. I thought it was a test of wits and if you are smart enough -- and I didn't want to participate in that kind of test. In high school I found I absolutely loved Walt Whitman. But I thought I just loved Whitman. I didn't think I loved poetry. But as a young editor, I was fortunate to be assigned to work with Lee Bennett Hopkins -- two or three years into my career when I was an assistant editor and beginning to work on my own books. And the very first book we worked on, I could see what he was doing and I loved it, and then suddenly I thought back and looked at all the books I'd signed, all the books I'd worked on, and I thought, Gee, I really love language,

I love lyrical language, I love imagery, I love words. Actually, I like poetry, and I'd never realized that before. So from then on in my career, I published as much poetry as I could get away with. But at a big publishing company, it really kind of is as much as you can get away with because poetry doesn't sell very much and it's very hard to get it published.

ST: Was I remembering Simon & Schuster, is that accurate?

RD: Yes, I worked for Simon & Schuster for six years, and then I moved to Orchard for one year, and then I moved to Greenwillow, which is part of HarperCollins, for another six years, and then I freelanced for six years. When I freelanced, of course, the one thing I didn't get to work on was poetry, because they'll hire you to work on novels mostly, the occasional picture book or nonfiction, but not poetry because it doesn't sell enough, right? So I was really, after doing five years of this, missing poetry. And somebody at WordSong contacted me and said, We hear that you work with poets and that you edit poetry, would you work with us? I worked as a freelancer for WordSong for a year, and then they hired me, and I've been there for five years.

ST: So what do you remember? What were those earliest books -- what was one of the first books you worked on? Do you remember?

RD: The first book that Lee and I worked on was *School Supplies*.

ST: Okay. So when you were hired to freelance, there was a book in place --

RD: Yes, when I was hired to freelance, it was *Bug Off!* by Jane Yolen -- was the first one I worked on.

ST: Do you have some memories of that?

RD: I'd worked with Jane before, so that was -- it was very smooth and easy. I just dove right in and edited, worked with her on the poetry, and worked with Jason on the photographs, and it was kind of fun.

NJ: That's right, her son-in-law, right?

RD: No, her son.

NJ: Her son, that's right, her son. Do you have a favorite poetry collection you've edited?

RD: That is really hard.

(Laughter)

NJ: Or one that just rises to -- it doesn't have to be a favorite, but one that rises to the top, maybe you're most proud of it because it was the hardest.

RD: I don't think I can choose one. There are so many.

NJ: Because you've done such a range.

RD: Yes. I mean, obviously at WordSong, the Nikki Grimes novels-in-verse are really unusual and really special. In the same, *Voices from the March on Washington* by J. Patrick Lewis and George Ella Lyon was a very unusual book, really fun to work on.

ST: Tell us a little more about that, when you say unusual.

RD: Well, they're telling the story of the March on Washington, in 1963, through the voices of the masses -- every poem is written from the point of view of a different character. They proposed it actually -- the idea that it might be illustrated with photographs. When I went to discuss acquiring it, we got sidetracked into this whole discussion of, Can you illustrate it with photographs? Because that kind of suggests that it's nonfiction, but they're making up all these voices, so it's really fiction. Do you want to illustrate in a way that kind of counters what it actually is? Then maybe we should illustrate it with art. But actually, it seemed like a book that's for 8-12 year olds, it seems like a book for older kids, so do you want to illustrate it at all? And if you don't illustrate it, then how do you treat it?

So we had a lot of discussions early on in-house with Liz Van Doren, Mary-Alice Moore, and myself, about how to make this a successful book, because some of the poems in it -- the very first time I read it -- were so powerful. I knew the very first time I read it, this was something I had to publish, but then the question is how is it going to reach a reader, and what format do you publish it in? Do you publish it big with illustrations? Do you publish it small? We finally decided that a novel-in-verse would be the best way to go. But then to make it a novel-in-verse with all these different characters, how do you do it to make it more immediate for kids reading it? So we decided to suggest to Pat and George Ella Lyon that they come up with some individual characters and write cycles of poems for those individual characters. That way, you would be able to see not just the march itself but how being part of such a huge historic event changes you as an individual. So you see, you follow these six characters from the beginning when they're preparing to go to the march, why they're going, what they experience at the march, and

how things change for them later. And so they did that, they did those six poems, and then they also had all these other voices.

