In 1818, as his hearing deteriorated, Beethoven began using blank booklets so his acquaintances could write their sides of conversations while the composer replied aloud. He himself often used these "conversation books" to jot down shopping and errand lists, new books of potential interest, and even an occasional sketch for a composition. At the time of his death in 1827, about 139 booklets survived, most of them in the possession of his unpaid secretary and biographer Anton Schindler. A scholarly team in East Berlin spent from 1965 to 2001 editing and annotating them in 11 monumental volumes in the German language.

I am now in the midst of making a new, user-friendly English edition, with fascinating new details about Beethoven's life and works continuing to jump off of virtually every page. We witness the composition of the Missa solemnis, we are present on the day when young Franz Liszt was brought to visit him, and we follow, step-by-step, the preparations for the premiere of the Ninth Symphony in 1824. Old myths fall by the wayside and a new, more human Beethoven emerges from these pages to a greater degree than ever before.