

Conversation with Rebekah Weatherspoon

Julie E. Moody-Freeman

Published online: May 2022

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

About the Author: Julie E. Moody-Freeman is the Director of the Center for Black Diaspora and an Associate Professor in the Department of African and Black Diaspora Studies at DePaul University. She is the co-editor of *The Black Imagination, Science Fiction, and the Speculative* and *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism, and the Speculative*. Her scholarly essays on Belizean writer Zee Edgell have been published in *African Identities*, *Macomeré*, *Canadian Women Studies/les cahiers de la femme*, and *Seeking the Self-Encountering the Other: Diasporic Narrative and the Ethics of Representation*. Her work on African American Romance has appeared in *Romance Fiction and American Culture* and *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*. Moody-Freeman is also the creator and host of the *Black Romance Podcast*, which is building an oral history on Black Romance writers.

Keywords: Black romance, Harbour, publishing, Rebekah Weatherspoon, Treasure

This conversation with Rebekah Weatherspoon originally appeared September 29, 2020 on the *Black Romance Podcast*, created and hosted by Julie E. Moody-Freeman: <https://blackromancepodcast.libsyn.com/rebekah-weatherspoon>.

* * * * *

Julie Moody-Freeman: *Hi Rebekah!*

Rebekah Weatherspoon: Hi. How are you?

JMF: *Thanks so much for being here with me. I'm Julie.*

RW: Thanks for having me.

JMF: *I want to again thank you so much for being here and taking the time out because I know I hate to interrupt your busy schedule.*

RW: Oh, no, no. I'm actually in between books right now. So you're fine.

JMF: *Good. Um, so I want to go all the way back to the beginning and to, you know, to what you read. So I have a favorite romance novel. What were some of your favorite romance novels?*

RW: Um, so unlike a lot – I feel like a lot of romance readers got started kind of early and a lot of people will say, you know, I read romance, I was, you know, borrowing my grandma's romance when I was a kid. I wasn't like that like. I was overscheduled where I was doing so many activities. I remember one year I was doing swimming, Girl Scouts, and basketball all after school. And the idea of sitting down and reading a book was like, 'no, I need to take a nap'. So I feel like I didn't fully start reading for pleasure just because I was so overscheduled until the end of college. And then, even then, I was reading lit fic stuff, and, like, I think the last book I was reading, my dad and I both were reading David McCullough's *1776*, which I didn't finish. It dragged, so I was like, 'ugh'. Then I was teaching middle school for a little while. So the kids were recommending me middle grade books and stuff like that. So I was just catching up on some of the middle grade books that I had missed. And it wasn't till, you know, my middish- lateish-twenties that I was working for Disney, and one of our bosses was like, 'I need someone to read *Twilight*, because we want to know what the teens are reading'. Yes. Um, so I read *Twilight* and then three other women in our office also read it, and we started talking about it, and then another woman in my office was like, 'do you know anything about fanfiction?' And I was like, 'no, what's that?' And so she opened this whole world of online fanfiction to me. And so I started linking up with people who were writing *Twilight* fanfiction. And through that I found all these awesome women who just couldn't wait to give me romance novels. They were like, 'oh, okay, you read *Twilight*? You have to read this book; you have to read this book,' and they were just, like, dumping all of these romances on me, and I was, like, 'this is the best'.

I think that was kind of the first time in my life where I had days off, I was, like, home, TV off, I'm reading romances. I know she doesn't really call them romances, but I started reading the *Outlander* series. And then I went over to JR Ward's *Black Dagger Brotherhood* series and Erin McCarthy's *Fast Track* NASCAR series that I loved. And then the first Black romance I read, a romance by a Black author I should say, was a lesbian romance called *Such a Pretty Face* by Gabrielle Goldsby. And a friend gave that to me, which was great, and I absolutely love that. One heroine is kind of, like, [a] butch lesbian who is white, who is in construction, and then the other one is Latina, and she's plus size. And I remember thinking, like, whoa, this is a book with a plus size woman, and she's not white, and the story was beautiful. It was great. It was very romantic, and I just love that book. Gabrielle Goldsby is a great writer. I'm sad. I think she's since stopped writing, but that was the first book I'd read by a Black author and then that was when I found Beverly Jenkins.