NJ: I'm interested in when you said you acquired that and how it changed, when someone submits -- or when you, an agent or whoever -- poetry to you, do they usually submit it all, or do they submit a sampling, or how does that work?

RD: It's usually the whole manuscript. But then we may change it. Like this, or like *Words with Wings*, which came in as a picture book, but the girl seemed older and she's writing about writing, so that also makes her a little bit older. We said to Nikki, would you turn this into a novel instead of picture book?

ST: Which was brilliant because then it ended up --

(Laughter)

NJ: A literary recognition?

ST: Yes, award-winning book. So, I also have a question. This might be a naive question, but -- back to the March on Washington -- when poems are submitted, in terms of your role as an editor, are you giving actual editorial feedback on the poetry itself?

RD: Absolutely.

ST: Okay, alright.

RD: Absolutely. Yes, so it's shaping the whole book, the whole collection, thinking often about what order the poems should go in, because you want to build -- you want the same kind of story arc as you would in any other kind of book, novel or whatever. Then on a granular level, each poem, can it be tighter, can it be stronger? Can the imagery be more vivid? Should it be a different form? I was recently working on something, something that will come out in the future, and there was a poem that was very close to being a haiku, just two syllables off. And I was like, Why don't you just make this a haiku. Because you also need to think about the poem forms and showing examples of different poem forms and what poem form is going to be right for the subject matter.

ST: So that takes me to, for lack of a better way of saying this, your own poetry training, your own poetry experience, in terms of your interactions with poetry.

RD: Entirely on the job, because like I said --

ST: I love that.

RD: So I had over the years looked up, What is a pantoum exactly?

NJ: I wondered, okay.

RD: And how many beats, and so on and so forth. When I edit, I'm counting out the beats and talking to the poet, Is this the right number? I think you have an extra beat here, or maybe you need one more beat here.

NJ: Would your English teachers be surprised?

RD: I don't know, maybe. I mean, I didn't say I hated poetry. I just thought I wasn't interested.

NJ: Which is what a lot of young readers think.

RD: Unfortunately. Because when I discovered that I loved it, I think many people weren't -- because I think it's something that needs to be taken apart and analyzed and a test of wills, not wills, a test of wits, really.

NJ: Why do you think your WordSong is the only imprint?

RD: I think that by and large publishers fear that poetry doesn't sell, and it is harder to sell. You go into a bookstore, there's a tiny, tiny poetry section. It's usually the classics, like Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, humorous poets who have made it huge. But it's very hard to get poems, poetry books out into bookstores. It's largely school and library sales, and those sales go slower. If you have a trade book that has a big write up off the bat, you have to hang in there for the school library sales to go. And you know, I think that a lot of people don't think they like poetry, so then you have a lot of teachers out there who don't think they like poetry and so are teaching it not as much as they might and not using as many books as they might. In fact, I think poetry could be the ideal way for kids to learn to love language. If it's not a test, if it's just to enjoy the poems, just read the poems. Kids have a natural interest in language, and poetry can feed into that, and can feed that and lead you into writing, into your own writing and to writing other things.

NJ: We've had a few poetry, novels-in-verse poetry. *Out of the Dust*, I think in the beginning that's one of Kwame's choices -- it's one of them. Have you noticed when that happens, any shift in interest in other poems, in other people thinking that they even want to submit work to you because of that?

RD: I do feel it makes people interested in novels-in-verse, not necessarily in poetry. I do see more submissions of novels-in-verse. And I think WordSong has a somewhat different attitude towards novels-in-verse.

NJ: Could you explain that.

RD: Yes. Because WordSong is a poetry imprint, I feel like any novel-in-verse that we publish needs to be a novel of poems. So each poem, the poems need to come first, and the poems need to happen to go with the story. The story is absolutely important because we want it to be a good story, but ideally in a novel-in-verse, I want you to be able to turn to any page in that novel-in-verse, read the poem, and that poem should have the kind of powerful impact of a poem, even not knowing the context. That poem should move you, even not knowing the context. It should make sense to you, even not knowing the context. So if you have a novel-in-verse that is written like a whole chapter, 25 pages, it's just kind of a narrative novel-in-verse. That's not something we would publish because I want it to be one poem strung after the other.

ST: So maybe a similar comparison would be picture books in rhyme aren't the same as a picture book that is actually shaped with a poem, poetic language that might be either a poem separated page by page but it's still a standalone poem, or poems on individual pages?

