

Treasure Island Memories ... *“a vast expanse of heaven”*

Treasure Island is at the heart of my memories of St. Nicholas. If I looked upon it now, almost twenty years later, I'm sure it would seem so much smaller, the way the jungle gym doesn't appear quite so tall. But as I remember it, Treasure Island was a vast expanse of heaven, a sea of big, colorful pillows taking up an entire corner of Mrs. Hampton's Lower Primary classroom. It had high walls (carrel dividers, I'm sure) that made it feel very snug, the perfect place to curl up with a book. Treasure Island demanded that I read in a state of utmost comfort, and I've been unable to find its equal since.

Mrs. Hampton's classroom wasn't all lounging around, though. We may have been only first- and second-graders, but we worked hard! In addition to rigorous spelling sessions and occasional curtsy lessons (on the off chance we ran into the Queen on Brainerd Road), we had a strict production schedule. We were assigned to rotate through “stations,” each of which required diligent work on an original poem or story. Upon completion, each poem was matted and laminated, while each story was handbound with colorful yarn and a construction paper cover. It seems Mrs. Hampton was my very first publisher. My salary? Neiman-Marcus chocolates from a dish at each station.

Inevitably, the time came when I had to leave Mrs. Hampton's classroom. I headed up the stairs at Grace Episcopal Church, through Middle and Upper Primaries, and out the chapel doors with my diploma in hand. High school and college ushered in the era of required reading, accompanied by tests, lectures, and an infinite number of term papers. Alas, there was no candy to reward a completed assignment, nor did my professors send home my writing samples to my mother. Personal reading moments were stolen between classes or late at night, when sleep was already in short supply. There was no Treasure Island; instead, I learned to read in cars and on buses, at mess hall tables and classroom desks. When the time came to job hunt at the end of my college career, the outlook was grim. Who would hire a professional reader?

*Katherine Giles '90**Katherine in Lower Primary*

English majors with no aspirations to teach often face a murky future. We're dubbed “versatile,” yet endure our fair share of skeptical looks from the gainfully employed. After graduation, I had several interviews, most for technical writing jobs that seemed stable, respectable—and downright stifling. After only a few months, I felt despair begin to sink in. The contented days of my childhood seemed eons away from this somber “real world.”

That said, you can imagine my surprise when a copy of my resumé ended up at Bas Bleu in Atlanta. It seems that the mail-order company was searching for a production assistant to read and review books for its retail catalog. I couldn't believe my luck: I would be paid to read!

Four years later, you may find me reading in line at the sandwich shop and at stoplights. I only carry purses that are large enough to hold a paperback. I give books as gifts to friends who don't read, in the hopes that they will begin to read. I remove furniture in my apartment when I need to make room for more bookshelves. I have tried to convince my boss to build Treasure Island II, but she's deterred by the soporific effect of so many pillows in our workspace. I *did* manage to introduce a candy jar to the office. A piece of chocolate for a piece of copy...the system worked when I was seven. Who am I to question a good thing?

Mrs. Hampton placed an order with us not long ago. The phone rep who took her order—for children's books, of course—informed me that she identified herself as my former teacher. Could she ever have imagined that one of her students would grow up to read for a living? Perhaps she hoped we all would, so she helped create a world where reading was a treat and our writing was always published. When I grew up and left St. Nicholas, I never forgot how good that felt. Surrounded by books at Bas Bleu, I have a daily reminder of how much reading means to me.