JMF: *Ah ha.*

RW: And that to me was kind of like my gateway drug, and I was just reading everything by Bev, and then little by little, I started finding, like, Kimanis and stuff like that. So I just kind of started finding more people.

JMF: *So what was it that hooked you? Was it the happily ever after ending? What were the elements that you liked?*

RW: You know what, it was, I think – for me, I’ve always been someone who is in love with love. So when I was a kid, I was very boy crazy. And I also, I love watching romantic movies; absolutely loved watching romantic movies. So reading books where it was like, ‘oh, this is so great, two people are falling in love. This is so fun’. And in some cases, ‘this is fun and dirty’. And then when I kind of got into a rhythm of reading. I really enjoyed the fact that I knew it was going to have a happy ending. I took a break for a little while, and I read a YA book called *Burned* by Ellen Hopkins. Ellen writes – her prose is beautiful. She’s just an amazing writer, and she writes a lot about fictional accounts of her life and her daughter’s life who was addicted to drugs. So a lot of her books are really heavy material, and I read one of her books called *Burned*, and I was in the DMV, and I’m, like, sobbing. It was like the most depressing book, and I was like, you know, I’m just gonna go back to romance. Like, this is a great book. But now I was sad for, like, three days after I read it, and I was like, ‘you know what? My free time is too precious. I don’t want to be sad during my free time. Let me just, like, go back over to romance where I know people aren’t gonna be dying at the end of the book’. I do have a good cry out of romance. But I also want to know that the end is going to be fine. Everyone will [be] okay at the end.

JMF: *Yeah. So when did you transition? When did you realize, ‘hey, I want to do this; I think I can do this’?*

RW: I can’t remember exactly what year it was, but it was also in that *Twilight* fanfiction community. And my friend Erica and my other friend were there. They were wonderful. And they said, ‘you know, you’re really good at this. You should try and write your own book,’ and I was like, ‘okay, I’ll give it a whirl,’ and so I was driving in my car one day, and I came up with the idea for my first book, and I just went for it. I’m kind of like a ‘just go for it’ kind of person. And I just went for it. And I wrote my first book, and I started a query. *Better Off Red*. That was my first book. I queried that and then I ended up selling it un-agented to Bold Strokes Books after about three months.

JMF: *And that’s the one that Treasure is also published?*

RW: Yes. They also published *Treasure*.

JMF: *Yes, yes. So, okay, you decided that you would go with Bold Strokes. What did you have to do? I mean, did you just send it to them? How did you get published with them?*

RW: Yeah, so they – I don’t know if they still do – but at the time they were taking manuscripts without having an agent. So I just sent it to them directly. And then Len Barot, who runs Bold Strokes Books, just contacted me, and she said, ‘we love your book, and we

want to publish it,' and, you know, I was young, then I had my parents go over the contract for me. And we were just off to the races after that.

JMF: *Wow. Were you still in your teens then?*

RW: No, I was in my mid-twenties.

JMF: *Uh huh. Okay, and you published. How many of them did you publish before you got to Treasure?*

RW: Oh goodness. *Treasure* might be my fourth or fifth one with them.

JMF: *Yes. Yes. Right. Yeah. Since we're talking about that, then, I would like to talk maybe about your experiences with, I guess, we've called [them] Bold Strokes Indie, perhaps?*

RW: Mhmmm, yeah.

JMF: *You did some self-publishing also?*

RW: Yeah. Um, so, but working with Bold Stokes was interesting. There was a lot of freedom to an extent. I wanted to write at the time a lot of, like, erotic romance, and they were into that. So they let me put out a bunch of erotic romance, which was great. And *Treasure* was kind of on the cusp of that, because it's new adult with younger characters. And then I wanted to write a young adult book. And they said no. After that, I was like, 'oh, this is kind of a bummer'. And I haven't written anything for them since. So, it was, it was interesting working with a queer small indie press that [let] me write queer erotic romance. That was [a] very interesting experience.

