

By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director/Office Manager

Last month, our Tween Book Group discussed "From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E Frankweiler" by E.L. Konigsburg. Before the event, some adult patrons told us how much they loved the book and a few members of our staff agreed. The story of two runaways who hid at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was a book beloved by many.

It's fun to think back on what you used to like to read as a child. Excited to keep the "Mrs. Frankweiler" conversation going, I asked my extended family what they liked to read when they were young. Ten of us from two generations shared an active email thread with some great memories about books.

As adults, my Aunt Cathy and I love to exchange book recommendations so I wasn't surprised to see one of my own favorite childrens' series make her list: the Betsy-Tacy Tib books by Maude Hart Lovelace. She also loved The Borrowers series by Mary Norton, The Melendy Family series by Elizabeth Enright, and most books by Carol Ryrie Brink (in particular, "The Pink Motel," "Baby Island," and "Anything Can Happen on the River").

Even though she replied to the email quickly, Aunt Betsy said that most of her favorite books had already been mentioned by the rest of the family. She added "Caddie Woodlawn" to Aunt Cathy's list of favorites by Carol Ryrie Brink, "Understood Betsy" by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and also remembered when her grandmother, Grammy Ferrier, read her "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe."

My Aunt Barby recalled that she liked to read stories about orphans, especially if they were reunited with their rich birth parents. I'm sure this says nothing about my grandparents' parenting and more about Aunt Barby's imaginative mind. She also loved the Shoes series by Noel Streatfeild ("Ballet Shoes," "Skating Shoes," and "Theater Shoes"). Barby also mentioned loving Little Golden Books and she wasn't the only one.

My mom has very fond memories of Little Golden Books from the 1950s like "Little Red Riding Hood," "Hansel and Gretel," "Scuffy the Tugboat," and "Five Little Firemen." She remembers proudly writing her name in the front of each one. The tradition continued as she and my dad read to my brother and I. We loved "Sam the Firehouse Cat" (don't look down!), "The Poky Little Puppy," and "Scuffy the Tugboat" (aka Tuffy da Tugboat).

As a child, my dad devoured the Hardy Boys mysteries by Franklin W. Dixon (a collective pseudonym for a number of writers) and pretty much every juvenile science fiction novel in the Plainfield (NJ) Public Library. He was such a reader that anything lying around the house was fair game, including the junior Encyclopedia Britannica.

Uncle Rob had a lot of picture books on his list, including the Babar books by Jean de Brunhoff, "The Story of Ferdinand" by Munro Leaf, and "Madeline" by Ludwig Bemelmans. He is looking forward to reading them again!

My Cousin Emily said she and her brother Nick had endless conversations about what it would look like to make a movie out of "The Thief of Always" by Clive Barker. She also loved R.L. Stine's teen horror series and says those books were a gateway to her love of reading.

Cousin Becca is known in our family for her love of American Girl and she's now revisiting it by listening to the "American Girls" podcast, hosted by two PhD historians who dissect the entire series book-by-book. It gives perspective to the beloved stories while providing historical context.

Not surprisingly, my husband mentioned many of the same books I loved (and that we read to our two children). The Ramona Quimby books by Beverly Cleary have that combination of happy and sad that we both treasure; the “Choose Your Own Adventure” books let you decide the ending to the story; and this article would not be complete without a nod to Roald Dahl, one of our favorite authors.

There was one series that came up in almost every email I received: the All-of-a-Kind Family books by Sydney Taylor. The five books tell the story of sisters Ella, Henny, Sarah, Charlotte and Gertie, who live with their parents in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the early 1900s. Barby said she used to look for pennies around the house while she was cleaning, just as Gertie did. Becca remembers learning about the concept of quarantine because all of the siblings had to stay home from school when scarlet fever broke out, even though Henny wasn't infected. I just remember lying on the couch and devouring the first book in one winter afternoon.

When your family gathers for Thanksgiving dinner, take a turn going around the table and remembering the books you liked to read when you were kids. You never know what family memories you'll uncover!