

>> This is Matt Raymond at the Library of Congress. For the past 9 years book lovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate reading at the Library of Congress's National Book Festival. This year the Library is proud to commemorate a Decade of Words and Wonder at the 10th Annual National Book Festival on September 25, 2010. President and Mrs. Obama are honorary chairs of the event, which provides DC locals and visitors from across the country and around the world the opportunity to see and meet their favorite authors, illustrators, characters and poets. The festival, which is free and open to the public, will be held between 3rd and 7th Streets on the National Mall from 10AM to 5:30PM on September 25 rain or shine. At this time I'm honored to welcome Pat Mora, an author, poet and literacy advocate whose bilingual stories bring what she calls book joy to kids, parents and educators around the world. Ms. Mora will be sharing her book, Book Fiesta: Celebrate Children's Day Book Day at the National Book Festival. Book Fiesta celebrates reading and commemorates Children's Day Book Day, the April 30 holiday that Ms. More established in 1996. Pat Mora is decorated with honorary doctorates from the State University of New York Buffalo and North Carolina State University and was recently named one of the fifty most inspiring authors in the world by Poet's and Writer's Magazine. Congratulations to you, Ms. Mora, and thank you so much for speaking with us today.

>> Well, thank you, Matt. I'm delighted to be with you.

>> Tell us a little bit about what inspired you to begin writing your poems and books for children in particular and have your own experiences as a mother influenced the way that you've written and chosen particular stories to tell?

>> I think reading to my own three children when they were growing up in El Paso, Texas, I became more and more fascinated by the power of picture books. Eventually I thought I'd like to try that too. I think that being a child of the desert and of the US/Mexico border who loves to read that has probably been, those three elements, the most powerful elements in shaping what I write about and how I write.

>> You've also talked about rejection, which almost all authors go through early in their career in getting published. How does one persevere throughout that?

>> It takes stubbornness. In most fields of life, and I think that's whether one decides to a physician, a nurse, a writer, a painter, every human being experiences setbacks and rejections. As a writer, I think rejections are part of the game. I love what I do, I feel very fortunate to do it, so even when I get discouraged I remind myself that I am lucky to be a writer, lucky to be a speaker and love of my own work is what keeps me at it and what keeps me stubborn about getting new books published.

>> You said that your aunt has been an inspiration for you. Why is that?

>> I had, I come from a very close bilingual family. I had a wonderful aunt who was like a second grandmother to me. He name was Ignasia Delgado. Actually come September I'm going to start on a new picture book

about her. Actually I hope to write it with my daughter, which will be a new experience. My aunt was a wonderful storyteller. She also, and I'll get teary even saying, she really models what it means to be a loving person for me, you know, she didn't have children of her own, I'm the oldest of four, and we were her children. She sacrificed and saved and we always came first.

>> You talk a lot about diversity and bilingualism, why do you think it's important to have kids start to read and write bilingually at an early age?

>> What's most important is that kids early on have positive reading experiences. I spend a lot of time talking to parents about that. I try to stress to them that whether that early experience is in English or Spanish or Russian, what's important is that a child feels, oh, boy, when mom or dad or grandma pick up a book, this is a good time. I'm going to get to snuggle, you know, this is time for me, the book and this is an adult who cares about me. If the family happens to be bilingual, then, of course, I want those experiences to be in those languages. The most important thing is that reading is not a punishment it is a joy.

>> I mentioned in the introduction the term book joy, which you coined, what does book joy mean to you? When and how do you experience it?

>> I tend to have long, busy days and whether I am at home in Santa Fe or if I'm traveling, at the end of a long day one of my favorite moments is when I open my book and it's me and my book and that's what I mean by book joy. Any real reader smiles when I say book joy because we know what it means.

>> You talk in your stories a lot about families and clearly that's important to you and has influenced your background, what keeps you coming back to this topic?

>> Others have said that writers don't always choose their topics, their topics choose them, and I think in some ways that the power of the desert in my life and the power of this really loving family that I come from it's like a magnet and sometimes, for example, with the aunt you mentioned I sometimes think I have written the last book or poem I'm going to write about her and I joke with audiences that she just sneaks right back in, you know, because she's just such a powerful force as was my own mom, you know.