JMF: *Yes. So you really, um, I guess I'll talk about Treasure since that's the one for me that's really adorable. Just, like, it makes me feel gushy, soft and warm when I think about that book. How much submission requirements did you have? Did they try to edit things out, or that's all you?*

RW: Yeah, I mean, I think Bold Stokes was pretty good about letting me write what I wanted to write. I had great editors over there. They helped me tighten up the story and stuff like that. But I don't feel like.... *Treasure* didn't have, like, a lot of story edits. That kind of got published as is, as it came out of my brain, which was good.

JMF: *That's amazing, amazing. So then as we move from that, I'm going to move through the different books. Right. So I want to move through Harbor, [and] Sanctuary. Are those self-published or how did those come about?*

RW: Sure. So I started self-publishing with my *Fit* trilogy. Those are novellas, and they're kind of BDSM rom-com novellas.

JMF: *Are those So Right and So For Real?*

RW: *Fit* is just the regular *Fit* trilogy. It's, like, the books with the guys with the muscles on the cover. The *Sugar Baby* novellas: that's *So Sweet* and *So Right Now*. So *Fit* was the first thing I self-published. I had submitted that to Harlequin for one of their submission calls, and they rejected that. So I said, 'oh well, maybe I'll try to self-publish it'. And I did. And that worked out fine. I ended up winning a Romantic Times Award for that. So that was wonderful. And then I published the *So Sweet* books after that. And then I did *Haven*, which is my first full length self-publish, and then I did *Sanctuary* and *Harbor*. So those are all together in that trilogy.

JMF: *So when you publish for yourself – I'm sort of a nerd when it comes to like copyright stuff, and I always want to know who's editing this? Some of them, you have an editor: Scott, I think, was the last [editor], Tara [Scott], but when you're self-publishing, who's helping you to edit?*

RW: So Tara edits my self-published stuff. She does all my self-published stuff. I worked with a wonderful woman named Annie Richardson on some of my early stuff. Now I work with Tara, who I actually met through Bold Strokes as well, and she's just great. She's Canadian, and we just clicked, and I'm, like, a real sensitive baby when it comes to my work. So she knows how to handle me with the soft gloves. She's a really good story editor. And I remember when I wrote *Sated*, which is the third book in the trilogy, that book stunk. That book was so bad. And she really gave me excellent notes on that. Now that's, like, one of my more popular books. People really love it. But she saved that book. Same with *Harbor*. I was not feeling great about *Harbor* when I finished it. And she came in and she had amazing story edits, and we just whipped that thing into shape. She's a great editor.

JMF: *So, what are some of the things that you're asking, character development? Because I'm thinking about that book, and one of the things I wanted to say about it is that I feel like the dialogue and your ability to tap into feelings. There was a part of it where Brook tells both Shaw and Vaughn about the fact that she feels that she wasn't enough. And it's like, 'oh, you're calling me out'. There are moments when I feel like I'm not enough too, so I felt like with Harbor that you are just able to tap into those feelings so much. Yeah, is that what the editor works with you about?*

RW: A lot of that is just me being a raw ball of feelings, and I just put that in my books, but the first draft, I think, Brook was a little... the way she was written, it was like a little too much too soon as far as her relationship with Vaughn and Shaw. So we worked a little bit on the pacing, to tighten up the pacing. And the end also was a little too over-the-top. So we smoothed over the end so it felt more realistic. And that was all Tara's notes, which were great.

JMF: *Oh my god, my heart is like... each book... like Rafe makes me [sigh], and Treasure also makes me feel... but that one [Harbor: Beards and Bondage], I love the feistiness of Brook. Yeah, Shaw comes at you, and I want to stand to attention too. So it's beautiful, beautifully written. Just in case there are budding writers, and they want to self-publish: how did you even go about finding an editor? And then how do you even decide how to get it on Amazon? What are some of the processes that you go through to self-publish?*

