

Literary Moms and Dads

By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

This time of year, we celebrate the mothers and fathers who shaped us, not to mention the other caregivers like grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends, who made an impression. We shower them with cards, flowers, coupons for hugs, and share how they have touched our lives. I am always grateful to my mom and dad for, among many other things, nurturing my love of reading.

In addition to the real characters we know and love, there are plenty of moms, dads, and other role models from books, television, and movies that have affected our ideas about caregivers. I asked the other Kirkland Town Library staff members if they remembered any standouts, and here are a few of their great suggestions.

Jennifer was the first to reply to my question with an enthusiastic vote for Frank and Helen Beardsley. The two met as widows, each with their own brood of children, then fell in love and merged their families. Helen wrote a book about the family, which was turned into the 1968 movie "Yours, Mine, and Ours." Lucille Ball starred as Helen, and Henry Fonda played Frank.

Several people mentioned Charles and Caroline Ingalls from the "Little House" television show and books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. This pioneering couple made the trek from the Big Woods of Wisconsin to the plains of South Dakota, their trials and tribulations bringing their family close together.

Readers of this column know I'm a "Little House" nerd, so I can't help but ruin this bucolic image with my two cents on the Ingalls family. Although Michael Landon portrayed him with a smile (and six-pack abs), in real life, Charles' pioneering spirit put his family in danger countless times. If you want to read a real biography of Laura and her family, I recommend the Pulitzer-Prize-winning book "Prairie Fires" by Caroline Fraser. Now we'll turn back to more selfless moms and dads!

Cindy and I both think fondly of Atticus Finch from "To Kill a Mockingbird." He was a single father, a role model, and an icon for justice. One of my favorite scenes from the book and the movie was when Scout and Jem snuck into the courthouse to watch Atticus defend Tom Robinson. It's one thing for a child to go to work with their parent, but Jem and Scout got to see their father on one of his finest days.

Speaking of father figures, Nina mentioned Heidi's grandfather in the classic book by Johanna Spyri. Although he is gruff and unapproachable, Heidi's cheerful personality broke through the surface, and his love for her prevailed.

Ruth said, "I've always enjoyed Papa and Mama Berenstain, especially in the early books when Papa was a buffoon and Mama waited patiently for the current disaster to pass." A perfect example is "The Bears' Vacation," where Papa gets caught in an undertow, surfs into some rocks, gets bitten by a turtle, and sails his boat into an ocean liner. All of this could have been avoided if he had followed his own advice and read the warning signs on the beach!

Noel thought of two more fathers worth mentioning. In "Inkheart" by Cornelia Funke, Mortimer is a great character and the catalyst of the plot. "The Road" by Cormac McCarthy is a harrowing survival tale of a boy and his father in a post-apocalyptic scenario.

What about Arthur and Molly Weasley from the "Harry Potter" series, Marmee in "Little Women," the Wormwoods and Miss Honey in "Matilda," Mr. and Mrs. Quimby, parents of Beezus

and Ramona, or Matthew and Marilla from *Anne of Green Gables*? There are too many more to mention! Suffice it to say that books are a wonderful celebration of all types of families.