Cousin Becky

I was astonished by my cousin Becky’s newfound talent. The last time I saw her play, she had looked like a little girl, running aimlessly around on the softball field. Her hair was in messy pigtails, and she was wearing oversized softball pants and a too-big shirt with a giant number 4 on the front. She couldn’t use her glove very well, her shoelaces were untied, and her knee-high socks were crooked. She was focused on the dandelions growing in the grass, and the bugs in the air, with no worry about whether she was winning the game.

That was almost three years ago, however, and a definite transformation had occurred in the meantime. Now she was truly an athlete. As she stood before me in the field, I took note of some of the specific changes in my cousin’s skills.

Yes, she was much more of a softball player. Her hair was pulled back and securely out of her face so it wouldn’t interfere with making a big play. Her uniform actually fit. She still wore number 4, but it was the right size now. The glove was the same one, but she used it differently, and I could tell that her hand was big enough to control it. Her shoelaces had double knots, and her socks stood tall. She was poised with intent between each pitch, and at the crack of the bat she was moving, regardless of where the ball was going. The dandelions and bugs never broke her concentration, and she fielded the softball with skill and grace.

Walter Dean Meyers

Walter Dean Myers, an award-winning writer of young adult literature, was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, in 1937. Raised in a foster home in Harlem, New York, Myers gives his foster mother credit for teaching him how to read. In grade school, Myers struggled with difficulties in speech that made expressing himself challenging, so one of his teachers encouraged him to turn to writing as a way to express his thoughts. Writing his first stories and poems at age nine, Myers started what would eventually develop into a writing career that has so far produced more than 50 works of children’s and young adult literature.

Described as a good student, Myers dropped out of high school because he thought he could not afford to go to college. In 1954 he enlisted in the Army, and served until he was discharged in 1957. Using his experiences of growing up in Harlem as the subject material in his books, his first success came with *Where Does the Day Go?* for which he won an award.

When describing his ideas about writing, Myers says, “The special place of the young adult novel should be in its ability to address the needs of the reader to understand his or her relationship with the world, with each other, and with adults.” He has won multiple awards for his writing, including two Newberry Honor Medals. Myers’s writing includes historical fiction, adventure, poetry, nonfiction, and picture books. He currently lives in Jersey City, New Jersey, where he regularly volunteers at local schools.