

Talk Story

By Jennifer Padua

When my husband Theodore and I first started dating, he asked what was one thing I wished someone would do for me. I replied that I wished someone would read aloud to me.

“Really?” he responded and asked why. I shared that I had always enjoyed a good story, and I loved it even more when I heard an incredible storyteller. But since I was an elementary school teacher at the time, it was I who was always the storyteller. That afternoon, he started reading *Memoirs of a Geisha* to me.

This began our journey of reading aloud. What I thought was a simple act developed into a habit and unintentionally opened opportunities for us to converse about issues in the books.

While reading *A Lesson Before Dying* and *Tuesdays with Morrie*, we talked about how we wanted to be taken care of while we were dying and the type of funeral services we would prefer. Since both books had teachers as main characters, we also shared which teachers had a positive influence on us.

We learned each other’s financial personality (*Smart Couples Finish Rich*), the type of traveler we were (*Traveling While Married*), what values we felt strongly about (*Five People You Meet in Heaven*), and our love language (*Five Languages of Love*).

Reading aloud helped us understand one another better and the experiences we had gone through. Theodore talked about his childhood as he related to the character Spencer Fujii in the *Middle Son*. I shared with him some of the rituals my friends and I did while growing up (*Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*). Since books often turn into movies (*October Sky*) and plays (*Heads by Harry*) it opened another path for us to critically discuss similarities and differences between the performance and written versions. As cliché as it sounds, we always agree that the book is better.

Though we both enjoy our time reading aloud, we had to set ground rules. For example, while Theodore is reading, I can’t watch his eyes or correct his verbiage because he thinks I’m doing a running record on him. Also, we’re not allowed to read ahead in the book without the other person (I got caught reading a chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*). In addition, we can’t always choose local books written in pidgin because I laugh more than I read aloud (*Pass On, No Pass Back!*). Finally, we both must have a vested interest when determining the next read aloud. As our lives became busier, we could no longer abide by the one chapter a night rule we set early on. There were times where one of us would fall asleep by the end of the first



Courtesy of Jennifer and Theodore Padua

paragraph. Initially, we got annoyed with one another, but it made us realize that while one of us slept, the other could read the books we had a sole interest in but did not qualify as a read aloud (*Separation of Power*, *The Altman’s Code*, *The Pilot’s Wife* and *The Money Dragon*). Since we both are avid readers, our nightstand is filled with our own personal and professional books we want to finish. However, we both know that our reading aloud always takes precedence. We cherish that reading aloud allows us to escape from our busy schedules into our own world, into the world of authors and issues, where we can share, learn and strengthen our relationship through the simple act of reading aloud.

Jennifer Padua, Reading Specialist, may be contacted at paduaj@prel.org. Theodore Padua is a member of the U.S. military.

