

Books. By Carol Louise Reynolds

I have always loved reading and books from the time I first started reading. We had a picture book when I was little called *The Wooden Tops*. This might have been my first book. Now, I am not convinced that I knew what they were then but now I think that they were skittles. After a little research I discovered that these *Wooden Tops* were part of the *Andy Pandy* programmes on television but, of course, as we had no television then, that was lost on me. You may remember *Andy Pandy*, a puppet toy in blue and white stripes? In my bedroom, beside the bed, was a floor to ceiling bookcase. It was excellent for climbing and when I had chosen a book, I could dive down onto the ridged green counterpane and lie there reading. The book I am thinking about was called *The Little Black Coal* and was the story of how a piece of coal had originally been a cone on a pine tree. Well I thought that it was more interesting than *Rupert Bear* or *Curly Wee* and *Gussie Goose* or *Grimms Fairy Tales* or even my comic *Jack and Jill*.

In school I read everything, other classes' story books, posters on the walls, notes on the teacher's desk and of course Bible stories. Good readers were chosen to read a reading at the annual parish *Carol Service*. I was barely tall enough to see over the giant polished eagle on the lectern and had to balance, standing on a pile of kneelers which was a rather precarious position. As there were no microphones, our principal teacher stood at the back of the church and yelled up at me to encourage me to yell back at him, so that when I read the lesson to the packed congregation they would be able to hear me.

My favourite book to read in school was actually a monthly magazine, which you may remember, called *Look and Learn*. It was packed with interesting facts and, wonder of wonders, it was in colour. Our school books, when they had pictures, these pictures were usually of the three colour type, so rather dull. Anyway I usually had read all my schoolbooks on the evening of the first day of term, lying on the same green counterpane.

Another favourite place for reading was in the children's library in *Blackrock*. There were child sized chairs and the sun came in the deep windows. My choice of book was never scrutinised so I read books by the same author week after week. Yes, *Enid Blyton*, with her boarding school midnight feasts and hard boiled egg and ginger beer picnics. She was followed by *Susan Coolidge's What Katy Did* series. Poor *Katy* fell off a swing and ended up in a wheelchair, just recompense for being not the nicest of big sisters. Then there were the *Chalet School Books*, yet another set of boarding school books set in the Austrian Tyrol before the *Anschluss* after which they then decamped to Wales which wasn't quite as interesting. Then, the *Bobbsey Twins*, part of a large impossibly contented American family whose adventures now come with a warning about

casual racism and taboo language! These were interspersed with the occasional Just William story or Jennings. And, just as I was about to move upward into the Mills and Boon section, my grandmother's favourites, one clever teacher advised me that it was actually the quality not the quantity of books which you read that mattered.

I was shocked. Surely if I read the most books, I had to be the best reader?

But no, I never won the prize for most interesting library list, so I started to query what other people were putting on their library lists. That curiosity, which was now piqued, together with my teacher's comment, have inculcated in me a lifelong love affair with books. Yes, books, hard back and paper back with that particular smell of newly printed pages have been my support and stay during these lockdown times and over many troubles in the past and will sustain me into the future. Sitting comfortably, lost in another person's words, what better way to survive come what may.