RW: Oh well, for people who want to self-publish, the first thing is to finish the book. That's like, I think a lot of times when people think about becoming writers, they don't... you know, you gotta finish the book. And then this is kind of the beauty of the internet, you can ask people if they know freelance editors. My cover artists, all the editors I've worked with, just ask around, you know. You can get on Twitter, get on Facebook. Join a writers' group and just ask around. You can even Google. A lot of freelance editors have their website set up and they'll tell you how much they charge and then you're good to go. So luckily we're not in the olden days of snail mail anymore where you really have to get out a phone book and try and find someone you know. It's much much easier with the internet, and all of your resources are going to be there. You know, I had other writers point me towards resources for all kinds of things. Miggs Malone, who's an amazing self-published author, she was the one who helped me find resources and taught me how to format books, that kind of thing. Um, and now it's actually easier. A lot of the, like, self-publishing tools are much much easier. It's a plug and play thing now. You don't have to like go into Word and like do the margins and all that stuff. And then Amazon and Barnes and Nobles, even Ingram, which distributes to bookstores and everything, it's the same thing: it's all just, you go in, you fill out your information, you upload your book. It's very easy. It's a lot easier now than it was, you know, even three years ago. So it's more just a matter of getting organized and getting to it.

JMF: *Right, yeah. I feel like you're a multifaceted writer. Black romance, interracial romance, queer romance, heterosexual, paranormal, erotic, romantic comedy. It's like, when I pick up a book, I'm like, 'oh, which one? What am I going to get?' Right? And I might get any character, and I love in terms of the different sizes, the different complexions, textures. So, like, what's your impetus for each subgenre? Where are these inspirations coming from?*

RW: I think it's, I want to write everything. Like, I also want to write horror. I want to write cozy mysteries. I want to write sci-fi, like I want to write everything. So I think just, you know, any given day. Like right now, me and my agent, we're sharing a document that has all my book ideas on it. There's 22 books up there. Like, that's so many books. That's crazy. But everything up there is like... it runs the gamut. It's like, historical, paranormal, like, I just I want to write everything. That's just how my brain works.

JMF: *And I'm assuming that the characters are coming to your head. So sometimes [do] you really have a choice if the characters come to your head?*

RW: It's just sometimes, like, I will come up with an idea for a character first. Sometimes I'll come up with an idea for a scenario first. Or sometimes it'll be a location. So it is different with every book. So at first *Harbor* wasn't a poly romance. That was two people at first, when I first came up with the idea, a long time ago. It was just going to be Brook and Shaw. And Shaw came to me first. I wanted her to be with a guy who was a carpenter on Cape Cod. That was, like, the first thing that came to my mind. And then I was like, 'no, I think this is something else,' and then Vaughn, kind of, like, fully formed himself. And then I was, like, ready to write the story.

JMF: *But it's funny in the story. It felt like Vaughn was going to be dominant. And you messed me up.*

RW: I think also too, a lot of times people have expectations of men, and they also have expectations of Black men. And so I was like, 'what, who is Vaughn, and what does Vaughn really need? What does Vaughn really want?' And then I tried to kind of build that scenario around him. At first I was like, maybe Vaughn will be the dominant. Because I think people think, like, the lawyer in the suit, that's the dominant one, that's the image. It's like the guy in the suit, he's the dominant, and I was like, 'no, Vaughn is not that guy'. I was like, 'it's Shaw'. He's the jerk who makes custom furniture.

JMF: *I was laughing at what you did to me because I knew exactly. I was like, 'see, you made up your mind'. The first time you saw Vaughn and then Shaw was crying. I'm like, 'that doesn't go together'. And I love it. I love when you do that, because as a Black feminist you think that you got it. And I tell my students, 'you never get it'. Yeah. That you always have to be examining those little stereotypes that's, like, percolating in your head. And that's exactly what you did in that book. So we talked about indie, self-publishing, and then now I want to talk about A Cowboy to Remember and that was with Dafina.*

RW: Yes.

JMF: *Which is more traditional?*

RW: Yeah... Kensington.

