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This interview was conducted with Rebecca Kai Dotlich on September 29, 2017 during the Plum Creek Literary Festival in Seward, Nebraska. The interviewer is Nancy Johnson.

NJ: I'm sitting with Rebecca Dotlich. We're in Seward, Nebraska, at the Plum Creek Literacy Festival. And I have the opportunity to conduct this oral history with Rebecca after she spent a full day with many children, talking about her work and writing and poetry. So, thank you, Rebecca, for your time.

RD: Yes.

NJ: PoetryCHaT is very interested in your story, finding out a little bit about your history as a writer, your history with poetry, maybe reader and writer, many of your interactions with poetry, but it doesn't have to just be poetry. Perhaps that's not where you started. So, you can go way back if you want, as a child, or you can start wherever it started for you.

RD: So, kind of where poetry started for me... When I think back, the first things I think about - being a child loving poetry, well, I didn't really know much about poetry when I was little. I just know that I loved jump rope rhymes, song lyrics. My mother used to sing a lot around the house while she was doing chores, and I remember that I would sing along with her. Most of the time, song lyrics rhymed, and I think that's what I liked about it. My brother used to play a

lot of songs on the radio that he loved, like “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” My mother used to sing a couple of songs all the time, like “Mairzy Doats and dozy doats.” She would sing the old ‘40s songs by Cole Porter, and things like that. So that’s the first time I remember loving words.

I also remember coming home with a Christmas tree, and they had gotten a new Mitch Miller album, and I laid down and I took out the white piece of paper from the album and was reading along with the words. I wasn’t really even listening to the music, I was reading the words. So it’s kind of like, probably started there.

We didn’t have a whole lot of books in our home. We had the *Golden books*, and we had encyclopedias that a man sold door to door. In school, I don’t remember, in elementary school, I don’t remember ever, ever having a poem read to us or anyone talking about poetry. But in high school is when I think I started loving poetry. And I don’t know why. I know that I was writing poetry on my own. My other friends weren’t. Sometimes I would show them to them.

I was writing poetry on pieces of notebook paper. I remember loving, again, songs, and I was looking at song lyrics.

I didn’t have books of poetry, but there was a teacher that I had in high school named Mrs. Doris Bradford, and she was the first one that would read poetry to us. I believe I was a junior, and she would read poetry. She would read a poem, and then she would just -- she would actually come in the door of class, and she had a book, and she would read a poem, and then she would put the book on her chest and kind of sigh and lean back, and then she would say, Okay, class, turn to page 86, or whatever, now today we’re going to talk about something. She never said, That was a poem. Did you like that poem? What do you think that poem was about? She just came in with these words. I remember some of the kids would kind of look at each other like, what was that, or what is she doing? And I was mesmerized. I loved it. Every day she would come in and do that, and every day I would love it. Sometimes after class I would go up and I would say, Tell me more about that poem, or where would I find that poem? Then I started showing her some of my poems that I was writing at home, alone, and she started telling me that they were beautiful and that they were lovely and that she thought I would be a poet someday. I really wasn’t even thinking of going to college at the time because my parents didn’t have the money. It just wasn’t like it is today, and there wasn’t as many grants and loans and that kind of thing. And so I said, Well, I don’t know how you’d be a poet. And she said, You’ll figure it out. She said, I think you’ll be a poet someday.

NJ: Where did you grow up?

RD: In Indianapolis, Indiana, and that's where I went to school, all through, yes. I still live right outside of Indianapolis. So, that's where it started, I would say.

NJ: And so, you did go to college.

RD: I did. I ended up going to Indiana University. My dad took me, and we got a couple of small bank loans for the first year. And I worked the whole time. I worked in the library actually. I typed the cards for the card catalog in the IU Library, and I took -- here's the funny thing. I didn't really know what I wanted to be yet. I knew I wanted something with writing, possibly poetry. I took one poetry class, I took a couple of creative writing classes, I took a couple of song writing classes, and I took art history and anthropology. That was it. I didn't want anything else. I did that for two years, and then realized I was no closer to a degree than I had been. And my dad was kind of running out of money, and so I went home to work, and then I thought I would go back the next year. But I ended up taking correspondence courses, and I took a couple poetry classes at home from some adult poets that were doing that. I actually kind of ended up working. I got a really good job working for a state representative, and I ended up just kind of doing it on my own, being self-taught, actually.

