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## Narrative of a Kentucky Bibliophile

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## Narrative of a Kentucky Bibliophile

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My dad is akin to the dusty, rutted, dirt roads of his old Kentucky home. His tawny, rough skin, aged by an upbringing of tenacious labor characterize a man of strength and brawn, but although this is true of him, my dad's heart is tender and kind. Every night, his six foot, two inch figure would walk through the pale-pink door frame of the room one of my older sisters and I shared growing up. He would bring with him a small, fold up chair, positioning it directly between the two of our rose-colored frilly beds, and then reached for the night stand, where a book was always kept. This specific book was one which he was particularly fond of. From the contents in-between the pages of this yellowed, musty paperback held stories and adventures from old-fashioned times before microwaves were invented and when outhouses were still used. My dad had an attachment to the characters of these stories, for he too lacked these modern conveniences unlike many of those his own age while he was growing up. Thus, the nine-volume series, *Little House on the Prairie*, was near and dear to his heart.

Before he began reading to us, he would always tuck our covers snugly in underneath our little bodies which made the covers squeeze around us as if they were giving us a great big bear hug, and then he would fluff our pillows until they felt like soft, velvety clouds, and afterwards I would lay perfectly still so I wouldn't undo all the tucking and fluffing. Once we were both comfortably settled in for the night, he would sit down on the squeaky fold up chair, then pull out a wrinkled bookmark from the pages that kept our place in the splendid story.

My dad's glasses were always propped up on his wrinkled forehead

where two little rounded indents showed times where he had previously done so, and to this day, he sometimes forgets where his glasses are when they are perched up there, much to his exasperation and our grinning gazes.

The room was warmly lit by the yellow glow from a lamp, and he leaned closer to it as he reached to lower his glasses from their perch. His soft creek-blue eyes would gaze at the illustration the writer had situated at the beginning of each chapter. A warm, admiring look appeared on our dad's face, and he watched our shining faces as we peaked over to get a glimpse of it as well. Satisfied, he licked his big thumb with his listerine breath and tabbed the top right-hand side of the page where he would turn next, and then he finally delved into the story.

I remember his animated expressions and the voices he liked to use when reading those dear stories. His matured, deep manly voice would rise to a high pitched girly tone whenever Ma, one of the beloved characters of the story, would speak, and the two of us sisters would laugh and giggle from the amusement. "My stars!" he would squeak, and we laughed till our bellies ached. On the other hand, though, whenever Pa spoke, he would exaggerate his already thick, baritone Kentucky accent to an even deeper and more southern one than it was beforehand. Along with exaggerating his accent, he would raise his voice to a deafening level. "Why, my lands!" was a phrase often used, and when it was, it was ear shattering.

The thing I remember the most about my dad in those days, when my sister and I were still under four feet tall and had haircuts we were so desperately embarrassed by, was the great joy our dad displayed when reading to us. When we reached a funny story, he would stop short right before the next sentence for a brief moment in the attempt to catch his breath and read it without bursting into uncontrollable laughter, but he couldn't restrain the urge, and before he knew it, his face turned cherry red and he would have to wipe away the watery little streams running down his scarlet cheeks. My dad's laugh started out as one of those polite little chuckles you expect to hear in a public place, but in between the words he tried to get out with much strained effort, the small chuckles turned into something more

like the sound of a loudly screeching monkey, “Hee hee, ha ha”, then they progressively turned into a giant howl of laughter until he was leaning back in the rickety chair while slapping his knee with so much enthusiasm it could have startled someone a whole state away.

Once he finished a chapter every night, he would pause to peek at the next story and give the two of us an idea about what the next escapade would be about. Although we would beg, “Pretty please, just one more, just one more, just one more chapter, please Dad!” he would tuck the bookmark into its place and tell us,

“Wait until tomorrow night.”

Once our dad finished reading to us, he would stand and fold up the creaky chair. He placed it against the wall, then told us the phrase he often did every night which we repeated back to him through our little girly giggles, “Goodnight, sleep tight, don’t let the bedbugs bite.” And we surely never worried about any bedbugs; we were too busy dreaming about the next adventure in the delightful story.

Although the days of my dad reading bedtime stories are long gone, I recollect them with fond affection, and I am grateful for the outflow that has come from them. I even use the phrases

“My lands” and “My stars” on occasion without realizing it came from my dad’s bedtime stories.

My love for reading grew as I grew, and I know in retrospect that my father’s influence is one of the major factors that played a role in my desire to read books for myself. I came to enjoy many different genres of books over time, but the ones I have the most affection for are the books that contain similar stories to those which I remember listening to growing up.

I thank my dad for instilling the love and joy for reading in my life, and I want to also instill that love and joy for reading in my own children one day, just as my dad did. I hope that one day my children will have sweet memories about me reading to them and that they will pass it on to their own children. To that end my love for reading has continued to grow and will continue to, as I believe it surely will.