

I'll have a marmalade sandwich, please.

Thank you sir!

I wrote a little blog on Winnie-the-Pooh, and my oldest daughter reminded me of the bear she liked. While I don't remember reading Paddington Bear to my daughters, I do remember something about the little bear.

From the title, you can guess that maybe marmalade sandwiches had something to do with Paddington. You would be correct. I do believe that was his favorite thing to eat. He also liked to drink cocoa. Now, I'm not sure how well cocoa goes with marmalade, but he is a bear from darkest Peru.

Now as with all children's books, the title character did not always do the right thing or behave correctly. He was always very polite, but trouble would occur. He did always try to do his best. Can anyone ask for anything more? Is this the appeal to my oldest daughter, a little bear that has a tendency to get into trouble?

Now of course if you know Paddington, you picture a bear in a hat, duffle coat and wellingtons. He almost always had his hat, and received the coat shortly after he was found. The boots came later.

There are now books and movies (videos from tv shows) about Paddington, so it isn't too late to introduce yourself to this little bear from darkest Peru.

Other famous bears (just to be fair)

Winnie-the-Pooh

The original Teddy Bear

Balou the Bear (from the Jungle Book)

The Berenstain Bears

Corduroy Bear
The Three Bears
Smokey the Bear
Gladly the Cross-eyed Bear...

Oh yes, and the Chicago Bears ☐

Which bears did I miss?

The blustery day

We had a bit of wind today and into the evening. A few of us at work braved the elements and tried to go for a bit of a walk at lunch. Didn't happen. It started to rain a bit, and it was driven hard into our faces. Not much rain, but it hurt. We went in and were lucky to find that there we were allowed to hit the buffet that was provided for a meeting. So today I got a free lunch. Can't say that every day.

Anyway the wind and rainy conditions made me think of book and a video "Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day". As a family we would watch the video, and I remember reading the Pooh books to my daughters many times. Now, the Disney movie "Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day" was taken from the book "The House at Pooh Corners". Other Disney Pooh movies were made from other chapters in this book and the first Pooh book "Winnie-the-Pooh". My daughters, wife and I read the original books and some of the Disney versions based on their movies. Always fun to read and watch. And I think I can still get my voice into Eeyore every now and then. I tried to add voices to all the characters in the book, but the girls had the video voices to compare mine to. I think they liked my 'Eeyore'. Maybe one daughter will comment?

So on this cool and blustery evening, I just have to say “Oh bother’.

From One Optimist to Another

I have always admired the work of Michael J. Fox. Although I usually had to find another tv in the house to watch his fabulous role as Uber-conservative Alex P. Keaton on *Family Ties*, the family did enjoy the *Back to the Future* trilogy and the original *Teen Wolf*. Another of my favorite Fox movies is *The Secret of My Success* in which he plays a young man climbing the corporate ladder without really trying. I admit that I was not an avid fan of his second major series *Spin City*, during the course of which he made public his Parkinson’s Disease diagnosis.

The past decade of Michael’s life is chronicled in the excellent autobiography, *Always Looking Up: The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist*. The book is broken down into four extremely informative, touching, and HILARIOUS sections each showing how he has embraced his new life. His decision to retire (maybe not permanently) from acting, politics (ok so maybe not the best reading ever, but), faith, and family have all played a part in the creation of the Michael J. Fox Foundation which not only funds PD research but for other debilitating diseases as well.

While reading about his political views did get kind of dry, it did hold my interest with some of the humorous anecdotes that were a highlight of the entire book. I loved the dedication he pays to his wife, Tracy (who played his girlfriend Ellen on *Ties*), son Sam, twin daughters Aquinnah and Schuyler, and 8-year old Esme (who was born following

Mike's diagnosis... COOL!) Cross-country road trips, playing guitar with The Who (it really WAS him playing Johnny B. Goode in *Back to the Future*), and his battle with Rush Limbaugh (the BEST part of the Politics section) are just a few of the remarkable tales he spins.

Through it all, one thing was quite evident: Mr. Fox's unwavering optimism. Never for one instant did I find that he was painting a picture asking for the reader's sympathy. It just proves the cliché that when one is given lemons he should make lemonade and who doesn't like a tall cool glass of lemonade.

Requiem And Return

On November 12, 1992, the world's greatest superhero lost his life in an epic battle literally on the streets of Metropolis right in front of the Daily Planet building. The comic series leading up to the end of Superman and the events following are all chronicled in the novelization *The Death and Life of Superman*. The story begins as a monster (no better way to describe it) of unknown origin and power begins his ravaging of the Earth. Members of the Justice League, including Green Lantern and other characters I am not very familiar with, are incapable of stopping the beast which became known as Doomsday. Eventually, the Man of Steel himself joined the battle which stretched from ironically, the village of Bluffton, Ohio (a mere 90 minute drive from my hometown... WOW to think) eastward. Not sure if this was a tip of the hat to the hero's creative team of Siegel and Shuster who grew up in Cleveland. The first part of the novel ends with the Man of Tomorrow's demise.

