



20 Apr 2019
Courier Mail, Brisbane

Author: Frances Whiting • Section: Qweekend • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 166,502 • Page: 1 • Printed size: 2527.00cm² • Region: QLD
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 67,279 • words: 1876 • Item ID: 1108235190

isentia.mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 1 of 5

QWEEKEND

APRIL 20-21, 2019

POWER *of* WORDS

How nurturing a love of books helps children navigate life's challenges

FRANCES WHITING



COMING HOME
WHEN THE WAR
WAS OVER THE
BATTLES BEGAN

ANZAC HONOUR
BIRRALEE CHOIR
HEADS TO THE
WESTERN FRONT





20 Apr 2019
Courier Mail, Brisbane

Author: Frances Whiting • Section: Qweekend • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 166,502 • Page: 1 • Printed size: 2527.00cm² • Region: QLD
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 67,279 • words: 1876 • Item ID: 1108235190

isentia.mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 2 of 5





20 Apr 2019
Courier Mail, Brisbane

Author: Frances Whiting • Section: Qweekend • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 166,502 • Page: 1 • Printed size: 2527.00cm² • Region: QLD
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 67,279 • words: 1876 • Item ID: 1108235190

isentia.mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 3 of 5

ON THE PAGE

Award-winning librarian Megan Daley reveals how books helped her overcome devastating loss, and her top tips to teach children how to read

FRANCES WHITING

Megan Daley spent a lot of her childhood up a tree. Or in a corner of her garden. Or snuggled under a quilt. Or tucked beneath the branches of a mulberry bush. But it didn't matter where her legs took her, her hands always held a book.

Daley, now 42, was the quintessential bookworm, the child who could be found in the library at lunchtime, the kid whose nose was always pressed between the pages – and not much has changed now she's a grown woman and has traded Potter (Beatrix) for Patchett (Ann).

Daley is the teacher librarian at St Aidan's School at Corinda, in Brisbane's southwest, where she has taught since 2002, and where her work igniting young readers' minds saw her awarded Queensland Teacher Librarian of the Year in 2015. In 2017 she was awarded the national Dromkeen Librarian's Award, presented at the State Library of Australia in Victoria. She is also former national vice-president of the Children's Book Council of Australia and the creator of the popular childrensbooksdaily.com website and blog.

All of which is to say Daley knows her stuff, and now with the release of her first book, *Raising Readers – How to nurture a child's love of books*, she's sharing all that she has learnt between the shelves. For parents of reluctant readers, it's a little bit like being allowed through the wardrobe door into Narnia to a place where book magic awaits ...

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

Raised in Bardon, in Brisbane's inner west, with her parents Geoff and Robyn Dean, as the eldest sibling of Amber, Jeremy and Simon, Daley was one of those fortunate children who grew up surrounded by words. Both parents are academics and bookworms – Geoff, 69, is an adjunct professor in International Policing at the Queensland University of Technology, and Robyn, 66, still does casual contract work as a teacher librarian.

"We had a big, old rambling house with lots of cubbyholes to crawl into with a book," Daley recalls. "Our parents would read to us often, and after dinner all four of us [children] would be in the lounge room, reading books together. At first I read a lot of English and American authors, and there weren't too many Australian authors I was aware of, but when I was about 11, I read John Marsden's *So Much to Tell*

You and it blew my mind." But it was seeing her first "real, live writer", Brisbane author Steven Herrick, at the launch of his book *The Place Where the Planes Take Off*, that everything clicked into place for a then-15-year-old Daley – "the connection between words and the people who create them, and the shared experience with their reader".

After leaving school (Rainworth State School and St Peters Lutheran College, Indooroopilly), Daley would spend most of her adult life helping others to make the same connections. Studying early childhood education and eventually earning a Masters of Education in Teacher Librarianship, Daley began her career in 1998 at Ipswich's West Moreton Anglican College, before a stint at the Anglican Church Grammar



20 Apr 2019
Courier Mail, Brisbane

Author: Frances Whiting • Section: Qweekend • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 166,502 • Page: 1 • Printed size: 2527.00cm² • Region: QLD
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 67,279 • words: 1876 • Item ID: 1108235190

 isentia mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 4 of 5

School, and now Saint Aidan's, where her library classes are described by one mother as like "adventures in wonderland". But how to lead other children, not as fortunate as those in Daley's daily educational orbit, down the rabbit hole?

"Every single child can have an identity as a reader," Daley asserts. "We are very quick to give up on kids as readers if they don't immediately show a natural inclination for it, to say 'oh, my child is not a reader' or 'my boy hates books', or 'they're just not interested', but I have not met a child yet who doesn't appreciate a good story. They may not enjoy traditional stories, or traditional ways of delivering them, but there is always a way for stories to find their reader.

"I have taught kids with dyslexia, with eyesight issues, kids who profess to detest books, and there are ways of sharing words with each and every one of them – e-books, graphic novels, and audiobooks, for example; there's really no excuses any more," she laughs.

Daley says to raise a reader is to firstly raise children who identify as readers, by immersing them – from birth – in language. "You can read to children from day one; babies start to show a real interest in books much earlier than you may think, infants respond to sounds, to repetition, to movement, to song, to rhyme, all of which can be found in books."

