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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Laura Elliott

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Mansfield, Missouri. Visiting the Rocky Ridge Farmhouse and Museum was a lifelong dream of mine, ever since my mom first began reading the series to me as a child. When I finally learned to read, I poured over the frontier word images that Mrs. Wilder painted in her *Little House* books. Thus, the *Little House* series has been an essential cornerstone of my children's library. I have enjoyed countless hours immersed in these books, in addition to biographies of Laura Wilder, memoirs, and other *Little House* collections.

As a child, I especially absorbed the series, but as I grew older, I moved to reading other works written by or about Laura Ingalls Wilder. For instance, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: Little House in the Ozarks* edited by Stephen W. Hines is a collection of Laura's newspaper articles submitted to the *Missouri Ruralist*. Many of the articles focus on Laura's advice and experiences on farming or on trips she took. Of course, one cannot forget the journals, *On the Way Home* and *West from Home*, which describe the country around the turn of the century and people she met. Lately, I finished reading Pamela Hill Smith's biography, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life*, which gives the reader more details about the writing process Laura Wilder developed to finish the series.

I was excited to discover two children's series, one based on Rose Wilder Lane (written by Roger Lea McBride) and another based on Caroline Quiner as a young girl (written by Maria D. Wilkes and Celia Wilkins). I read these just as enthusiastically as I did the *Little House* books so long ago. The most recent additions to the Laura Ingalls Wilder portion of my library are the *Little House Cookbook* by Barbara M.

Walker and *The Wilder Life: My Adventures in the Lost World of Little House on the Prairie* by Wendy McClure. Purchasing the cookbook was inspired by Wendy McClure's baking experiences and expectations of the food described in the *Little House* series, and I thought that I would take time to try some of the recipes myself at some point. If you are an avid fan of Laura Wilder, I do highly recommend McClure's book. Her experiences with frontier life will spark much laughter along with an occasional bout of nostalgia.

As much as the *Little House* series has amused me, I have added more books written by and about her daughter Rose Wilder Lane. William Holtz describes Rose's life in his work entitled *The Ghost of the Little House: A Life of Rose Wilder Lane*. His focus on Lane's artistic accomplishments as a writer has encouraged me to read some of her biographies that I have downloaded onto my Kindle. I also have recently purchased two of her fiction pieces, *Free Land* and *Young Pioneers*, which are loosely based on her parent's lives.

Granted, the *Little House* books are not the only ones that take up the seven bookshelves in my house. As a former educator, I am always on the look-out for a wonderfully written and illustrated children's book. While teaching, I took great delight in introducing Jan Brett's book, such as *The Mitten* and *The Hat*, during the winter months of the school year. The class and I would enjoy looking over the illustrations, trying to predict the next event. A. A. Milne's Pooh books were always a hit with the children. Recently, I discovered Jane Yolen, whose *Owl Moon* has easily become one of my favorite stories to read aloud.

Reading these stories has often led me to the chapter books section of the children's section of a book store or library. I have discovered Roald Dahl's quirky writings, Lois Lowry's thought-provoking tales, and L.M. Montgomery's hilarious Anne. I must say, though, the most fun I had reading books aloud in the classroom was when I read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis. The first movie was about to be released just as I finished the book. I have fond memories anticipating the release date with my students.

Even though I am passionate about children's literature, I do take an interest in books related to sewing – one of my favorite hobbies besides reading. My mom has been very instrumental in teaching me how to sew, and we are often found browsing the local bookstore and craft store for intriguing project books in quilting, knitting, crocheting, and cross-stitching. We have learned a great deal about new ideas and tips for projects that others have created. For instance, the *Better Homes and Gardens 101 Christmas Cross-Stitch Designs* and Sam Hawkins' *520 Christmas Cross-Stitch Designs* have been wonderful references for quick and easy ornament projects that I give out at Christmas. On occasion, I find a sewing book that is completely useful for things that I have no idea what to do with and don't want to get rid of. Ann Cox's *Beginner's Guide to Silk Ribbon Embroidery* is such an example. Growing up

when it was fashionable to wear ribbons as a young child, I now have a resource for putting all those ribbons to good use! I can now use ribbons to create many embroidered pictures that will look wonderful in my house.

One of my favorite quilting books that I have in my possession I happened to pick up in Lancaster, PA while attending a conference. On a whim, my friends and I decided to tour an Amish farmhouse museum open to the public during our free time. Browsing through the gift shop, I picked up *The Quilter's Guide to Amish Quilts* by Jan Jefferson and Maggi McCormick Gordon. Not only is the book filled with how-to guides for quilting these beautiful masterpieces, but it also gives background into the daily life of the Amish, which I have enjoyed reading immensely.

I had a friend remark once that I had too many books. In a way, she is right. I have too many books to share in one short article. However, the books I have shared in this article are valued for the people who shared them with me or, in some cases, I have shared with a student. Having these books on my shelf are daily reminders of how books can create wonderful memories.

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