The last two sections detail the aftermath and the rise of the Supermen: four individuals all but one of whom claim to be the real deal miraculously brought back from the great beyond. There is the Last Son of Krypton, The Man of Steel, a Superboy (but don't call him, Boy) and a Cyborg Superman. But, is one of these the real Kal-El or are they each cheap imitations? They each have most or all of his power but all claim to have only bits and pieces of his memory. Some of the personalities exhibited by the four are less than the true blue, Boy Scout image portrayed by the original. However, by the novel's end, the real McCoy (HEHE) is revealed as well as the identities of the others.

I really liked the nods to past characters of the legacy and other small bits tossed in. Inspector Henderson from the Adventures of Superman tv series has a role. Landmarks and locations are given names calling to mind past Superman related people: Collyer Boulevard (for [Bud Collyer](#) who was the original voice of Superman in radio serials way before I was thought of) and many others. Fun to pick those out!

Overall, I think this was the best incarnation of the Death and Return saga. It started as the comic series that lasted an entire year. Then, the novel which was just so much fun to read. Finally a few years ago, an animated feature was made that left too much out to be really enjoyable. Thanks Chris and Lisa!

Parental Pickle

Have you heard about the controversy of Lenore Skenazy? She is the New York mom who is under fire for letting her 10-year-old son ride the subway alone. I would not put my kids on a

subway alone, but us here (*taking on a sudden hickish accent...*) are country folk, after all, and even I didn't ride the subway when I was in New York three months ago. But I trust that Ms. Skenazy made the right decision for her child... why? Because I think that parents these days NEED to be trusted to make the right decisions for their children! I believe that we are in the midst of an age where we are much too over-protective of our young-uns. And those parents who aren't utterly over-protective are left to a cruel and unusual punishment of media scrutiny... If you follow and/or agree with what I'm saying, you will enjoy the writing of Lenore Skenazy:

The last word: Advice from 'America's worst mom'

A year ago, journalist Lenore Skenazy caused a media sensation when she let her 9-year-old ride New York City's subway by himself. In a new book, she explains why she has no regrets.

About a year ago, I let my 9-year-old ride the New York subway alone for the first time. I didn't do it because I was brave or reckless or seeking a book contract. I did it because I know my son the way you know your kids. I knew he was ready, so I let him go. Then I wrote a column about it for The New York Sun. Big deal, right?

Well, the night the column ran, someone from the Today show called me at home to ask, Did I really let my son take the subway by himself?

Yes.

Just abandoned him in the middle of the city and told him to find his way home?

Well, abandoned is kind of a strong word, but ... yes, I did leave him at Bloomingdale's.

In this day and age?

No, in Ladies' Handbags.

Oh, she loved that. Would I be willing to come on the air and talk about it?

Sure, why not?

I had no idea what was about to hit me.

A day later, there across from me was Ann Curry looking outrageously pretty and slightly alarmed, because her next guest (the one right before George Clooney) just might be criminally insane. By way of introduction, she turned to the camera and asked, "Is she an enlightened mom or a really bad one?"

The shot widened to reveal ... me. And my son Izzy. And some "parenting expert" perched on that famous couch right next to us, who, I soon learned, was there to Teach Us a Lesson.

I quickly told the story about how Izzy, the 9-year-old, had been begging me to let him try to find his way home on his own from someplace, anyplace, by subway.

I know that may sound a little scary, but it's not. Here in New York, families are on the subway all the time. It's extremely, even statistically, safe. Whatever subterranean terror you see Will Smith battling in the movies goes home when the filming stops—probably to New Jersey. Our city's murder rate is back to where it was in 1963. And, by the way, it's probably down wherever you live, too.

That's why letting Izzy find his way home alone seemed like a fine idea. Not dangerous. Not crazy. Not even very hard. My husband and I talked about it and agreed that our boy was ready. So on that sunny Sunday when I took him to that big, bright store, I said those words we don't say much anymore.

"Bye-bye! Have fun!"

I didn't leave him defenseless, of course. I gave him a subway map, a transit card, \$20 in case of emergencies, and some

quarters to make a call. But, no, I did not give him a cell phone. Because although I very much trusted him to get himself home, I was a lot less sure he'd get the phone there.

And remember: He had quarters.

Anyway, it all turned out fine. One subway ride, one bus ride, and one hour or so later, my son was back home, proud as a peacock (who happens to take public transportation). I only wrote about his little adventure because when I told the other fourth-grade moms at the schoolyard about it, they all said the same thing.

You let him WHAT?

The more polite said things like, "Well that's fine, and I'll let my son do that, too ... when he's in college."

So-back to the Today show. After Izzy tells Ann how easy the whole thing was, she turns to the Parenting Expert—a breed that seems to exist only to tell us parents what we're doing wrong and why this will warp our kids forever.

This one is appalled at what I've done. She looks like I just asked her to smell my socks. She says that I could have given my son the exact same experience of independence, but in a much "safer" way—if only I had followed him or insisted he ride with a group of friends.

