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*Books are the quietest and most constant friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers.*

*Charles W. Eliot*

Books have always been something I loved. As a child I would go to the library and choose several books to bring home. It was always sad when I had to return them. I wanted to keep every book I read.

When I was in high school and the days of reading Shakespeare arrived, I have to admit that that was probably one time in my life I didn't appreciate all there was to learn from reading. That was when I discovered I liked a good mystery, a sappy romance and a true story. My literary personality was formed.

Children have a way of making you enjoy the pleasures of a book all over again. When my children were small we would go to the library quite often. Any book they wanted to read or bring home was fine with me. I have very fond memories of snuggling up and reading. As they became readers, we would take turns reading chapters so we could both be involved. The one thing they knew they could always get out of me at the store was a book. Candy, NO! Movies, NO! Balloons, NO! Sweets, NO! Books, YES!!!! Two rules; no writing in the book and no page ripping.

Over the years I have enjoyed a novel, a short story, magazines and of course, the newspaper. I love to read in the car, on my deck, at an airport and on the plane.

When death came to my door, my ability to concentrate on anything was gone. Reading a book was the last thing on my mind. I didn't want to see a newspaper or magazine either. It was all too overwhelming. I also did not want to read or hear about anyone else's problems. I had a horrible thing happen to my family and I needed to concentrate on us. Doing something I used to enjoy so much became not so enjoyable.

After a bit of time went by, I started to crave information. I wanted to read everything I could get my hands on concerning grief. I couldn't read enough. I needed to know that what was happening to me internally and externally was normal. I had never experienced a real broken heart before and I needed to know how to mend it. Reading became the thread that would put me back together.

This is typically the season of hot chocolate, a roaring fire, soft music and a good book. I tend to stay inside more and read. I still read books and magazines about grief and mourning. It is a process that will never end. A book is a great gift to give yourself as well as to someone you know that may be mourning a loved one.

Here are some things books have taught me the last few years:

- They can relax you
- They can take you away from everyday stresses
- They can inform you
- They give hope

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- They are inspirational
- They let you know you are not alone
- And as a gift they can bring joy and comfort

I still love books as much as I did when I was a child. The subject matter may be different now but they are still my friend, my counselor and my teacher.

Barb