RD: Yes. If we have a single poem illustrating this picture book, it's Boyds Mills Press. *The Great Big Green*, I don't know if you're familiar with that, but that is clearly a poem. It's like the thing is, the thing is green, green is, the green is green, and by green I mean big, mean green. It's totally a poem, but it's a picture book. We publish poetry collections, or novels-in-verse.

NJ: Okay, collections. So an illustrated poem, so that would be --

RD: That would be Boyds Mills Press.

NJ: Okay, okay, that helps me --

RD: As opposed to WordSong.

NJ: Yes, got it.

RD: So a single poem would be treated as a picture book.

NJ: Even if it's by Walt Whitman?

RD: Even if it's by Walt Whitman.

(Laughter)

NJ: Well, that just helps me understand. That's great.

ST: You might find yourself in the role of educator I imagine sometimes when people submit to you and you give them feedback -- graciously no doubt.

RD: Yes.

NJ: What are the average number of submissions that WordSong receives? Is there such a thing as an average number a year?

RD: I've never even tried to separate. I have a submissions log for everything I get, but that's just stuff that comes to me. Then there's a huge amount more that just go to Boyds Mills Press and to the other editors. I've never sorted through it to look at how much goes to WordSong.

NJ: Do they have a target for how many they will publish --

RD: Yes. We want to publish three to five poetry books a year. Because we worry that if we do too many, then they'll start to cannibalize each other, so we want them to be individual and different, and we want there to be room for each to gather its audience.

ST: Still with that market in mind. Yes, absolutely, what's possible.

NJ: Sylvia brought up something I'd like to come back to about illustration. Do you make the decision -- is that your decision about who illustrates somebody's collections?

RD: Yes, usually I start with the text and think about what kind of art might compliment the text and go well with the text, and then I always talk with Van Doren about -- does she agree? Is this something we want to approach? If we're in agreement, then we approach that. Occasionally something comes to us already paired, but it's much more common --

NJ: Like Jane's.

RD: Yes. It's much more common for us to figure out who we want to illustrate it.

ST: And do illustrators have a certain response to illustrating poetry? Is it something that is more, I don't know, challenging, or not, or free? I'm just kind of curious about that.

RD: I think that probably depends on the illustrator. I think there's some people to whom that would appeal. They might feel more freedom to be able to illustrate very different subjects in the course of a book and not necessarily have to pull them together. On the other hand, sometimes the poetry subject itself lends itself to be pulled together. We have a book coming out called *School People*, Lee Bennett Hopkins again, is an anthology, but of course it's an introduction to the people you meet at school, the staff and the teachers. So of course you want to start out with the bus driver. You don't want the bus driver in the middle of the story. It gives the illustrator the opportunity, then, to create a story in the art that pulls the poems together as well as having the individual poems. So different poem collections might be treated quite differently in the illustrations, and I think different illustrators might prefer one way of approaching it versus another way of approaching it.

ST: There's a lot of exciting things happening with youth voices, in terms of the intersection of music, and I think in older adolescents, teens, some of our students, that sort of K-20 arc now where we're thinking, or even pre-K -- birth to 20. So do you have some ideas about WordSong in terms of a little bit older audience and some explorations of books that might appeal to something just a little bit older?

RD: I think, so far we are going up to middle grade, and I think we might go early young adult. I actually have two future books signed up that are going to be young adult novels with us. But I would certainly be open to looking at collections for older readers.

ST: Well that's what I'm curious about -- collections -- and what happens when something is recorded and some audio kinds of possibilities that integrate music.

RD: That's kind of an intriguing idea. I haven't really explored that, but that's an intriguing idea, to include music.

NJ: Especially with older readers.

RD: Yes.

ST: There's so much of a -- it seems like a conversation that happens when you start having older readers engage in poetry and song and that kind of back and forth.

NJ: And it also, especially there's such -- in the last five to ten years with the poetry aloud movement, and the contests, and rap itself has really given new, given voices to poetry in a lot of teens. I didn't know that it existed. Maybe it didn't exist when I was a teen.

RD: So that's interesting, thinking about audience and -- I wonder what Bea would think.

ST: Well, Poetry Speaks -- Poetry Speaks does some of that by having and including a recording of the poet, so that's already starting to have that vision, I think.

RD: And those have been out for a while.

ST: They have been.

RD: Like for a decade or so.

NJ: Yes.

RD: Right?

ST: Mm-hmm, yes. Those are a go-to for many of us.

