



Rheta Childe Dorr

Omaha, Nebraska was the birthplace of Reta Louise Child on November 2, 1866. Her father, Edward, and mother, Lucie, soon realized she was a challenge.

At age twelve, against the wishes of her father, she traveled to a nearby town to hear a lecture on women's rights. The speakers were Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They spoke on the right of women to vote in elections. At that meeting she joined the suffrage movement by using her only silver dollar to pay dues in the National Woman Suffrage Association. Reta's mother also caught her giving the family's clothes to children of the poor. Later Reta changed the spelling of her name to Rheta Childe.

In 1884, her father enrolled her at the University of Nebraska. There she loafed "to my heart's content" and then dropped out, to her family's displeasure, to take a job in the post office.

At age twenty-four, Rheta went to art school in New York City, wrote poetry, and married John Dorr, a forty-year-old businessman from Seattle, Washington. The couple lived in Seattle and a son, Julian, was born in 1896.

This was the time of the Klondike

Gold Rush to the Yukon Territory. Rheta interviewed people traveling to and from the Klondike, by way of Seattle. She sold these stories to New York magazines and wrote a book about Alaskan natives.

John was unhappy with Rheta and wanted her to stay home, care for their son, and write fiction and poetry. Rheta disagreed. She left John. With five hundred dollars, she took Julian to New York City with hopes of finding a full-time job as a journalist. But the editors of that time would not hire women as reporters. So she spent three years doing freelance writing. At one point she sold her engagement ring to buy food for the two of them.

Rheta's freelance writing got her noticed by large newspapers. She was hired part-time to supervise news photographers who were attempting to get pictures of Theodore Roosevelt, the future vice-president. He refused to pose for them because he disliked publicity. But he liked Rheta. If she was in charge, he would allow pictures to be taken. She gained his trust and received twenty-five dollars as a bonus. Mr. Roosevelt invited her and the camera crew to dinner. The *New York Evening Post* later hired her as a reporter in 1902.

Rheta often traveled to meetings of suffragists and feminists in New York, Washington, D.C., and Europe. She was called the "militant suffragist" by the *New York Times*. By 1915, she was writing a syndicated editorial "As a Woman Sees It" for the *New York Daily Mail*. Over the years, Rheta took nine trips to Europe as a writer. The *New York Evening Mail* sent her to cover the Russian Revolution. Upon her return to America in 1917, she used her experiences to write a book, *Inside the Russian Revolution*.

When Julian was serving in the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I, Rheta asked her editor to send her there as a war correspondent. Rheta spent three months writing about her experiences for the *Evening Mail* and wrote a book in 1918 titled *A Soldier's Mother in France*. At fifty-seven, she wrote her autobiography, *A Woman of Fifty*. Her son became a U.S. vice consul to Mexico but died in 1936. Rheta's health declined and she passed away in New Britain, Pennsylvania on August 8, 1948.

Language Arts

- Compose a rhymed or unrhymed poem of four to eight lines about Rheta Childe Dorr. Share with your classmates.
- Make a list of three qualities Rheta possessed that made her a successful journalist. Compare and discuss your list with classmates.

Mathematics

- How old was Rheta when she died?

Social Studies

- In 1900, Theodore Roosevelt was elected vice president of the United States. Who was elected President?

Answers: Mathematics: 81 years; Social Studies: William McKinley