

RUTH FORMAN



'Make this day your own square/ in your own life quilt/ so shining/ it brighten the whole of your years this far . . ." With these inspiring words, poet Ruth Forman urges us to make our dreams come true. She delights in crafting poems that readers of any age can understand and love. Ruth began writing as a kid growing up in Massachusetts and New York. At about age seven, she wrote a book she called *Poems for Kids*. She says, "Creating that first book of poems when I was a kid maybe made it a little bit easier for me to do a book of poems when I was older." After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, Ruth published *We Are the Young Magicians*, winning the prestigious Barnard New Women Poets Prize. Since then, she's written more books, including an award-winning book for kids, and her work is in many poetry anthologies. She also shares her passion for poetry by teaching writing classes. Ruth holds a master's degree in film, and her dream is to combine the arts of film *and* poetry.

Q. What was your most challenging experience as a kid?

Moving from my mom's house to my dad's house when I was about nine. It was a very big change. I moved from a rural environment, where I got to play in the country pretty much every day, to an urban environment [in upstate New York] . . . One of the ways I was able to make that an easier experience actually was by meeting a Bahá'í community that was very loving and was a wonderful, very diverse family that took me in as their own.

Q. How did you learn about the Bahá'í Faith?

I started meeting the [Bahá'ís] of Rochester, New York. And I really loved the community . . . When I was 12, I went to some Bahá'í classes and went to Bahá'í schools on Sundays . . . I went to my first youth conference, and really loved it. By the time I was 15,

Q. How does being a Bahá'í affect your work?

Being a Bahá'í always gives me a sense of hope throughout things that might be very difficult. As a writer, you have to be wide open and be willing to be a witness to whatever is going on, whether it's beautiful,



Left: At age 12, Ruth loved going to Bahá'í events for kids.



Right: Ruth (second from right), age 14, at Green Acre Bahá'í School in Maine, U.S., where she volunteered during summers

I decided I did want to be a Bahá'í. Even though my background as a child was Christian, I very much embraced the Bahá'í Faith, its principles. Even as a child, it felt like they fit more my outlook of how life should be and how the world should work together.

whether it's something difficult or challenging. For me, because I'm Bahá'í, I have a sense that we're moving toward a better place as the human race. So I think that always gives my work a sense of hope . . .

Q. What makes a good poem?

If you can say things in a way that's very unique, that people aren't used to hearing, that is very truthful . . . When you speak the truth, people sit up and take notice. And if you use the senses in your work—sight, sound, smells, and taste—it makes the poem come alive in a way that the person reading or hearing it can really experience it, because it's calling on their senses to participate.

Q. Some artists feel they get inspiration from God.

Do you feel this, and if so, can you tell us about it?

Yes, I very much feel like I get my inspiration from God . . . Sometimes, I name God specifically in my work. But other times, I think I want . . . to exemplify some of the virtues that I feel are so important and beautiful, like truth, like justice, like peace or hope. And I try to make sure my work is infused with that so people can *feel* that hope or truth or justice.

Q. In this issue of *Brilliant Star*, we're talking about mysteries. To you, what are life's greatest mysteries?

We're all here for a reason. We all have something to contribute to the world. So part of the mystery of life is kind of figuring that out . . . And then after we figure that out and do our best, kind of taking each step toward what we think that calling is. I think the beautiful mystery is how all of those pieces fit together.

Q. How did tai chi and karate become important to you?

As a writer, I was sitting down too much. I wanted to get up and move. So I stumbled upon a tai chi class, and I realized that I really, really loved it . . . When I practiced tai chi, it was almost like a moving prayer . . . Karate . . . has the combination of strength and power and beauty. I think when you do it well, it's also like a moving form of poetry, for both of them.

Q. If you had one wish for *Brilliant Star's* readers, what would it be?

That they realize that they're all very special people and have something very unique and special to offer to the



Left: Practicing tai chi is an important part of Ruth's life. She says, "Each movement tells a story . . ."

Below: Ruth presents her children's book, *Young Cornrows Callin Out the Moon*, at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books.



Q. What's your advice for aspiring writers?

Read! Because there's so much out there to inspire us . . . The second thing I would say is to keep . . . a little journal, or just a little notebook, and write down thoughts . . . And then just be open to touch the world, and be comfortable writing that down, sharing that with other people in [your] own perspective. Because . . . a really good story teaches us and inspires us, feeds us. And I think when you can do that, it's really a contribution to somebody's life.