



Confessions of a Bedtime Story Addict

By Holly Bowne

They say the first step to healing an addiction is admitting you have a problem. Well, I don't know if I have a problem exactly. It's just that I like to read bedtime stories to my kids. A lot. Maybe it's a little unusual considering they are now teenagers. And sure, it's a bit difficult for my daughter and me to squeeze together onto her twin-size bed, her being a full three inches taller than me and all; but, I tell myself I can quit anytime I want. The truth is... I'm not so sure. And my children have become my enablers.

It all started when my firstborn was about 10 months old, and I decided that we needed to add a new and loving phase to our relationship by establishing a bedtime routine. I looked on it as a way to let her know it was time to slow down and prepare for sleep. I'd gather her up onto my husband's and my queen-size bed, piling the pillows around us to create a comfy, little cocoon where we'd slowly savor a picture book together. (Well, I'd savor, she was more interested in chewing on the cover.)

As she got older, I pulled out all my old favorites—rereading classics like the “Little House on the Prairie” series, “Nancy Drew,” and “Anne of Green Gables.” We became immersed in the imaginary. Then along came “Harry Potter,” and together we entered the world of fantasy. I satisfied my dramatic bent by creating distinctive voices for each character. The boisterous, cockney accent of Hagrid, the cool, insolence of Draco Malfoy, and the calm of Dumbledore.

I thought perhaps I'd finally overcome my compulsion to read aloud every night when my son's developing taste in books varied so sharply from my own. My passion has always been fiction, but he's much more interested in reading about volcanoes, wolves, and medieval knights. Initially, I'd sigh when he'd pull out his choice of reading material for the night. “Don't you want me to read this?” I'd whine (who is the child here?) holding up a “Hardy Boys” mystery. “Not tonight, mom.” He'd reply, happily climbing onto his bed and plumping the pillows in anticipation.

But I soon found myself just as fascinated as he was with the interesting new facts we'd discover together. I mean, did you know that pumice stones—used to smooth

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the rough spots on our feet and elbows—are actually volcanic rock?

Like any good junkie, I always finagle a way to satisfy my habit by reading to them both every night. Occasionally our storytimes can run a bit late, especially if I get caught up in a particularly good chapter. When my husband inevitably comes looking for me, he rolls his eyes to find me once again curled up with one or the other of them, dramatically relating the latest story of choice. “I’m only reading five minutes to each of them!” I call out to his retreating backside. As if that is sufficient enough explanation for the fact that I’m reading bedtime stories at 10:00 p.m. on a school night.

In my defense, I truly believe these special storytimes are as much for the kids as they are for me. Just like me, they love and look forward to this special bonding time we share. After hectic days of homework, after-school sports and multiple parenting challenges, I need this time reading with them. In much the way my husband relaxes by flipping through the channels on the television in the evening, reading to my children relaxes me. It brings a calming conclusion to the day. A time to cuddle with them on their beds, with the warmth of a new book covering us like a cozy blanket.

I acknowledge, though don’t want to admit, my days are numbered. With our oldest in high school, and our youngest finishing up the middle school years, too soon it will be over, and they’ll be onto new adventures of their own making. But for now, I’ll happily feed my addiction, and treasure up every single, sacred minute of our bedtime storytimes together. ★

Holly Bowne’s work has appeared in regional, national and online publications. Visit her at www.hollybowne.blogspot.com where she explores the more humorous aspects of balancing the writing life with parenting her teenage children.

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