NJ: So, did you ever go back to school?

RD: I took classes, but I never actually got a degree. I still kind of regret that, a little bit. I've thought about maybe trying to get that. But at this point, I'm not sure that it would really matter. And then I look back at a lot of the poets and songwriters and artists that didn't get any degree. They just loved what they did, and they had -- I do believe that there's some talent that you're born with, and then I believe it's passion and determination and to keep learning. I learn all the time.

NJ: How did you move from working for a politician and doing -- I mean, what you do now is so different from that.

RD: Right.

NJ: What's that trajectory?

RD: Well, then someone hired me away from him, and they said, "We'd like to have you work for public relations at the Indianapolis Airport. We would like you to welcome the people coming in off the plane, give them maps, talk to them about where to go in the city." I couldn't pass up the job. Number one, I thought it sounded fascinating, and I would meet new people, and the pay was good, and so I said okay. So, I got that job. While I had that job, this is kind of

where it came from, they had back then no computers, so there was a big typewriter. In between people coming in and meeting new people and getting maps and making phone calls for them, or whatever they needed, I had a lot of free time. I had a lot of down time, and they said it's your time, whatever you want to do. And so I wrote poetry on the typewriter, and I still have it. I have sheaves and sheaves of it that I wrote while I was there. I'm not saying I was a good poet at that point, but it's what I loved, and it was a passion for me. By then I was buying my own, some poetry books that I loved. Back then it was Sandburg, Frost, Auden, you know, different ones, but I would get a couple of anthologies. I'd go to the library. I still wasn't in -- it had nothing to do with children's poetry yet, nothing at all. And so that's where I spent a lot of my time, doing that.

And then, you know as life does, pretty soon you're having children. When I was a young mother with little ones, I was reading the poems to them. I had a collection of poems. I had some nursery rhymes. I had fairy tales. I had a few picture books. So, as I was reading to them, it's not then that I said, Oh, I can do this. It's not that at all. It's that I said to myself, This makes me happy, this makes me happy. I had gone through a lot of depression. I had gone through some awful times. My brother had been murdered. My dad had died. I was very sad a lot of the time. I kind of lost my passion for writing, but then this made me happy. And reading about muffins and mice and moons and stars, I was like, This is my medicine. This is my life. And that's when I started writing poetry for children.

NJ: And so from writing it and not submitting it and not publishing it, how did that happen?

RD: Well at some point, and I don't remember exactly, but it was maybe a couple of years, I was writing so much and I was loving it so much, and I was getting out books from the library, and I was, you know, I was just so into it, and learning more and more, and then I would find out, maybe interviews of poets and how they wrote and what their process was, and I was becoming -- it was everything to me. Then I went to a bookstore and I just got a book that was the *Writer's Market*, and it was a big, fat, thick book, and it was the *Writer's Market*, and it told you what publishers were accepting what, where to send your -- Because of course back then it was still all snail mail, and so you would put a stamp on it and get an address and send it to New York and hope you'd hear back. I just, it's really, that's what I did. I just started doing that and saying, Well, maybe I could get some of my things published. I did that for ten years, I got rejected. Ten years I would watch the mailbox and run out, and I always had something out. But for ten years, most of the time they would say, you know, Oh, we already have plenty of poets, or, We have some poets that we publish all the time -- it was just pretty standard stuff. And I always felt like, here I am. Again, it was a whole world different before computers and Facebook and email and Internet. I felt like, here I am in the middle of Indiana. Will I ever -- I

mean, I had never traveled to New York. I had only been on a plane like twice. And I thought, Will I ever be able to make a connection with this place called New York and all these people? I had no idea, but I just kept sending and sending and sending.

NJ: What was the breakthrough? What was the first “Yes”?