Daley also recommends reading immersion, surrounding children with books in their everyday lives, not just relegated to a few shelves in a bedroom or playroom. "I call it 'on-the-go reading', placing books in every room, in the car, on the hall table. I always have a book in my handbag, I have books at the breakfast table in case one of the children just picks it up. It's this almost incidental reading that can really make it →



20 Apr 2019
Courier Mail, Brisbane

Author: Frances Whiting • Section: Qweekend • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 166,502 • Page: 1 • Printed size: 2527.00cm² • Region: QLD
Market: Australia • ASR: AUD 67,279 • words: 1876 • Item ID: 1108235190

isentia.mediaportal

Licensed by Copyright Agency. You may only copy or communicate this work with a licence.

Page 5 of 5

a part of children's everyday lives, rather than a separate, controlled activity. Just by making books always available and accessible to children is a way to lead them into a life-time love."

It is helpful, Daley says, to show children "the world behind the book" by attending book launches with them, taking them to literature festivals and meet-the-author talks, all ventures in opening the door to a wider appreciation of the literary world. But for all this lofty talk of festivals and author chats, Daley is not above the odd spot of bribery, either. "Oh absolutely," she says, laughing. "I think some parents are shocked to hear me say that but, you know, we bribe our children to try a new food, or take up a sport – some parents pay their kids to improve their marks, so I see no problem with paying, for example, a teenager \$5 [to read] a book.

"I've seen this work, and what eventually happens, if it's the right author or the right series, is that one day you don't have to pay any more and you have a reader in your house."

There's a sense that Daley would do just about anything to turn a non-reader into a bibliophile, and she agrees. Part of the reason is she knows the comfort, joy and adventure a great story can bring – but as an educator she also knows the advantages. "There is so much research out there, and so much anecdotal evidence, which I see myself on a daily basis, that kids who are readers have a greater chance of succeeding academically. It turns them into problem solvers, information gatherers, it gives them whole new perspectives on the world, it helps with comprehension, with so many aspects of their lives outside of the written page.

"As educators, I can tell you how grateful we are when children come to us from homes where reading is encouraged, where they have been read to, and a love of reading has been nurtured. Those children have a head start in

reaching their academic potential." And also, as Daley points out with a smile, "books are just a lot of fun".

THE DARKER ARTS

Daley's book is divided into user-friendly chapters, with age-appropriate tips and book lists. It delves into particular challenges – with tips on everything from how to keep tweens reading to how to start a book club. There are chapters on specific genres with matching recommendations, and also advice on how books – and which books – can help children negotiate life's more complex issues, and not-so-magical moments.

Daley and her two children, Ava, 11, and Georgia, 7, have all had to find their way through many of those, with Daley's book dedicated to her husband and partner of 20 years, Dan, who died in April 2017 after suffering a catastrophic heart attack at the age of 40.

But if the end of the couple's union was traumatic, the beginning was magical, Daley meeting Dan, a transport planner, while at university, when she was wearing a pair of her signature fairy wings (she has a thing for fairy wings and the fey creatures attached to them), purple Doc Martens and glittery stars painted on her cheekbones. They shared, Daley says, two beautiful decades together, producing their beloved daughters, both avid readers. The dedication to

Dan in Daley's book reads: "Daniel John Daley AKA our Chief Bedtime Books Reader".

Daley's grief was compounded by the loss of her younger brother Simon in 2012, her dear friend and well-known Queensland author Narelle Oliver in 2016, and a much-loved aunt in 2017. Her family is, as Daley notes, "well acquainted with grief".

"When Dan died, after suffering for years and years from

chronic pain after back surgery went wrong, our one consolation is that his wretched, pinned back is now pain-free.

"It was, as you can imagine, a pretty awful time for us. What got us through, and continues to, is the way our community just wrapped their arms around us. We have been so well supported, our neighbours and school community have just taken such care of us, and with us, it's been incredible." What also helped, she says, are books. Her chapter entitled "Reading the Dark" explores the language of grief, and how books – from E.B. White's childhood classic *Charlotte's Web* to Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* – "can give you the words when you have none left yourself".

"I do think it's important to allow children to experience the full gamut of human emotions and experiences through carefully written, age-appropriate books, and for some children it may be the only way they do allow themselves to let great sadness out. Children often ask librarians for 'books that make me cry', and I think they can be a very safe way to explore some very big feelings. I have found great comfort in books since Dan died. I smile when I think of him reading aloud to the girls, and part of his wonderful legacy to his daughters is the lifelong gift of words."

For Daley, who is still known to pop on the occasional set of fairy wings and take herself to hidden places to open the pages of a really good book, writing *Raising Readers* – at the urging of University of Queensland Press publisher and well-known books champion Kristina Schulz – felt both wonderful and strange.

After all the years of seeing other authors' names on book spines, after thousands of books she has pressed into people's hands, to have one of her own took a little bit of getting used to. But it also feels familiar, like entering the wardrobe's doors into Narnia, and discovering that you feel right at home there. ■