>> That says a lot I think. You talked a lot about literacy, you talk about libraries and librarians. It seems you have a special place in your heart for those kinds of issues. Why is that?

>> I did go to the library as a child thanks to my mom. It wasn't necessarily always a time that was equally welcoming to all kinds of kids and I hear a lot of stories about that. Some of those young people who never were really noticed by librarians when they were little are now librarians themselves. So little by little as a country I like to believe that contrary to what we always hear in the news we are embracing diversity in complex ways. The next generation is going to show us that

one need not judge other people by their skin color or by their bank accounts. I trust in that next generation because they are experiencing diversity day to day, you know, in the schools, in the shopping mall and whatever. I think it's one of our national strengths so that I am always, you know, shocked at the way in which people reject what I view as part of our common good.

>> You're also described as a literacy advocate. Do you agree with that and do you see that your role as a writer and advocacy linked in some way?

>> If by advocate we mean champion, I would be happy to accept that, you know? I am a champion of the power of books. I have spoken a lot, lots of people speak a lot about the power of media and I think it's a fact. On the other hand, I also think parents are powerful, I feel educators are powerful, you know, teachers and librarians. I feel books are powerful that they allow us to relax, to laugh, to learn, to become more empathetic, I am more human because of the books that I have been privileged to read. I want that experience for all kids. There are far too many families, too many homes, in this country that are bookless and it breaks my heart.

>> I'm going to give a spin to my high school Spanish here but I mentioned the children or the Family Literacy Initiative, Children's Day Book Day or, [speaking Spanish], can you tell me about what that is and how it's evolved since you began it in 1996?

>> I joked that I was [speaking Spanish], which is a fast way of saying that long name [speaking Spanish]. Many people just call it dia now which means day. It's a good name for it. It's a daily commitment that those of us who have embraced the idea of wanting to link all children to book languages and cultures. I often say that my friends, the librarians in Charlotte, North Carolina, say dia equals diversity in action. That they are busy reaching out to all the different sectors of their communities and in a special way we celebrate, we started out celebrating April 30. Now for large library systems and school districts they can't get them all in on one day and so all during April there are these culminating [inaudible] of this determined commitment to link all children to books, languages and cultures.

>> Hmm. You've worked in quite a few genres. You've written poetry for adults, you've written for children obviously and a non-fiction and one of the things you've written about is creativity. What is creativity in terms of is it something that can be learned or is it innate in a person or maybe a combination?

>> We're all creative. I firmly believe that. Somehow some of us early on and that goes back to the power of family, power of school, begin to doubt that we have interesting and different solutions to propose. That could be to a science question, it could be writing a poem, it could be to writing a song. The impetus for writing this new book Zing [phonetic] about 7 creativity practices, was my concern that given the diversity in our classroom sometimes not all of our students are viewed as equally creative and sometimes the teachers and librarians at the

front of the room don't firmly believe in their own dear heart that they are creative and as a country we need that innovative energy, we need to believe in our potential.

>> What do you think that educators or should do about that?

>> First I think they have to work on believing it themselves, which is why in this book of fourteen letters seven are to the educators and 7 are to the educators linking that idea to their own student. So I think we have to embrace the idea that I am a creative person, I have something special to contribute to the world, I have to give myself the quiet to hear that, to see it, to explore it and maybe I do that by gardening or cooking or writing a poem, but we all need to nurture and foster our creative potential and as we do that, then we are more likely to say oh that's a great idea, I could do that with my students, I could do that with the kids who come to the library. We have to experience it first.

>> This is probably a good segue into the next question but I often like to ask authors about their own writing process. Some people do it certain time of the day, certain place, certain rituals. How do you write?

>> Ideally, and life is seldom ideal, ideally I have a nice cup of tea, I have quiet, I have space around me, I'm a very nesty write so I have my dictionary and my thesaurus and my Spanish dictionary and so I make a big mess. So ideally I may be sitting at the dining room table, which is where I'm sitting as I'm talking to you, and I have my cup of tea and I have the quiet I need. Now, I have been writing for about 30 years and I will say that through those 30 years I have certainly written at airports and hotel rooms and at restaurants. So we can't wait for the perfect situation. I think that's a problem people will say, well, I'm going to write but I'm waiting for retirement and I always say, well, start now. I started at two hours a week.