JMF: *So how did you transition to [traditional publishing]?*

RW: So I had been throwing around that cowboy idea for a while, That's been in the works for, like, four years now. I've been thinking about that for a long time. And so I had an agent, previous to the agent I have now, and when she and I were together, I sent an email to Esi over at Kensington, Esi Sogah. And I was like, 'I have two ideas'. And this was right before the LA Rams were supposed to come to LA. The football team was supposed to come back. So I said, 'I can do Los Angeles football players for you, or we can do cowboys'. And she came back, and she said, 'let's do cowboys,' so the first thing I sent her got rejected. It was a completely different thing I had to do with, like, gambling and all this stuff, which actually worked out fine because I saw that movie *Molly's Game*. And I was like, 'I never want to write about poker ever, so never mind'. I was like, 'I won't do poker', and then I signed with my new agent and she was like, 'I think there's still interest in this whole cowboy thing. Let's talk it out'. And then I came up with the idea for the fairy tales and that was what clicked, and so we sold that to Kensington.

JMF: *Yes. What's the difference in editing style? I mean, you know, when you're self-published and you're with an editor, that's one thing. But what about the traditional? What are some things you can't do that you might do when [working with a traditional publisher]?*

RW: Well, I think the only real difference, Esi is an amazing editor, and she's a Black woman too. So even a lot of the, like, you know, if I drop a Beyoncé joke in the book, she gets all that, so I don't have to sit there and explain it to her. So the editing process was great because she got all the inside jokes. She got everything that was there on the page. So in that respect, it was very smooth sailing. I think the only difference with working with a traditional publisher is you're just collaborating with more people. So you're talking to the publicity people, you're talking to the art department people, you're going back and forth with the cover. When I self-published, it's just me and whoever's doing the cover, and we're just talking, you know. My agent is not involved, editors not involved, it's not that. So it's just, it's just more people. And then I'm on Kensington's timeline. You know, so if I'm putting on my own book, then I'm on my timeline. I can do it when and however I want to. When I'm working with a publisher, then I'm on their timeline. So that's just that's the main big difference.

JMF: *What I want to do now is I want to dig in a little into Treasure and Harbor because with Harbor, you're doing a polyamorous relationship. With Treasure, you're doing a lesbian relationship. What are you trying to do? Are there certain missions? Are there certain themes that you want to come out when you write a heterosexual romance as opposed to maybe a queer romance story?*

JMF: *First of all, it's love.*

RW: Yeah.

JMF: *Oh, tons of love, especially with the polyamorous.*

RW: I think. I wrote them so many years apart that they're not – obviously I was in a different mind frame when I was writing both of them. But with *Treasure* I just remember wanting to write. I wanted to do three things. I wanted to write a lesbian romance with two Black girls. Well, four things, I wanted to write a lesbian romance with two Black girls who were in STEM. They're both computer science majors. I wanted to write a lesbian romance with a Black girl who was a sex worker. So she's, she's an exotic dancer. And I wanted to write a Black lesbian romance with a young Black girl who by all accounts has like all the privilege that a young Black girl can have. So her family is wealthy. She lives in a really nice part of town. She has the option to stay home and work on her mental health while going to a prestigious four-year university. She has by all appearances two supportive parents in the home, that kind of thing, but is also struggling with her gender identity and is also struggling with mental health while all trying to go to school and meeting someone that she is finally having her first real attraction to. So I wanted to explore that. I like exploring first loves. That's something I really like, and I like that idea of also a woman who was a sex worker finally falling in love for the first time. And I think a lot of times people have all kinds of feelings about sex workers' personal lives, and I wanted to also write a sex worker who had a partner who was supportive of her work. So in that story, Alexis never asked her to stop stripping. She's never like, 'oh, I don't want you to be a dancer,' or 'I'm not comfortable with this', She doesn't even question it. She's like, 'oh, that's great. This is how we met. I've met you at that strip club, and I just want to be your girlfriend. I'm not trying to

get you to change at all. I just want to be with you, and I want you to be happy'. So those were the things I was trying to convey that story. And, most importantly, I just wanted to write a soft love story where two Black girls fall in love. And it's a happy ending.

