



Valerie Worth

(October 29, 1933 – July 31, 1994)

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Valerie Worth was an author and poet best known for her ‘small poems’ for children. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1933, she was raised in the nearby suburb of Swarthmore. Worth’s mother was a botanist. Her father was a biology professor at Swarthmore College. The family moved to Tampa, Florida and then to India a few years later. Worth returned to Swarthmore to attend college. There, she met her future husband, George Bahlke. She graduated in 1955 with an English degree and High Honors. She was married shortly after. While her husband finished his Ph.D. at Yale University, Worth worked at Yale University Press and wrote poetry on the side.

Worth and her husband settled down in Clinton, New York. George was hired to teach English at Kirkland College. Worth joined a small writing group. There she met Natalie Babbitt, a celebrated author and illustrator whose husband was the president of Kirkland College. Worth read some of her small poems to the group, and Babbitt offered to send them to her publisher. This began a fast friendship and collaboration between the two authors. Worth’s first book of poetry, *Small Poems*, was published in 1972 and was illustrated by Natalie Babbitt.

Worth’s parents encouraged a lifelong love of poetry. Her mother read poetry to her when she was young. Her father wrote poetry inspired by his work. Raised by a botanist and biologist, and growing up in rural areas, Worth also developed a love of nature and an eye for observation. She enjoyed being alone with nature and loved to study the close details of weeds, flowers, and small animals. She combined her love of poetry and nature in her own poems. Worth wrote her poems in simple, free-verse. While many poets at the time were writing about their lives, Worth focused her poetry on everyday things. Instead of writing about important events from her own life, she explored experiences that all children share. She wanted her poetry to show the magic that can be found in nature and in ordinary events and objects.

Worth and her husband had three children. She published a dozen books in her lifetime, including both poetry and fiction. Natalie Babbitt illustrated many of them. In 1991 Worth received the NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. She died of cancer in 1994 at her home in Clinton. Three more books of Worth’s poetry were published after her death.