RD: I was actually shopping with my daughter when I remember -- We had, at that time we still had, in malls and in restaurants you had phone booths, and I remember that I called from a phone booth to get my messages at home, and there was a message from Boyds Mills Press from an editor named Lisa, and she said, I’m with Boyds Mills Press. I had sent out -- And maybe let me back up here a minute. I had joined an organization called SCBW. Now, it’s SCBWI. Back then it was SCBW. It was out of California. I don’t remember how I heard about it, but I paid the money to quote “join that,” which means you got a newsletter and that kind of thing. I got this newsletter that said Boyds Mills Press was a new company, a spinoff of *Highlights*, and the editor, Bea Cullinan -- Bernice Cullinan -- which ended up being my very good friend. But anyway, she was looking for poetry collections, and nobody was looking for poetry collections. She even said what she was looking for. It was poems about sleep, poems about animals, poems about holidays, and maybe one other thing. And the funny thing is, I said to myself, I’ve got a few poems that I’ve written about little animals like squirrels and different things and where they sleep, and so I said -- She wanted 27 poems, or 40, I don’t remember, and I only had 12. And so, I said to myself, I’m sending them. I’m just sending them. I’m going to break the rules here because it’ll take me forever to get that many written. So I sent in what I had, and I sent in a letter, and I said, I know I only have 12 and you had asked for more, but if you like these, I promise you I can write the rest.

And back to then the phone call, I got my message, and it was, This is Lisa Ballinger from Boyds Mills Press. We got your manuscript called *Sweet Dreams of the Wild*, and we would like to talk to you about publishing the book. And it was over the top. I was so excited. I couldn’t believe it.

NJ: And you were at a store when you --

RD: I was at a store when I got that message. I could not believe it. She said to give her a call back. So, to make a long story short, of course I got right home, called her back, and she said, Kent Brown will be calling you to make an official offer soon. And on a Saturday, he called me and made an offer for my very first book. He doesn’t know it, but I would have paid him.

(Laughter)

NJ: We won't tell him. When was that?

RD: 1995, I believe, something like that. And the book came out in 1998.

NJ: And that was *Wordsong*

RD: Yes, *Wordsong*. One of, probably, their first books of poetry -- I don't know how many, they did. That was my first foray into the real publishing world.

NJ: And that was an illustrated collection?

RD: Yes.

NJ: Who did the art? Do you remember?

RD: Her name was Katharine Dodge. She lived in Pennsylvania. I never talked to her. I don't know anything about her.

NJ: Is that book still in print?

RD: I believe it's now out of print.

NJ: So how many books have you done since then?

RD: You know, I haven't done an actual count, but I think about 35, something like that. I would like to add something to that, because once I knew that I had a book deal and I felt like a real author, a real poet, I did two things. I found out through the SCBW, now "I", I found Eileen Spinelli's phone number, because I had always, I had read *Highlights* a lot. She had poems in the magazine a lot. I found out Lee Bennett Hopkins' phone number. I had always wanted to be in his anthologies, because now I was going to the library and getting anthologies. I was getting collections of her poems. So, I called both of them.

I don't remember which one first, but I called Eileen and I told her that I was an upcoming poet. I had just gotten my first book. I would like some advice. I would like to talk to her about poetry. She was absolutely wonderful -- she was sweet, she was kind, she was just a doll. And we, to this day, we are very good friends.

I called Lee and I said to him, Is this Lee Bennett Hopkins? And he said, Yes, it is. I must say that he has since told me, Would you quit telling this story. I don't want to get a bunch of phone calls. I said, I just want to tell you that -- He answered the phone, I didn't think he would. I was thinking it would go into a voicemail or an assistant or something. And I said, Oh, this is Lee Bennett Hopkins? Yes, it is. And I said, Oh, hello. My name is Rebecca Kai Dotlich and I write poetry, and I would like to know if there's a way I could get into your anthologies. I love your anthologies. And he said, Slow down. Tell me your name again. So, I did. And he said, Now, start over. So, I did, very calmly, and I told him. And then he said, I will send you a letter the next time I do an anthology, and I will give you a chance to be in it. But I must tell you, I only pick the best poems in the whole country. Just because we've talked and just because I like what I've heard, that doesn't mean I'm going to choose you. Your poems have to be the best. And I said, Okay, I understand that. He said, "Okay. And a couple months later, he did.

NJ: And what book was that?

RD: It was called *Small Talk*, with Harcourt.

That was my first time I got poems published with him in his anthology. He put in two poems actually. He asked for very -- I still have the letter, and it was on onion paper, and he asked for two. He asked for small poems, short poems. He gave me an example, and I think one was from Patricia Hubbell. I think he gave me one or two, and I believe it was a poem about a snail. He said, Send me some poems if you have for this. Instead of sending him a couple, which I should have, I typed out about 50 small poems, which I knew I shouldn't have, but I thought, What are my chances? If I give him 50, maybe I'll get one. He chose two, and that was my first time I was in his anthologies.

