

BOOKS IN MY CHILDHOOD

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I cannot imagine a childhood without books. Our family moved to a new town every 2 years, and within a week of our arrival in a new place, we located the public library and obtained a library card. My Aunt Edith gave me beautiful books during the Second World War, when books were scarce and expensive. I don't remember learning to read, but it was before I started to school.

My parents were readers, and they never made me feel that I was wasting time while I was reading – a complaint I heard from some of my friends. Dad always encouraged me to read biographies – helping me learn about the lives of famous people. I remember looking for stories about people who lived in faraway countries – because I dreamed of travel in my future.

One summer I spent a week at my grandparents' house. The library was very close to Grandpa's office, and I discovered the Little House books. I began to read them, in order, as fast as I could. They were heavy books, as I discovered while carrying them to Grandma's. Each book was printed on thick paper with lovely illustrations here and there. I can still see them on their shelf, just waiting for me. I managed to finish them all before I had to go home.

I recall how much I loved the Bobbsey Twins, Nan and Bert and Flossie and Freddie. Their adventures became mine also. In a more serious vein, I thought The Five Little Peppers were my special friends, and I cried along with them when they encountered obstacles and disasters. Louisa May Alcott kept my hopes up with Little Women, Eight Cousins, Jo's Boys, An Old-Fashioned Girl, Spinning Wheel Stories, and Under the Lilacs. And I almost forgot Heidi, Heidi Grows Up, and Heidi's Children. Most of those were "classics" in my parents' generation.

As I got older, I began to devour all the Nancy Drew volumes I could find. I didn't own any of them – my parents thought they were not "quality" – but I enjoyed all of her adventures.

Perhaps those books reinforced my family's strong assumption that "of course daughters go to college." My grandmothers both went to the Normal School to become teachers after they graduated from high school before 1900. My mother and her three younger sisters were all college graduates by 1940. To bring this up to date, two of our children are librarians and the third is a professor. All three work on college campuses. Books have been a significant influence on our family from the time each of us began to read. I cannot imagine life without them!