

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Diana

Two events in my life have recently captured my attention, continue to occupy my thoughts, and will, therefore, be the catalyst for my spring message. Each of those happenings, while involving youth that span a wide age range and literature genres that are decidedly different, has an element in common. They were both sparked by five to six words that pulled the referenced youth into a special piece of literature and mesmerized them throughout and beyond the reading experience.

The first event began with these words by Margaret Wise Brown, “In the great green room. . .” I’m sure you recognize this opening phrase of *Goodnight Moon*, and I would suspect this classic picture book evokes heartfelt memories for many of you as well. For me, it took on new meaning over spring break this year when my son, daughter-in-law, and their six-month-old daughter visited. I learned that they read *Goodnight Moon* to their daughter every evening at bedtime. She is, therefore, quite naturally familiar with the words quoted above. However, I was amazed to watch my granddaughter respond dramatically each time those five simple words were spoken. When she was feeling happy, saying that phrase would make her squirm from head to toe and literally squeal with excitement, and, if those words were spoken when she was getting tired or fussy, a sense of calm would come over her, and she would be soothed. One need only utter, “In the great green room. . .” and she was immediately transported to a world filled with happiness and tranquility.

The second event began with the words of Colonel Gail Halvorsen, “From little things come big things.” These words were discovered by a group of seventh grade students this school year when reading the award-winning novel entitled *Candy Bomber: The Story of the Berlin Airlift’s “Chocolate Pilot”* by Michael O. Tunnell. The main character in this story, “Hal” Halvorsen, is a retired United States Air Force command pilot who earned the name “Candy Bomber” when he dropped candy from his plane in 1948-1949 during the Berlin airlift to raise the morale of children in this Soviet-blockaded region. Initiated through Mr. Tunnell, the 97-year-old candy bomber personally corresponded with these students via email throughout the fall semester. This amazing learning opportunity resurfaced in my mind just a couple weeks ago when the teacher of these middle grades students contacted me. She shared that Colonel Halvorsen phoned her to thank her for sharing his story and to express his admiration of the teaching profession. The only word I can think of to describe her reaction to this gesture is *giddy!* She felt that she could never repay this heroic gentleman for all he had

done for her students, and yet she exclaimed, “He THANKED ME! Who am I to be thanked by a man who brought hope to millions of people? Twenty-five years of teaching has just come down to one moment.” I’m not sure that “Hal” Halvorsen realizes the impact he has had on this classroom, but through his generosity, he once again, gifted children (and their teacher) in a way not one of them will ever forget. These six simple words, “From little things come big things,” have become the classroom motto and will live on in the minds of these adolescents long after the school year ends.

The intense responses of these children to the five or six special words that initiated each of the instances described remind me of the benefits of children’s/adolescent literature to evoke personal and emotional feelings that withstand the test of time. Occurring within one year of each other, nearly 70 years ago, the memories and life experiences reflected in *Goodnight Moon* (written in 1947) and Halvorsen’s candy drop (1948-49) continue to engage readers today while simultaneously passing literary history from one generation to the next.

As my presidential role in the CL/R SIG comes to an end this summer at the International Literacy Association (ILA) 2018 Conference, I want to express how thankful I am for the opportunities that this special interest group has afforded me and for the friends I’ve made who share my passion for children’s literature and reading. I’m sure that each of you can think of five to six unforgettable words in treasured books that have captured your attention and continue to occupy your thoughts and share my sentiment that one must never underestimate the power of the written word – especially when it appears in quality children’s/adolescent literature!

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