

Reading Aloud

2/5/24

Reading aloud has been an important part of my family tradition for several generations. I'm told that my grandparents read to each other at bedtime every night. Both being amateur actors, that was probably some high quality reading. I don't know if my mother ever got to be part of their bedtime stories. She was the one who told me about this nightly intimate ritual, but I imagine she had her story time earlier and was tucked in bed.

As a child I had a wonderful collection of books in my room, shelved in the mission bookcase with glass fronted doors. I don't remember which of the picture books I tended to choose for the nightly bedtime story although I still own most of them. There was one about going to the circus that I particularly liked that I no longer own. My grandfather was the paragon of patience while I collected all of my dolls to sit on the bed and listen to the story with me.

When I was a bit older, those picture books were put away and out came the chapter books. I had some really beautiful editions of some books. My mother's uncle was a physician and they tended to get lovely illustrated books for their daughters. When the older cousins had outgrown their books they passed some of them down to my mother, the baby of her

generation and many of them ultimately came to me. I had a lovely edition of "Little Lord Fauntleroy" which I cherished but made the mistake of loaning to a friend who never returned it.

My favorite book was probably "Heidi," being the story of a little girl and her grandfather, although I'm sure it was my mother who read "The Bobbsey Twins" to me.

When it came time for bed for my children, they all were read to by either Bob or me. I was really disappointed when the day came that Casey lost patience and took over reading a book to herself rather than wait for me to read it to her. That moment came for the next two also, which bring up the question of when children learn to read. I don't think being read to actually changed the trajectory of starting to read. All four started at different ages. Casey read at 5. Robin read at 4. Mischa read at 6. I'm not sure when Ian actually started, but it was late. I think he had mild dyslexia and was very slow to read. That was a great opportunity for me. He didn't desert me in the midst of a good book. We often read what was probably well above his grade level. I'm trying to remember what all of those books were, but I do know that we went through the 'Hobbit' and the 'Trilogy of the Ring.' Our broad reading may have masked his inability to read fluently because his knowledge of literature was far beyond his actual reading ability. He eventually caught

up and books were the centerpiece at his and Layla's wedding reception.

When my mother was nearing the end of her life and in a nursing home I turned to reading aloud once again. That meant again reading a wide variety of books, adult ones this time, although we did read the Harry Potter books as they came out. I would get paperback copies of them to leave in her room in case they disappeared and kept the hard covers at home. We didn't quite make it though the Harry Potter series before she died.

One of the problems with all of today's electronic medium is that it fills the space that was filled with all of this type of reading. Before we got our first computer, Bob read "Call of the Wild" aloud to me while I ironed. Both the reading and the ironing have generally disappeared. I wonder how often the new generations will ever get a chance to experience this intimate activity. Surely it is their loss.