JMF: *Do feel that by doing that you were consciously trying to maybe dispel stereotypes or to try to depict what you think were the reality of the complexities of Black experience?*

RW: Right. I think it's a combination. I think it's a little bit dispelling, but also just trying to be inclusive. You know, I know a lot of people who are sex workers. When I first moved to Los Angeles, I worked at a sex shop, and a lot of the clients and even my coworkers were also involved in sex work. So to me these were also the people I was hanging out with, you know, and a lot of girls I went to college with. I went to UNC Charlotte. I went to college with a ton of girls who were doing sex work to pay for school. You know, like, a lot. And I think sometimes there's this idea that sex workers are, like, other, and it's, like, no, you – everybody knows someone who is involved in sex work, everybody. So I wanted to just not even sound like a positive life, just include sex workers in romance, you know. With *Harbor*, I think, I was more concerned about Brook. The first two books, I think the murders and the crimes that take place in the beginning were kind of, like, in your face. And I was talking to my editor, and she was like, 'you know, just the way things are right now, the way the world is, like maybe let's not traumatize people with this book'. And I was like, 'I agree with you, so I'll kind of pull it back'. I wanted Brook to be someone that – and I think I can maybe relate to her in this way – a Black woman who has it together but also is not getting the love and emotional support that she needs. She's got a good job, she has a loving sister, she's got a loving brother-in-law, and she's got loving friends. But just because someone has it together doesn't mean that their needs are being met. And I thought, well, wouldn't it be great if she had two guys who are giving her all the support and also two guys who are in love with each other? So it's a healthy circle. I didn't want to put her in a situation where she was trying to take one of the guys away from that relationship. I wanted it to be [that they] all want to be together. And then when I was coming up with Vaughn's character, he kind of was the center of that part of the relationship, where he was saying 'I'm someone who has so much love to give that to me, relationships aren't just between me and one person but between me and many other people. And why can't I be in love with more than one person at once, and we all be in love with each other? We all support each other and that's the family that we decided to build together'. And so that's what he was looking for. And I was able to throw that together.

JMF: *Yes. So what does it mean to occupy space as a writer who stays true to the genre?*

RW: Oh, I think that's just, it's... I don't really think about that because it's just automatic.

JMF: *Yes.*

RW: You know, it's just this is where I want to be. This is where I'm happiest. This is what makes the most sense to me. Yeah. So here I am, you know. That's how it feels to me.

JMF: *And is the core love? Or you think it's because that the genre brings that to it, maybe?*

RW: I think so, yeah. And I think for me, it's love, but it's also inclusive love. And wanting to show as many people as possible in love and finding love in different scenarios.

JMF: *Who are your readers and what are their responses to you and their relationship to you?*

RW: I feel like I've had such a wide variety of readers, which is always interesting to me. I do feel like I tried to write for women of color, and I tried to write for Black women specifically. And I want anyone to pick up my books and enjoy them. I want that. I mean, that's my goal. I want readers to pick up my books and have a good time reading them and when they're done, say, 'oh, that was – I had fun, or that was cathartic, or that made me feel a certain way'. That's what I really want. I always feel that really special warmth in my chest when Black women find my books. That always gives me that extra – just because I know that still, it's so hard for us. We just don't get to see ourselves in the media, not nearly as much as white women do. We just don't. And I think that goes for all women of color. All women of color just do not get to see themselves in the media. I think for Black women the problem is that our portrayals are so negative in a specific way that's harmful. That's very harmful and also is very violent.

And so that is very frustrating when you're watching certain things. And you're like, 'oh, this is a story about a Black woman, but she either has to die, or she's being abused, or even if she's just, like, [in] *Sleepy Hollow*, even if she's like this cool cop who's the center of the story, somehow we're going to find a way to kill her'. That just gets very exhausting after a while, so being able to write books where Black women aren't murdered, first of all, and then are able to find love, and are able to be full human beings, when readers find that, and they're connecting to that: that makes me feel wonderful. And then, as that branches out, just knowing that people are enjoying the books or connecting with [them]. I know a lot of people like Rafe because he was a character who came into a woman's home and supported her.