NJ: And you and Lee have become very good friends?

RD: Yes, he's my very good friend, yes.

NJ: What are some of the things, in addition that he believes in you, that you learned from him, either directly or indirectly, that has maybe shaped your work?

RD: He has such a work ethic that unless people know him and his story, it's unbelievable where he started from and everything he did. He was a teacher for so many years. He wrote the first *I Can Read* book for Harper, and it was poetry. He loves poetry. He has a passion for it. Even though I did too, hearing him and being with someone else that did verbally, over the phone, because we hadn't met. So, hearing that passion. He also always told me to be very careful of each and every word, which I thought I knew, but I even did more so once he told me.

He's a big believer in revising to the point where there's not one wasted word. And again, I thought I knew that, but I learned it even more. He's a big believer in putting yourself in the poem, put your heart in the poem, give me something emotional. He said, Don't just write a poem that you think you're supposed to write something about. You've got to feel it. And he said, "Make me feel it." Those are some of the things that I've learned from him.

NJ: How about -- Bea accepted your work, and you mentioned she was a good friend. Talk to me a little bit, talk to us a little bit more about that relationship.

RD: And even though Lisa was the editor that called me, she told me that Bea was the big editor and the one behind this who picked out my work and loved it. When I first met Bea, she was -- Unfortunately she's not alive anymore, and I wish people could see her in my mind -- she was like this little Debbie Reynolds, and as you know, little, beautiful. Even when she got older, she had the young heart of a girl. She had the pep in her step of a girl. She was a girl's girl. In other words, we would room together. We ended up getting to know each other so well through Boyds Mills Press, we would room together sometimes. She would always -- that hair would be rolled, the makeup would be on. She wore hose and heels and beautiful suits and pearls. She would always want to do my makeup in the morning. She told me I didn't wear enough makeup. She says, Honey, you have to wear more makeup. She'd say, Let me do your brows. Let me do your -- And so, we got to be such friends like that. We would be in nightgowns together, talking about poetry. She had me come to her house where she lived on Long Island, and I stayed there with her a couple of nights. I went to her apartment many times when she lived in New York. She talked to me about her son Jonathan, who had died, and we got to talk on a personal level a lot. And she loved poetry. Bea was passionate about poetry. She didn't know that much about it, to be honest, as far as how it's written or how it gets on the page, but she knew she loved it. We would talk sometimes on the phone. I remember she even called me one time and said, Dear, give me an example of a mask poem. And I said, Well, Bea, just remember it's something very simple like the teapot. I'm a little teapot, short and stout. Remember that. The teapot's talking. She said, I will never forget that. But I loved her, I loved her, yes.

NJ: Did you ever, eventually, take classes, or is most of your poetry knowledge and skill self-taught, taught from being a reader?

RD: Self-taught, almost all of it. In college, I took one poetry class. I think I said that, and a couple of song writing, and creative writing once, but no, I never ever took a class in metrics or anything like that. It's mostly self-taught. I have read a lot, a lot of poetry. I really listen and watch and see how it's done. I've talked to other poets. And I probably have to say most of it is

from doing it and getting better slowly by practicing, reading more of it, more and more and more, practicing more. But mostly, I think, it's just having a passion for it that I can't even say where it comes from.

NJ: Where do -- I sound like the kids, but I am interested -- where do your ideas now -- do you sit down to write poetry? Does poetry start and you have to sit down? How does that work for you?

RD: It's very interesting, and it comes in many different ways. It used to be, before I was published and I was just writing poetry, I would sit down and think of maybe something I was thinking about that day, something either I was sad about or something I had seen on a walk with my children, or maybe if they were excited about a rock or a butterfly or a frog, I would say, Oh, I want to write a poem about that. A lot of it was sometimes, I don't know, I could be sad, let's say, and I thought, I'm going to write a poem from the point of view of the tear. Or I would just give myself, I guess, little assignments. It was just, Here's what I want to write about. But it changes. Now that I've been published and I'm a published poet, and I do a lot of poems on assignment. I'll do a lot for anthologies, and Lee, for instance, and Paul Janeczko and J. Patrick Lewis, hope I'm not leaving anyone out, I'm thinking, but if they -- Georgia Heard. When they have a poetry collection, they will say, I want you to write a poem for this collection, and here's the poem I want you to write.

