

B is for BOOKS

I have loved books since being a very small child. I was fortunate that people read to me...a lot. So much, so I am told, that by the time I was 18 months old, I'd had particular books read to me so many times that I knew them off by heart. I was staying in a boarding house in Filey on the Yorkshire coast with my parents and was sitting in my high chair at breakfast apparently 'reading' fluently.

I could read before I went to infants' school but I had to work my way through the reading scheme alongside everyone else. I read about Old Lob, the farmer with his horse called Dobbin and Percy the bad chick who got into all sorts of mischief.

As soon as I was old enough to be allowed to walk to the central library in Ashton with my little friend May, from our house on Turner Lane, I brought home a pink card for my Mum to sign. When I returned it, duly signed, I became the proud possessor of a library ticket. I chose 'Milly Molly Mandy' as the first book I ever borrowed from the library.

We had a collection of books in the classroom cupboard at school but we were not allowed to take them home. Instead we had a story at the end of afternoon class just before home-time. That's when I first met 'Brer Rabbit' and 'Little Grey Rabbit' & 'Sam Pig' by Alison Uttley.

When we moved to Waterloo, I joined the branch library on Taunton Road, just around the corner from school. I would search the shelves for anything by Enid Blyton but was often disappointed because her books were in great demand. If Enid Blyton wasn't available, I'd often find a Hardy Boys mystery or a story featuring Nancy Drew, girl detective.

I steadily built up my own collection of books through birthday and Christmas presents. I discovered Malcolm Saville's books which took place in Long Mynd, an area of Shropshire which might as well have been on the other side of the moon. I read some of the classics too. "Pollyanna" played the "Glad Game", an eternally optimistic viewpoint which could be construed as irritating but instead transforms the folk in the New England town where she has gone to live with her strict aunt. From that book, I learned about 'calf's foot jelly' and 'missionary barrels'. From reading 'Heidi' I learned about the Swiss Alps and life as a goatherd long before 'Sound Of Music' ever hit the big screen.

Our classroom at Waterloo Council School also had a book cupboard. I borrowed Arthur Ransome's books like 'Swallows and Amazons' which featured a girl called Titty. She and her chums sailed during their school holidays in the Lake District, an activity that appeared quite fantastical to me. I came across 'Orlando, the Marmalade Cat' too and "Madeleine" books set in Paris in the 1930s. Even in the 1950s, these stories seemed impossibly glamorous and a little dated.

When I left school I went to work in Manchester Libraries but the travelling made long days working till 8pm even longer, so when a job for a library assistant came up at Ashton Library, I applied. Trevor Bolton was the Chief Librarian at the time and he encouraged me to take my "A" levels at Beaufort Road College evening classes so that I could go to Library School and become a Chartered Librarian. I worked for four years in Ashton Library and spent some of the time working in Hurst Library which was housed in a small lodge building on Queens Road and Waterloo Library which was in a purpose built building on Taunton Road, near the War Memorial. It was often quiet in the evenings and the libraries were open till 8pm. I caught up on a lot of reading whilst working late on my own at Hurst or Waterloo. I read D.H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell as well as lighter stuff like Howard Spring's books set in Manchester; Agatha Christie and P.G. Wodehouse.

Now I can afford to buy my own books so I have an extensive collection of books on art and architecture, travel and gardening as well as novels which I can read over and over again.