NJ: But there aren't a lot, yet.

RD: Yes, I think we're the only ones doing it, right?

NJ: So Walt Whitman was one of your favorites. Do you know why?

RD: I think maybe because it is so personal and just the beauty of the language. I really responded to it as a teenager and still do.

NJ: I wondered if you still read Whitman.

RD: Yes.

NJ: Who is writing for young people who mimics some of what speaks to you with Whitman?

RD: I think, it may sound weird, I think Lee Bennett Hopkins. In his anthologies, there's something kind of universal and all-inclusive and celebratory. He always looks at things from a celebratory point of view that somehow I connect that with Whitman.

ST: It doesn't sound weird at all.

(Laughter)

NJ: Knowing his work and knowing him.

RD: Yes.

ST: Did you bring something to talk about?

RD: I just brought the booklist, just in case something came up, I thought, you know -- a cheat sheet.

NJ: Pretty impressive, wonderful.

ST: So you scan down, does anything kind of pop out for you that was a particularly, again, challenging or fun, celebratory experience, surprise?

NJ: Maybe a surprise.

RD: *Fresh Delicious*, by Irene Latham. Even though we've worked together now for a long time. If somebody had come to me and said, Would you like to publish a collection of poems about fruits and vegetables? I would have said, No.

(Laughter)

RD: I could not have imagined it, because I like fruits and vegetables but many kids don't, and where's the market for that? And how are you going to get kids to be interested in it? But then she writes a poem about black-eyed peas in a pod being in a canoe or okra being mouse shaped, swords for mice, and how can you resist? And then the poems were just brilliant.

ST: So did she send that manuscript in -- what was the journey with that?

RD: She sent the manuscript in, and there were some poems that I absolutely, totally loved and some that I thought needed some work. But by and large, it was so playful and such strong imagery, very short, very vivid poems. I thought, kids are going to love these poems. Even if they don't love fruits and vegetables.

(Laughter)

ST: Well, when I think of that book, the illustrations are kind of, they're blocky -- is that the right description? The bold colors and that kind of -- it's got sort of a wash that's right there. So maybe talk a little bit about that illustration inspiration.

RD: I thought it needed something bold and bright to, again, counteract fruits and vegetables, which seem kind of boring.

ST: Of course.

(Laughter)

RD: I came across Mique Moriuchi's artwork. I forget where I came across it. She had a few animated fruits, vegetables. I think they were peas with faces or something like that. But I just loved her colors and I loved the boldness of her art, and I thought looking at samples that she could do something really fun and energetic with *Fresh Delicious*, which I thought it needed -- energetic art.

NJ: Could you talk about -- I'm interested in titles of poems, poetry collections. Do you come up with those? Does the poet come up with the title of the book collection? Does it vary?

RD: It does. Like *Words with Wings* came in as *Words with Wings*. It was a picture book, but it had the title *Words with Wings*. *If You Were a Chocolate Mustache* went through quite a lot of title discussion. I think he had -- his original title we didn't like, and I forget what that was. But then for a long time it was called "*Never Spit From a Rollercoaster*," which was one of my favorite poems in the collection, and which we thought was very funny. And then we presented it, and one of the sales people said, You can't use the word spit in a title, no one's going to buy it.

ST: No adults will buy it. Kids will buy it.

(Laughter)

RD: No adults will buy it with the word spit, so you have to change it, and don't use spit. So then we went through a lot of different titles, and finally decided *If You Were a Chocolate Mustache* was fun.

NJ: Did he have a say in that?

RD: We talked with him. He came up with a lot of different titles. And he loved this one. He thought mustaches were funny.

NJ: And chocolate ones especially.

RD: And chocolate ones --

ST: And the book cover is brown, chocolatey, in a way.

RD: That came after the title, though.

ST: Okay.

RD: That was to match the title.

ST: Yes, that's what I would have pictured in my mind. It has that nice chocolatey cover, light blues and things like that, yes, right, very good.

NJ: But sometimes it comes in and you know it's the right title.

RD: Yes.

ST: Well, "Words with Wings" is a poem in the collection --

RD: And *Delicious* came in as *Fresh Delicious*.

NJ: It did.

RD: There was no better title for it, it fits it.

NJ: You mentioned how you like sound.

RD: Yes.

NJ: So that works.

RD: Yes.

NJ: Do you write poetry?