NJ: Wow.

RD: Lee might say, I'm going to write a poem about the library. I want you to write the opening poem about the library and about books. But it's always like you can't -- it needs to be kind of metaphorical, or it can't be specifically trying to teach something. Pat might say, for a *National Geographic* book, he might say, I'd like you to write a poem, maybe, do you have anything on moose? And I might say, No, but I'll write you one, or, Can't believe it, I actually wrote a poem about a moose. Let me see if you like it. And then what happens is you send those in to them, and they decide whether that poem fits or not. If it doesn't, you go back to the drawing board. Or they'll say, What else do you have? Or --

But okay, to answer your question, a lot of it now is on assignment, but I still do a lot of my own poetry for collections, and that, okay, how do I get the ideas for that? It's usually something -- I'm looking out the window as I'm thinking this. It's usually something that I love, that I'm curious about. It could be, for instance, snow. I've always loved snow, what children can do with snow, snow forts, snowball fights, snow angels, but I also love the look of snow coming down, the wonderment that I've always heard no two snowflakes are alike. How does that happen? They look like crystals. I love the way they look. So, there you go. So, then I'll start writing about the snow.

I'll watch. There's another way I'll get an idea for a poem. I'll sit out -- if I'm going to write a poem about snow, I'll get my snow boots on and my coat and my scarf and hat, and I'll go out and I'll sit and I will watch the snow come down, and I will write what it looks like to me and what I am thinking of, and how when it lands, when it melts, what am I thinking? I do a lot of observing, and usually something that I'm passionate about or that I love or that I'm curious about.

NJ: I once heard Katherine Paterson say that when she wrote *Jacob Have I Loved*, she had to go to Chesapeake Bay to do the smell research.

RD: Oh.

NJ: So, I'm curious as a writer, what kind of research -- you kind of alluded to that with putting the boots and going out to observe. What role does research play in your work?

RD: Okay. You know what, many times a lot. Many times not at all. If I'm writing an emotional poem, something either that I've experienced from my heart, or maybe I've seen a child go through something and I've seen a child, let's say, be sad and I want to write a poem about what I saw or what he said about his grandfather, that's all emotional.

But there are poems that I do research for. There's one in particular. I remember when Lee had asked me to do a poem on Washington, D.C., for a book at that time, I think it was for Simon & Schuster, maybe it was Harper, I think it was Simon & Schuster. It was called *My America*, and he was going to have poets do poems about all regions, states, all that. Well, I wrote a poem about Indiana, but towards the end he said, No one has written about Washington, D.C., so we would like you, me and the editor, and I believe it was Rebecca Davis at the time, so it must have been Harper. And he said, Would you write the poem about Washington, D.C.? I said, Yeah, sure. Just like the actor that says, Can you ride a horse? Yeah, sure. Now you've got to learn how to ride a horse. I was like, what in the world? How am I going to -- how am I going to take all of Washington and get it down into a poem. And so, I did a lot of research. I went to the library. I got stacks of books. I had never been there.

NJ: I was going to ask that.

RD: Never been there. I got stacks of books, and I was reading all kinds of things, and I was taking my notebook and writing lines and trying to get it figured out, and I couldn't do it. I was like, I'm not there. It's not giving me -- I'm not getting where I want to be. So, I told my husband, I've got to get on a plane. I've got to go there. And so, I did, I'd never been there. I went and I took my notebook, and I walked around the streets, looking at the statues, looking

at Arlington Cemetery, watching everything, looking and watching and observing everything I could and taking notes. Then when I got home, I wrote the poem, and I think it's a good poem. I think it came, not easy, but it fell together better now that I saw it and I knew what I was writing about. Before, I was just kind of taking some facts from a book. Now I felt it, I saw it, and now I wrote a better poem about it. So that's the only time I think I ever traveled specifically.

