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Read, Read

Juniper read to Laura and Amanda in the living room. From my desk, a room away, I missed some of what she read, but I picked up the book and caught up when I had time. Sometimes I joined my family as they gathered together and read, but I often had work to do and missed out on part of it.

We read aloud in our family starting soon after Juniper, our older daughter, was born. Reading aloud was interrupted when Juniper and Amanda decided to try public school, Amanda as a sophomore in high school, and Juniper as a junior. For a while, their time was so occupied with school, with getting there and back and with homework, there was no time for reading aloud.

Amanda didn't like the reduced family time nor the lack of time for her own writing, drawing and music, so she returned to home schooling, and reading aloud started again. She read to Laura while Laura cooked, or Laura read while Amanda worked on various projects around the house.

Often, I came in from outdoor work, or I left writing at my desk and went into the kitchen for something I wanted or for company, and the reading stopped. When I left, I usually said, "Read. Read," indicating that the interruption was over, and they should continue. My words were a reference to the past, when we lived in Whitney Valley in northeastern Oregon.

When Amanda and Juniper were small, they both fit into the rocking chair with Laura. Before bedtime, they moved the old blue rocker (whose noisy springs we all agreed said, "comfort, comfort") close to the wood-burning stove in cold weather or close to the open window in summer, and Laura read to them.

Laura has always been an early to bed and early to rise person, and often, while reading, she drifted off to sleep. Sometimes, as she began to drift, the story she was reading got mixed up with her beginning dream, and what she said became uproariously funny for her listeners. They erupted in laughter and talked about what she had said, but then insisted, "Read. Read."

Sometimes she woke up enough to finish reading. Sometimes she couldn't muster the energy, and I helped her up and sent her off to bed, and then I snuggled down between two warm, eager listeners and continued reading from where she had drifted into dreams.

I also read to Juniper and Amanda even when Laura didn't fall asleep. With four of us exploring the library, reading book reviews, and listening to recommendations from people around us, we came up with an ever larger selection of books to read together. I read *Wind in the Willows* to our daughters three times. A little at a time, I read *The Bible* aloud at bedtime until we finished the entire book. Often, I sang what I was reading of *The Bible*, and that added to our enjoyment and seemed normal to us.

For a while, when Amanda and Juniper were small, every time we went out along ditches, down by the river, or out across

the meadow, they looked for Moley and Ratty. While I may not have actively joined the search, I hoped they would find the two characters from *Wind in the Willows*, and I wouldn't have been surprised if they did. Juniper and Amanda felt like Moley in the spring: "Hang spring cleaning." The adventure is outdoors. Seek it.

They often became the characters we read about. When Juniper was four, for quite some time she would answer to no name but "Pooh Bear." She was Pooh Bear, and nothing was gained by questioning that fact, though some tried. Laura and I didn't. We liked living with Pooh Bear for a while. He is an interesting, warm, and loving bear.

Eventually, three no longer fit in the rocking chair. The reading went on. Juniper and Amanda learned to read many books to themselves. The reading went on. We moved to other houses. Our jobs and schedules changed. Laura and I got busier. The reading went on. Its patterns changed. Our daughters began to read to us.

Juniper and Amanda developed a system of classifying books according to how good we thought they were. To be classified high in their system, a book had to be well written, with an exciting story and believable characters, and it had to have a positive ending and a positive, lasting theme. The book had to be free of anything seriously objectionable. If animals were portrayed as operating only by instinct, devoid of intelligence, if the author was guilty of racist or sexist thought, or if any information in the book was inaccurate, the book did not receive the highest classification.

Some of the books that received high ranking were J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, *The Gammage Cup* by Carol Kendall, and *The Once and Future King*, by T.H. White.

We particularly liked books that held meaning deeper than their surface meaning, because we could delve into deeper meanings in long discussions between readings and when the books were finished. The meanings we discussed often led us to other books in explorations that began to put the questions about meaning into frameworks far transcending the books that started our discussions. *The Dark is Rising* series, by Susan Cooper, led to discussions about religion, about the power of good and evil, and about what we saw as strong touches of religious irreverence in the books.

Amanda and Juniper read *The Outsiders* and S.E. Hinton's other books to Laura. Those books helped lead us into discussions about social problems, during which we defined not only our knowledge of the world around us, but our knowledge of our own values, our hopes for influencing the world around us, and our plans and hopes for our own lives. Juniper, Amanda and Laura read aloud the older versions of the Hardy boys books, on the other hand just for the fun of reading.

Most of the reading aloud after our daughters finished high school and went off to college and returned home only periodically was by Amanda and Juniper, for Laura. I attended part of the time, between times of attempting to earn a living, and I cautioned myself not to allow my priorities to become so skewed that I missed too much of the reading aloud.

We read to our daughters when they were very small because we all enjoyed it. It was a warm and rich experience for all of us, sharing stories and building a common background of wide, shared experience.

Laura and I could not have foreseen that what we began so many years ago, when our daughters were quite small, would grow to this rewarding experience, where they return the favor happily and help us continue to expand our world as we helped them expand theirs.

Our experience, the solid family unity that reading together helped build and still helps hold together, our feeling of being richly rewarded, leads me to repeat the advice I've been giving for years to people caring for children, "Read. Read."