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Visiting Old Friends

It's rewarding to teach, as Laura and I learned by home schooling our two daughters, Juniper and Amanda. When our daughters grew up and went into the world on their own, Laura taught other children, in private schools, and, when she completed work for the necessary degrees, in public schools.

When she taught in her own, parent-supported school, Laura and I went to a bookstore and spent about an hour and a half picking out books for children learning to read and more complex books she will read aloud to those children.

During the process of picking out books appropriate for her students, first and second graders, Laura was bothered by the prices of the books. She said, "I won't get reimbursed for these, because I want them to be among my own tools as a teacher, not to belong to the school.

"I wish I still had all the books we had for the girls when they were growing up."

I said, "There are boxes and boxes of books in the storage shed we haven't unpacked. We don't know what books are in those boxes. We could get them out and go through them. I'm sure there are some you can use."

We moved from Colorado to Oregon nine years ago. We sold and gave away many books before we moved, but we still had many. In our family, books are often treasures and friends, not easily parted with.

We have books that belong to the family and books that belong to individual members of the family. Juniper was already out on her own, and Amanda went soon after we moved. Juniper has not yet settled into a permanent home with adequate storage for all her books. Amanda married, and she and Brian live in a tiny house with very limited storage.

We continue to store many of their possessions, primarily books, in our storage shed. That's what parents are for, once children move out on their own, to store their grown children's possessions, is it not?

I've read several articles that say parents should put limits on the time they store their children's material possessions. "If you don't come and get it within a year, we will give it away,

sell it, or throw it away.”

They are brave souls who can do that. Maybe I could with clothing, bicycles, sports equipment, any kind of merely material possessions, but I can't do it with books. Years have gone by, and still we have most of Amanda's and Juniper's books.

At the bookstore, Laura paid for her books, and we drove home. I moved everything that was in the way, then carried boxes of books out of our storage shed. Laura sorted through the books in sunshine in the carport and on the planter wall. I heard exclamations of pleasure as I went about other tasks in the area. It is so nice to meet up with old friends after a long time apart.

“*Little Bear*. We still have that. Here's *Charlotte's Web*. The kids at school saw the movie, so they think they wouldn't want to hear the book read, but just wait until I start reading it. They'll love it. Oh, look at this. I thought we gave these away.”

Even I, who thought I had other things to do, was drawn to the growing piles of books on the planter wall. “Diana Wynne Jones, *Dog's Body*.”

“They're not ready for that.”

“No, but I am. It's been years. I'm ready to read it again.”

“I'm going to need a box for the books I'm picking out.”

I brought Laura a box from the house. She said, “Sorting through three boxes is enough for today. We've made a good start. We can look at the rest another time.” She put the books she picked out in the box I brought for her, and I repacked the three boxes and put them back in the shed.

By late afternoon, we were ensconced in the living room, surrounded by books, memories, and plans. Laura had books on the floor in front of her that called up many deep and pleasant memories, of the books themselves, and of the adventures reading them together became for our family.

I was deep into reading my book, but it was easy for me to come up from the depths to participate in memories that came to Laura.

She told me her plans. “These are the first ones I'll read. The kids at school love the *Little Bear* books. I'm so glad we decided to go through these boxes.”

Warmth from the late afternoon sun poured in through the windows. Warmth from past memories and a still strong sense of family surrounded us. Plans for these books hinted at warm times in the near future. The pile of books, many of them over thirty years old, knit together all the years of our family's

education with the present, with the future.

Good books are powerful.

I looked at Laura in warm afternoon sunshine, daydreaming, remembering, and planning what she would read to her students. Then I sank back into the depths of the book I was reading. After twenty-five years, since I first read the book, I remembered only enough of it to add a friendly, familiar feel to what was rapidly becoming a new adventure.