RD: No, I don't. I've written three poems in a life. (Laughter) It's so few that that's all that are written. When I was in high school I was supposed to write a *Song of Myself*, based on Walt Whitman.

ST: And you came out on the other side still loving Walt Whitman. That's pretty amazing, isn't it?

RD: The teacher made us do Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, and write tremendous amounts on each -- and I didn't like Emerson at all. And I thought Thoreau -- Emerson just seemed full of himself to me, as a teenager, at the time. Thoreau had his points, but I really didn't care how many feet across and how many feet deep his pond was.

(laughter).

And all of the work that we had to do on each of these may have been much more torturous to me as a teenager. But there's nothing she could do that would destroy Whitman for me. I loved Whitman. So at that time, I was also playing soccer in school, so I wrote a poem about soccer, which is a terrible poem.

NJ: Do you still have it?

RD: Probably somewhere. But I just remember I was writing at a very slow pace, but soccer is fast. And then when my husband died. After he died, I wrote a poem, which kind of poured out a lot of what I was feeling. I sent it to Rebecca Dotlich, and she edited it for me. So she helped me make it an actual poem. Working on it, not just writing it, but then working on revising it helped me personally. So it's possible I had a terrific poem, but it wasn't important to me at the time.

ST: It doesn't matter. It was the writing process --

RD: Yes.

NJ: -- write to publish?

RD: Right, exactly. I would not like to publish. I don't think of myself as a poet or even as a writer. But I love to be part of the creative process. I love watching that -- watching things grow and helping, being a part of that.

NJ: Is there a book on that list that you look down and you go, I am so proud of what happened with this book? Or this writer? This poet?

RD: Obviously, *Garvey's Choice* and *Words with Wings* and *Voices from the March on Washington*.

Catching a Storyfish, that also came in as a really long picture book.

ST: No kidding?

RD: Yes. It was so clear that this character was -- really needed her own story, and she needed more space for that story, and it needed to be a novel-in-verse. I asked Janice if she would consider doing that, and she did. It was a story about a storyteller who spoke and they couldn't start talking. I asked Janice maybe as part of the storytelling, maybe she needs to learn to listen, maybe that's part of what goes on. I had it in my mind -- a totally conventional -- this is why I like to be part of the process, but I don't want to direct. What she came up with how she learns to listen was just nothing I ever would have expected, nothing I ever could've come up with, but I love it, love it, love it, love it. That was really fun to watch. That was one that was really fun to watch evolve.

NJ: Any other books on the list that started as picture books and they turned into novels-in-verse, or vice versa, they started longer and then they turned into a collection?

RD: *Keep a Pocket in Your Poem* was originally much longer. I don't know that it -- it wasn't as long as a novel-in-verse, but part of that process was whittling it down and trying to make sure that it was, would fit into the picture book format, because it felt like a picture book to me. Making sure that all of the poems were for the same age group, because we had some that were quite a bit younger -- so that it would all speak with the same voice. I love what he did with that one too. Really fun.

NJ: That's been around a while.

RD: What?

NJ: That's been around a while too.

RD: No, actually, *Keep a Pocket in Your Poem* is just out.

NJ: Oh, I'm thinking, what's the --

RD: You're thinking of *Keep a Pocket in Your Poem*.

(Laughter)

NJ: That's the one.

RD: No, what Pat did with *Keep a Pocket in Your Poem* was -- he takes classic poems and then he writes parodies. He says writing parodies is his way of paying tribute and honoring the original. So it opens, I think, I think it opens with "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and he wrote "Stopping by Fridge on a Hungry Evening," which is really funny. But then you come to, what is it, Emily Dickinson, "'Hope' is a -- "'Hope is the thing with feathers. That perches in the soul." And he does "grief is a thing with tissues." So it ranges from funny, as he can be, to profound all in the same. It introduces kids to really important classics, but because of the way he plays with them, it's a really accessible way, and a fun way I think to get to know the classics.

NJ: It sounds like a perfect book for a teacher, as well, as a way to introduce and invite.

ST: So I know that *Word with Wings* has a small teacher guide.

RD: Right.

ST: There's a little brochure. So who works on that?

RD: Marketing decides which book could use a teacher's guide, which books might not need a teacher's guide --

NJ: Do they ever do poetry collections with teacher's guides? I don't know if I've ever seen those.

RD: I think we've had teacher's guides for some of these.

ST: So you're -- are you also asking poets, or are you waiting? Do you wait for submissions?

RD: Mm-mmm.

