

The Unexpected Pleasures of More Than a Decade of Reading Harry Potter

Recently, I finished reading Book 7 of the Harry Potter series with my youngest daughter Noelle. We cried, laughed, gasped in shock, cried some more.

It was quite a journey, reading all seven books with her, and it took us four or five years.

Amazingly, it was my *fourth time through the series*. I read all 7 books with four of my kids, taking several years each time through.

I absolutely love the Harry Potter series, and have had the immense pleasure and honor of reading it to my kids, learning new things each time, finding new pleasures with each one, rediscovering details I'd forgotten, falling in love with the characters all over again each time.

Reading the series with four kids brought me some unexpected pleasures:

1. I started reading it with my eldest daughter, Chloe, when she was in elementary school. Probably 17 years ago or so. It began a lifelong love affair with Harry Potter for Chloe — she eventually fell in love with the actor who played Harry in the movies, Daniel Radcliffe, though she might not want me to tell you that, and we saw him in a Broadway play in New York after she graduated high school. I was there at the beginning of that love affair with the series, and sharing that with her has always been something special for me.
2. Chloe and I used to wait for each new book to come out, which was a delicious pleasure of anticipation. She was always so excited to read, but my time to read with her was limited — she was only with me a few nights a week, I worked full time and was doing freelance writing, and I had a bunch of younger kids to help take care of. So she had to wait as we made agonizingly slow progress through the last couple of books, despite the nail-biting excitement of the plots.
3. Reading with Chloe gave me the pleasure of discovering things about her, as we read together ... she was able to grasp complex vocabulary at a young age, understand difficult plots, and seemed to pick up on subtle relationship dynamics in the book that I didn't think she'd understand. She had a deep sense of empathy for the characters, and a tender heart that I saw as we read through emotional parts of the book. What a lovely thing, sharing that with her.
4. We started when Chloe was in elementary school, but didn't finish until she was 15 (we had to wait for the books to come out, and we took long to read them) ... that meant that we would bond together reading in bed in a way that I might not have done with a teen-age daughter normally. By that age, they often start to grow apart from you, but

reading with Chloe helped us stay close.

5. I remember crying as I read some of the more emotional parts (like the deaths of some characters, who shall remain unnamed for the sake of avoiding spoilers), with all the kids, but Chloe was the first. My voice would crack with emotion, and at times tears would flow down my face as I read. Chloe cried with me. It was like losing family members.
6. When I picked up the series again with my son Rain (who is now an adult in college), it was a completely different experience. It felt more like going on an adventure with him, and sharing in that adventure was so much fun. I'd already forgotten lots about the earlier books, and so it was also a process of rediscovery, which was a delight!
7. As with Chloe, when I read the series with Rain, it became a shared experience, something we did together while he was a kid (into middle school) that we'll always have. He's an adult now, but those times reading with him were some of my favorite experiences with him.
8. Rain remembers the two of us falling asleep together when we read the book sometimes. Sleep was actually a big theme for me as I read to all the kids ... I've become infamous in their eyes for falling asleep while reading to them. It's as if the books cast a stunning spell on me, perhaps.
9. When I read with Seth, it was a new experience as well. He had such enthusiasm for the books, it was so much fun. He bought Harry Potter wands and would cast spells. He really liked using Avada Kedavra (the killing curse) on me, which I patiently explained (as a ghost, I guess) was patricide. He seemed unbothered by that, as he kept cursing me.
10. Seth also liked to dress as Harry, robes and glasses and all. I loved being a part of his fantasy world, bringing it to life every time we read.
11. When Seth and I finished the series, it was satisfying but also left a hole in our lives. We started reading Lord of the Rings, which is awesome but without the same emotional connection, I think. Noelle and I are looking for a series now ... I think we're going to read the Unwanteds.
12. With Noelle, she brings an innocence to the reading experience that I really love. It's a freshness, a wonder, an excitement. It reminds me of reading with Chloe. Each kid's personality comes out in different ways in these shared experiences.
13. As with the other kids, Noelle and I read the books in spurts. We'd get interrupted by travel or visitors or holidays, then pick it up again, letting the memories of what happened the last time we read flood back into our minds, as if we were looking at memories in the pensieve. When things got exciting, sometimes we'd read two or even three times a day, trying to read as much as possible. It was if the thread of the books were woven in strange and magical ways into our lives.

That's what Harry Potter was for me, with all the kids: a magical thread woven into the last

15+ years of my life, weaving me and each child together in unexpected, joyful ways. There have been lots of other experiences weaving us together — being part of a large family, traveling together, riding bikes and playing in the park, playing boardgames and werewolf, cooking together and spending time with other loved ones. Harry Potter was like all of that, except with wands.

That part of my life is over now, which brings a bit of sadness in my heart. I hope to read the series with my grandkids one day. I will always cherish the magic experience I shared with my kids.

p.s. I didn't read the series with my two other kids, Justin and Maia, because Eva wanted to read them with them, and it saddens me that I didn't have that with them. But I have my own shared experiences with them, and love them just the same.