JMF: *Yes.*

RW: And didn't make her life more difficult – actually made her life easier. And on top of that was excellent at taking care of her daughters. And got on YouTube and learned how to braid hair and, like, you know, really was like, 'okay, I'm looking after these two Black girls, how can I not mess this up?' And I think – just maybe it gives people hope in a sense too. I can imagine what this looks like. And I told Beverly Jenkins that when we were talking a couple weeks ago during our panel. When I found her books, it was really important to me to see two Black people in love because I felt like her characters also are the men that my mother was telling me to look for. You know, my mom's, like, catchphrase is, like, 'oh, there's nothing better than a hard-working Black man'. That was, like, her whole catchphrase. My dad's amazing. I have a wonderful father. And I think she kind of instilled in me to find a man who's like loving and caring and hard-working, and so when I read Bev's books, I was like, the men in her books are so loving, so caring, but, like, hard-working men, like, you know, out on the range on their horses, like, about that work. And that to me was like, 'oh, this is great'. Also, it kind of [was] like a reminder that I also deserve that. I also deserve to be loved and taken care of with someone who has their act together. I think that's the kind of the power of romance, being able to read a positive

relationship. And sometimes if you're not in a positive relationship or if you're alone, it gives you something to say, 'you know what, it's actually okay if I hold out for this good thing,' you know?

JMF: *Yeah. Yeah, and I think that's why those words – when she said 'I wasn't enough' because I have heard myself say 'I am enough' – that's how you feel with your books. I told Beverly Jenkins the same thing I'll tell you where I... well first, first of all, if I'm going to read your book. I had better set a chunk of hours because I will not cook. Nothing will get done.*

RW: Right, right, right.

JMF: *I have to finish it, and it's bothering me. But also what stays with Beverly Jenkins, I told her the community, it feels like that that community is out there, and I want to be there. That's kind of how I feel. I'm not quite sure how you do it. But for Fit, I remember him just walking with her.*

RW: Yeah, yeah.

JMF: *That – just of anything else, that sticks with me. Right. And remember, in terms of Rafe, I kept waiting for the drama. I kept saying, 'I know it's going to happen'. The whole book long, like, 'it's going to happen,' and it didn't happen. So I felt so good about that because there was no drama. No drama at all. And it talked about how you could have that relationship. A lot of times people feel like with relationships there has to be lots of conflict. And I'm not saying there won't be trouble/ But it wasn't damaging. But I kept feeling that was supposed to happen, particularly because it was interracial. And that's why I always want to go back to that book.*

RW: Oh. That makes me very happy.

JMF: *That feeling, yeah. And the same way I'm feeling in Harbor, and the conversations, and the communication that they're having, you know, talking to each other. And a lot of times you don't see that depicted in some love relationships and particularly with Blacks and other people of color. Yeah, for that I – thank you for these wonderful books.*

RW: I think I'm doing the right thing.

JMF: *Yes, you are. Yes, you are! My final question. What are you currently working on or just finished?*

RW: So I just handed in the final edits on the second cowboy book. Which is called *If the Boot Fits*. And that's a Cinderella retelling of Zack's younger brother Sam, and a plus size assistant named Amanda. So that should be fun. And then I'm working on a top secret project next. Can't tell you about that one. And then after I finish that I'm going to do cowboy book number three. And we have a title, but we haven't announced yet, so I don't want to say what the title is.

JMF: *Okay, good. I'm waiting for it. And that's the other thing I wanted to tell you – in terms of the body size, because for Brook, in terms of her body size and then you're saying again for the second cowboy book, but yeah, I love how you depict that.*

RW: Right, yeah. I mean, there's plus size women everywhere. And there's plus size women in loving relationships everywhere. So it seems silly not to give them their own romance stories.

JMF: *And a lot of people also you'll see sometimes where they'll be like, 'well, now you have all these books with these plus size women, but all the men are buff.' But then you throw another book in with the Scottish guy, who is sort of a big size guy, not necessarily muscled as Shaw. Yeah, right. So, I love the variety, you really are, um, how do you say, talking about how us as human beings. [How we] come in different shapes, sizes, colors, and you're including all that and that's beautiful to me. Well, Rebekah, I really appreciate this. I love our conversation, and I look forward to your books.*

RW: Thank you so much, and let me know if you need anything else, I'm around; there's a pandemic. I'm not going anywhere outside the house.

JMF: *Well, take care!*

RW: You too. Thanks so much for having me.