ST: You wait.

NJ: Solicit?

ST: Yes, solicit. There's the word that I'm looking for. Thank you, Nancy. Do you solicit any kinds of works?

RD: A lot, because I've worked in poetry for so long, a lot of poets I have relationships with, so we'll talk and sometimes things come out of --

ST: Conversations.

RD: Right. I welcome people to submit, because I also think that your best work is going to be what you're most passionate about. I'm not sure you always get the best book by saying, I want a collection of math poems. You might get a better book by somebody who happens to like science sends you a whole, whatever.

ST: Yes.

RD: So I don't want to nag too much, but I'll also sometimes brainstorm and think about ideas.

ST: And so then, you are back and forth and you're working and you're involved, and it's relational, and there's the poems, and then there's the illustration, and then it gets to this perfect, finished form, and then -- You send it off -- you turn it over to marketing, to other divisions within.

RD: Marketing still has to decide whether --

NJ: You're probably not just waiting around though, are you? You've got --

RD: You're always working on a bunch of different ones at once.

NJ: So when you think of when WordSong started and some of those initial dreams you read about even before you started with WordSong, do you have any dreams for where you'd like it to go?

RD: I would love for it to be better known. I'm not sure that we're as well-known as -- everybody knows Penguin Random House, everybody knows HarperCollins. I'm not sure that outside the poetry community the name WordSong is recognized really, and I would love to find ways to reach out and make it more known. We've talked about doing the WordSong book of something or other. We haven't actually started on that, but that's in-house one of the things we're talking about. Is it an advantage to do the WordSong book of, whatever? Because that helps the name get known, or because it's not known yet, does that not really do anything? So that's some of the conversation that we're having,

looking towards the future. How do we reach more people? How do we get people to remember that there is this imprint that's devoted to children's poetry, people who don't already know that.

NJ: And there are plenty who don't.

RD: How do you reach lots of teachers, say, who don't think they like poetry, and help them see poetry can be fun and kids can look forward to it and it can help kids realize that they love language and rhyming and playing with language, all of that.

NJ: So WordSong, are they part of -- I know the Highlights Foundation workshops and the amazing work they do. Are there any other specific WordSong sponsored?

RD: No. They have poetry workshops along with the other kinds of workshops. But that's an interesting idea.

ST: Well, this has been lovely. Is there anything that you were hoping we would ask you?

(Laughter)

ST: Or something that you were dreading that we would ask you?

(Laughter)

RD: I don't think so.

NJ: So what can we most look forward to, in the next year? That's coming out.

RD: What's coming out is, *School People* is coming out in the spring, that's spring 2018. *Crawly School for Bugs*, which is David Harrison, collection of bug poems that's kind of set in a school setting, is also spring 2018. And then Lee Bennett Hopkins has another collection on the fall list, illustrated by Serge Bloch, called *A Bunch of Punctuation*. Which is kind of like *Fresh Delicious* -- can you make punctuations fun?

(Laughter)

RD: I think he has.

NJ: Are they all his, or is it an --

RD: It's an anthology. And in spring '19, we have Georgia Heard's *Boom, Bellow, Bleat*, which is a collection of animal poems for two or more voices, which I can just imagine kids in classrooms. It's very sound oriented, it's very noise oriented. It's a lot of fun.

NJ: What's the title again?

RD: *Boom, Bellow, Bleat*.

And then, *In the Middle of the Night*, which is fabulous. It's by Laura Purdie Salas, illustrated by Angela Matteson, who did our *Grumbles from the Town*. And it's a collection of poems written from the point of view of objects. The kid goes to sleep, and once you go to sleep all the objects in the house come alive. They're having all these adventures during the night, and then they go back to sleep in the daytime. It's really fun. And then *I'm the Big One Now* by Marilyn Singer, illustrated by Jana Christy.

NJ: None of those are novel-in-verse?

RD: No. And then hopefully we'll have a novel-in-verse from Nikki Grimes on the fall 2019 list, but she's been very busy lately.

ST: She certainly has.

(Laughter)

NJ: Oh my gosh, these sound fabulous.

ST: They do, they sound just outstanding, looking forward to them.

NJ: It must be exciting.

RD: It is, yes.

NJ: Because you work in the future. I mean, your work is always in the future, isn't it. Very much so. Thank you so much.

ST: Thank you for taking the time to meet us here in Chicago at ALA.

RD: It was fun talking with you guys

(End of audio)