But other times, like there are times that I have -- Lee has asked me to do a poem about a certain bug, so I'll do lots of research about that bug, get lots of books out. I want to find out everything, from how they look, how they eat, how they -- where they live, how they crawl. I'll try to find one and see one if I can. I wrote an elephant poem once that I went to the zoo and really watched, like how does the trunk, you know, how does it fold down, how does it come up, how does it wrinkle, how do they move? Anytime I can do any research physically -- go there and look at, I do. Otherwise I just look through books, but yes, a lot of times you have to do research. I can come up with many examples where I had to read about it before I could write about it.

NJ: I was looking earlier today at your collection with Jane Yolen, your fairy tale poems. Collaboratively, talk about what is it like as a poet? I mean, I tried to see who did which poem or -- Do you collaborate on a poem? Do you take turns? How, what role does collaboration play?

RD: Okay, yes, that's interesting. And before I forget, when you say Jane Yolen, she also did an anthology that I have poetry in, so I left her out of that list. Okay. So, well alright. The way, first of all, I'll tell you how that book even started, *Grumbles from the Forest*. Pat Lewis and I had done a collaboration on castles, and that's the first time I had collaborated with anyone, and it was called *Castles*, with Boyds Mills. Pat and I did it a little different than Jane and I did it. Pat and I wrote -- we made a list of castles that we would each write about, and we wrote those poems. That's kind of pretty much how we did it. He worked himself, I worked myself. I think there was a few times that we made sure that the other one didn't, like, dislike the poem or anything, but we didn't do a whole lot of collaboration. We admire each other's work, we trusted each other, and that's kind of how that book came about.

Well, we were at a conference and Jane was there, and she picked up that book, and she loved it. And she said, How did this book come about, with you and Pat? You know, how did you guys -- So I was kind of telling her, and she looked at me and she said, Well, next time you have an idea, let me do it with you. And I said, Sure. And she goes, Let's come up with an idea. And I said, Okay. You want to do it now? She said, Yes. So we went to a table and had a cup of tea and started brainstorming. And because she is so -- she's like, you know, what would you

call her of fairy tales? She knows so much about fairy tales. She's written so much about fairy tales. She goes, Let's do something on fairy tales. I said, Is there really something that hasn't been done? And she said, Let's put a twist on it. And she said, We'll write poems about well-known fairy tales, but we'll kind of put a twist on it. We can do it from the point of view of one of the characters. We can make it kind of funny. We can put in our own imagination. I said, Okay, that sounds good.

So back to your question. We started -- we weren't as organized, maybe, as Pat and I were. Jane and I just started writing. She would -- Jane's like this (sound of finger snappings). She's so quick. Before I even got home, she's sent me these poems, and she's like, Okay, I wrote this, this, and this. And I'd be like, Oh, she wrote Cinderella. I was going to write Cinderella. I was like, Yes, this is a good poem. Okay, you got Cinderella. But then we would write -- we each wrote a poem about that particular fairy tale, but we could choose ourself, we just couldn't do what the other did. If she wrote a poem already from the point of view of the shoe, let's say, then I would write a different poem. We collaborated very easily with one another. We were really honest with one another, because she told me, she said, You've got to be honest, and you've got to tell me, and I've got to be able to tell you. I said, Absolutely, I don't hold back. It's fine with me. We would tell each other -- your line five, the rhythm is totally off, fix it. And the other one would write back, Okay. Or one of us would go, and we did it to each other, That word in line seven, you can get a better word for that. Good eye, okay. Very rare did we disagree. There was maybe a couple times that we might say, I really want to keep that line. Well, okay, tell me why. And then we'd talk it out. But most of the time, we just, we really did kind of go back and forth and help revise, and that kind of thing. But of course the editor, Rebecca Davis was our big cheerleader and also helped us and told us when something wasn't working or whatever.

NJ: So, related to collaboration, I know you and Georgia collaborate as teachers of poetry.

RD: Yes, right.

NJ: Talk about that collaboration and maybe what you've learned as a poet from that.

RD: Georgia and I became very good friends. We've been friends for quite a while. We have different ways of teaching. We come to poetry from two different places. She was trained in poetry. She studied with some great poets. She studied with Stanley Kunitz. I never -- I was in Indiana, she was in New York. I'm sure I would've if I'd of had the chance. I always admired that. She told me stories about it. I'd love to hear that. She writes more poetry, I would say, and this is the way she teaches too, more from the heart, more emotional. That's more her.

