

Dear Reader,

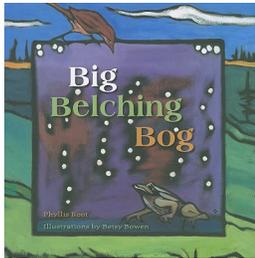
I'm so glad to have this chance to write to you, reader to reader. Reading has always been one of my favorite things to do. My dad told me once that when I was still in a high chair I was reading, but I think he may have been exaggerating. He liked to tell stories, just like I do.



Two things I especially loved when I was a kid—stories, and being outside.

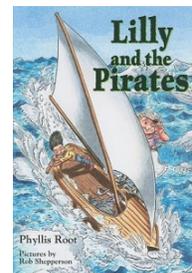
Stories were everywhere. Stories like *Babar* and *Curious George* and *Flicka, Dicka, and Ricka* on the shelves of the bookmobile that stopped by the woods down the hill from our house every other week. Stories and poems in a big red book my mother bought me once after I had to go to the doctor's office. Stories in the school library once I started first grade. Stories like Nancy Drew that I could buy for a dollar each in Wolf and Dessauer's department store. Stories in the comic books on the rack down at Platt's Pharmacy. And stories that my friends and I made up and played out.

We had lots of room for stories in our neighborhood: big back yards, a huge field of weeds behind my house, attics and basements and garages. When we weren't making up stories we played kickball or baseball or rode our bikes all around or went exploring and built hideouts. One of my best friends was Donna, and we both planned to be writers when we grew up.



Every summer when I was little my dad and mom and sister and I would go to a cabin for a week or two. We'd swim and fish and row boats and, of course, read. Here's a picture of me with a fish I caught. I still love being outside, and I still love stories—reading them and writing them, too. I wrote [BIG BELCHING BOG](#) because the first time I ever saw a big bog in northern Minnesota, I fell completely in love with it. That bog was one of the wildest places I had ever been, incredibly beautiful and enormous and quiet. It took me a long time to figure out how to put words down on paper that might make readers love the bog, too. I didn't do the art in the book because I'm not an artist, but I love Betsy Bowen's pictures, and I think she must love the bog, too, to make such wonderful art.

I was afraid of a lot of things when I was little, like the dark, and the space under my bed, and meeting people, and fire ants, and not knowing where to sit in first grade. I was a lot like Lilly in [Lilly and the Pirates](#), except that I didn't write things down in a worry book. I'm still afraid of a lot of things, but I've learned that even when I'm afraid, if I just go ahead and do what I'm afraid of, I'm almost always glad I did. That's how I ended up sailing across the Sea of Cortes and hearing whales breathing around us in the dark. And how I ended up going in a raft down the Zambezi River. And how I ended up dog sledding and camping out in northern Minnesota when the temperature was 25 below zero.



By the time I was in fifth grade I knew I wanted to be a writer when I grew up. It took me a long time, but I feel really lucky to be doing what I love to do. And when I'm writing, I'm not afraid of anything.

So whatever it is you want to do, even if you are afraid, follow your heart to do it.

And keep reading!

[Phyllis Root](#)