

THE POWER OF A PROMISE

(MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH READING)

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My earliest memory consists of my watching Mama and Daddy reading a newspaper. Since we were very poor, there were no books in our home - except for a tattered Bible that had once belonged to Mama's preacher father.

"What are you doing??", I would ask them as they read.

"We're reading, and, one day, when you go to school, you'll learn to read, too," they said. "Reading is fun!"

"When can I go to school and learn to read?" I asked.

"When you're five years old," they said.

So, I waited for what seemed like forever. "O how I wanted to learn to read!!"

When I was five, Mama walked me to nearby Bishop school in Detroit's Black Bottom and enrolled me in kindergarten. We played with blocks and dolls and balls and puzzles. The teacher would read a story to us every day - but no one taught me how to read.

After about a week, as I recall, I told Mama that I didn't want to go to school anymore because they wouldn't teach me how to read!

One day, I announced that I wasn't going to school anymore because they wouldn't teach me how to read!

"You have to go to school. All five years olds go to school. Just be patient, they'll teach you to read," she said.

"When?" I asked.

"Soon", she said.

After a while, I left school crying every day, and I tearfully announced, "I'm Not Going Back because they won't teach me how to read."

Every morning, I cried as Mama walked me to school; and every afternoon, when she picked me up, I cried, "They didn't teach me. They didn't show me how to read!"

Finally, one day, Mama walked me to a new school - Sacred Heart Catholic School. Sacred Heart didn't have kindergartens - so they enrolled five-year-olds in the first

grade – and they taught me how to read on day 1! (How Mama ever got the money to pay Catholic School tuition, I'll never know, - but, somehow, she found a way)

Mama said that within two weeks, I was happily reading. The teachers allowed us to take our Dick & Jane Readers home, and I would read,

“Look, Jane, look.”

“Run Spot, run.”

“See Dick walk.” -

Over and over again. Such is the power of reading! 🌀 such is the Joy that reading brings!!

Reading can comfort, and dry tears, and fulfill promises and activate the imagination and energize the soul and help to build a future.

After two years, Mama removed me from the Catholic School and enrolled me in Lincoln School – a public school near the housing project where we lived.

The excellent teachers at Lincoln not only taught us to read, but they also introduced us to a variety of fiction and non - fiction books to read independently.

Fairy tales were my favorites and I was determined to read them all. With great delight, I read *Grimm's Fairy Tales*; *The Red Fairy Book*; *The Blue Fairy Book*; *Norse Fairy Tales*; *Chinese Fairy Tales* and on and on. There was no public library in the project – but the Bookmobile (a large truck filled with shelves of books) came to the project every two weeks.

I would check out 12 books (the maximum) every week and proudly read them all before the Bookmobile returned.

My brothers laughed at me as they went outside and played marbles and baseball and rode our old rickety blue bike – but I ignored them and joyfully continued to read all my books.

I never let go of Mama's promise that “in school, they'll teach you how to read.” Indeed, that promise was so powerful that it provided a foundation for my life – a foundation that it has continued to this very day.

I eventually became an Elementary School Reading Teacher; a Middle School English Teacher; a High School English and Remedial Reading Teacher and a College Professor of English Education, Reading and Literacy.

I often wonder what would have become of me if Mama had left me in the Kindergarten at Bishop School, hating school for an entire year!

I also often think that Mama's promise is echoed in God's promise in Jeremiah 29:11 which says: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."