>> Yeah. You said that inspiration often finds you not necessarily the other way around. Are you on a plane sometimes and you start writing something on a napkin? How does that work?

>> I've been known to do that. I try to have a little notebook with me but the aunt we talked about was always writing things on the back of envelopes and probably I grew up seeing that, but yes, I will just write down a phrase or an idea. Sometimes it's years before I get back to it. So I mentioned in that book on creativity to have sort of like a, what I call the compost pile so that you are saving your ideas because you will forget them.

>> You've said before that one of the most important pieces of advice you can give is to "learn to savor revision."

>> [Laughter]

>> Why is it that the first draft really is never the last draft?

>> The first draft can be the last draft if it's a letter to my mom, it's something I'm going to read to my friends at a party. In other words,

personal writing does not usually need to be revised. If I'm interested in sharing it with a group of strangers, if I'm interested in publication, then I have to be committed to improving it. When I speak to writing teachers, I say that we have to meet students where they are in their personal writing development. We cannot ask students to be crazy about revision if they're early writers and that could be early writers at 60. So initially you have to begin generating a lot of text. As you do that, and you're reading at the same time and that has to be a combination, that's the winning combination, then as you're doing that your own standards for your own writing ideally will rise and you say I think I could do that better and that's when you fall in love with revision.

>> Yeah. You're obviously read by countless children. What did you read when you were a young person?

>> I grew up in a home with books thanks to my mom and we had a set of orange books called the Child Craft. I even bought a set a few years ago, I managed to find one, because I so loved the illustrations. They were not in full color or anything like that, but I loved the rhymes in it and that's one of the reasons I love to write poetry, you know, I love poems like I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me and what can be the use of him is more than I can see, those kind of things, you know, just they were so comforting to me and maybe that's a key word that books and reading are a comfort to me both like a real comforter is when you pull it over you and psychologically they are a comfort to me, they are a safe place for me and I want that for kids.

>> You've also said you read the stories of Laura Ingalls Wilder as a child. What drew you to those?

>> I was looking through the W's at the library long before Little House on the Prairie was even thought of and I simply fell in love with that family. Interesting thing about that is that though I have spent much of my life talking about the power of seeing bilingual families and friends given the demographics of our country, that family it was nothing like my family except it was also a close family. So it was like my family. I was a member of that family book after book after book.

>> You obviously are going to be at the National Book Festival on September 25 so what do you like to talk about at book festivals? What can your fans expect to hear from you?

>> Well, I like to talk to them, I try to think about what questions they may have for me and try to answer those. The book festival is an event, you know, such an honor to go and usually the advice given it's not to spend too much time reading but to chat with the audience and in my previous visits I have gone around to different tents and listened to people. I remember the last time standing at the back and listening to Walter C. Meyers and thinking aren't we all lucky just to be in this tent listening to him? You know? He is an imposing figure and such an important voice. So I just try to think about what might my audience want to hear. I also try to share what are my loves, you know, writers take them back to the page either by questions that we're trying to work out

for ourselves, you know, sort of deep questions, but also we are driven back to the page by our love, by our love of writing but also for me, you know, by a love of a landscape, by love of stories, and share that with an audience.

>> Well, Pat Mora, before we let you go do you want to talk about maybe what's coming up next for you?

>> Well, one of the things that's coming up next is this book about the aunt that you were kind enough to ask about. It's a book I sort of got the idea for the book probably five years ago, it's taken a while to get to it, but my aunt became a citizen very late in her life, and I think that would be an interesting story today. As a country, we are thinking a lot about immigration and citizenship and my aunt was very eloquent, and I'm not going to give away the key line of the book, very eloquent in how she talked about why late in her life though she was very proud to have been born in Mexico, why she decided to become a citizen.

>> Well, Pat Mora, thank you so much for talking with me today. We definitely look forward to seeing you at the Children's Pavilion at the National Book Festival. That is on September 25 from 10AM to 5:30PM on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. rain or shine and, as always, free and open to the public. From the Library of Congress, this is Matt Raymond. Thank you so much for listening.