She also, though, can write a darn good poem about a bug, if she wants to. I come into teaching more, talking about word choice, alliteration, metaphor, that kind of thing, observation. She comes to it more from the heart. What are you feeling? Put it down. That kind of thing. But when we teach, we do a little of both, and we have a lot of respect for each other and for how each other teaches. I think we both feel like people who come to our workshop can benefit from both of those. If you can combine the two of those, that's perfect, that's wonderful. We're also working on a collection together. But we're working on it, so it's not anything yet we can talk about, and it's far from being a book yet, but we're working.

NJ: How many of those, the poetry at the beach or shore, I mean, it's the workshops. I probably had that wrong.

RD: Oh no, that's okay.

NJ: How many of those have you done?

RD: That's okay. It's Poetry by the Sea --

NJ: By the sea, by the beach (laughter).

RD: That's okay. It's close enough. We had three, but one was canceled last year because of the hurricane. This one was the second one, and of course we missed the hurricane. So we've done, actually, two. We had three scheduled, but we've done two together. We're still thinking about doing a third next year. We also give poetry workshops out at *Highlights* together.

NJ: I knew that. That was my next one.

RD: Yes, so we've given two of those, and we'll be giving our third next month. And we're already on schedule to do it again in October for 2018.

NJ: And they fill.

RD: Yes.

NJ: How many people come, and who comes?

RD: Usually 18, 20 people. And that might not sound like a lot, but it is when you have two of you and you're teaching and you're critiquing and you're together for four straight days -- Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday -- five days. And you're sharing, and it's great. You get to know each other. There's a bonding there, because people come from all over, to answer your question. They come from every state. Last year we had someone come from Sweden, and we've had them from Hawaii, and we have them from Illinois, you know what I mean, Indiana, Florida, New York, wherever. They come from everywhere. Sometimes they're teachers. Most of the time they are writers who love poetry and really want to either publish poetry and they haven't been able to make that happen yet, or maybe they have had a few things published, but they love poetry, they want to be immersed in it, they want to learn more, and they want to be with fellow poets, because that's nothing better. And they want to have time to write.

NJ: Let's go full circle. When you think back to that early poet in you, whether you knew, probably had no idea, where you'd be right now, --

RD: No, no.

NJ: -- to that poet who was typing in your free time. Based on what you know now, what would you tell that young poet?

RD: Interesting. I think I would tell her to try to make her dream come true a little bit earlier than she did, a little bit sooner, a little bit quicker. Don't think life is going to be, oh, forever away; oh, maybe when the kids grow up; oh, maybe when the kids get into school; oh, maybe when I have more time. I did a little bit of that anyway. I always woke up early before they went to school. I'd get up at 5 if I had to, to write for an hour. I'd stay up late, at midnight or 1, writing if I had to. I always seemed to do, but I think I would've done it more, quicker. I think I would've taken maybe some more classes at a local college. I think I would've tried to learn a little bit more a little bit quicker. I would have also said, You don't know it, but it's going to happen, and you're going to be happy doing it, and you're going to find your niche, and don't worry about it so much.

NJ: Do you mind indulging us by either reading or speaking one of your poems to end?

RD: Let me try to remember.

NJ: I'm not trying to put you --

RD: I'm going to try it, and if I can't, you'll hear me trying to think about it. Because I haven't thought about this poem -- the first thing that came to mind. It was Bea's favorite, and there was a man named Raymond, Allen Raymond, who used to publish the *Teaching K-8* magazine, and it was his favorite. And every time we would be -- I wrote this poem. I didn't write it for an anthology. I wrote it remembering my dad, and then it got in a couple of anthologies. But Bea would always say at a luncheon, she would say, Please read that poem. And Allen would say, Please read that poem. And he would get tears in his eyes. I'm going to try to remember that poem. I haven't even looked at it for a long time.

Kitchen Waltz

My small bare feet spoon his shoes,

sideways slide, one step, two.

And here we go along the floor,

toe piggy backing, three and four.

Around my dancing giant goes,

trailing me on leather soles.

Five steps, six, spin and dip,

dancing Daddy, please don't quit.

The world is big, but I belong

to Daddy's kitchen waltzing song.

NJ: Thank you, Rebecca, very much.

RD: Thank you. Thanks.