"Well, how is that the 'exact same experience' if it's different?" I demanded. "Besides, he was safe! That's why I let him go, you fear-mongering hypocrite, preaching independence while warning against it!"

Well, I didn't get all of that out, exactly, but I did get out a very cogent, "Gee, um ... " Anyway, it didn't even matter, because as soon as we left the set, my phone rang. It was MSNBC. Could I be there in an hour?

Then Fox News called. Could I be there with Izzy that

afternoon? MSNBC called back: If I did the show today, would I still promise to come back with Izzy to do it again over the weekend, same place, same story?

And suddenly, weirdly, I found myself in that place you always hear about: the center of a media storm. It was kind of fun, but also kind of terrifying—because everyone was weighing in on my parenting skills. Reporters queried from China, Israel, Australia, Malta. The English wanted to know, “Are we wrapping our children in cotton wool?” To which I boldly replied, “What the heck is cotton wool?” (Turns out to be the kind of cotton in cotton balls.)

The media dubbed me “America’s Worst Mom.” (Go ahead—Google it.) But that’s not what I am.

I really think I’m a parent who is afraid of some things (bears, cars) and less afraid of others (subways, strangers). But mostly I’m afraid that I, too, have been swept up in the impossible obsession of our era: total safety for our children every second of every day. The idea that we should provide it and actually could provide it. It’s as if we don’t believe in fate anymore, or good luck or bad luck. No, it’s all up to us.

Childhood really has changed since today’s parents were kids, and not just in the United States. Australian children get stared at when they ride the bus alone. Canadian kids stay inside playing videogames. After I started a blog called Free Range Kids, I heard from a dad in Ireland who lets his 11-year-old play in the local park, unsupervised, and now a mom down the street won’t let her son go to their house. She thinks the dad is reckless.

What has changed in the English-speaking world that has made childhood independence taboo? The ground has not gradually gotten harder under the jungle gym. The bus stops have not crept farther from home. Crime is actually lower than it was when most of us were growing up. So there is no reality-based

reason that children today should be treated as more helpless and vulnerable than we were when we were young.

If parents all around us are clutching their children close, it's easy to understand why: It's what pop culture is telling us to do. Stories of kidnappings swamp the news. Go online, and you can find a map of local sex offenders as easily as the local Victoria's Secret (possibly in the same place). Meantime, if you do summon the courage to put your kids on a bus or a bench or a bike, other parents keep butting in: An unwatched child is a tragedy waiting to happen.

Here's a typical letter addressed to me at Free Range Kids:

"I understand that you probably don't want your children to grow up afraid and not able to survive as independent adults," she wrote. "On the other hand, I think you're also teaching them that there is nothing to fear, and that isn't correct. It's survival of the fittest, and if they don't know who/what the enemy is, how will they avoid it? There are many, many dangers to protect them from, and it does take work—that's what parenting is. If you want them to run wild and stay out of your hair, you shouldn't have had them."

I agree that it makes sense to teach your kids about danger and how best to avoid it. Just like you want to teach them to stop, drop, and roll if they're ever in a fire. But then? Then you have to let them out again, because the writer is wrong when she says, "There are many, many dangers to protect them from."

There are not. Mostly, the world is safe. Mostly, people are good. To emphasize the opposite is to live in the world of tabloid TV. A world filled with worst-case scenarios, not the world we actually live in, which is factually, statistically, and, luckily for us, one of the safest periods for children in the history of the world.

Like the housewives of the 1950s, today's children need to be

liberated. Unlike the housewives of the '50s, the children can't do it themselves. Though I'd love to see hordes of kids gathering for meetings, staging protests, and burning their baby kneepads—and maybe they will—it is really up to us parents to start re-normalizing childhood. That begins with us realizing how scared we've gotten, even of ridiculously remote dangers.

We have to be less afraid of nature and more willing to embrace the idea that some rashes and bites are a fair price to pay in exchange for appreciating the wonder of a cool-looking rock or an unforgettable fern.

When we watch TV, we have to remind ourselves that its job is to terrify and disgust us so that we'll keep watching in horror. It is doing an excellent job on both fronts.

We have to learn to remind the other parents who think we're being careless when we loosen our grip that we are actually trying to teach our children how to get along in the world, and that we believe this is our job. A child who can fend for himself is a lot safer than one forever coddled, because the coddled child will not have Mom or Dad around all the time. Adults once knew what we have forgotten today. Kids are competent. Kids are capable. Kids deserve freedom, responsibility, and a chance to be part of the world.

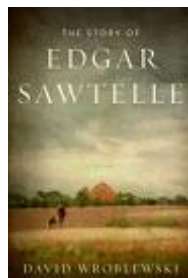
I have to be honest, though: I write all this in a kind of shaky mood because I just got a call from the police. This morning, I put Izzy, now 10, on a half-hour train ride out to his friend's house. It sounds like I'm a recidivist, but really: His friend's family was waiting at the other end to pick him up, and he's done this a dozen times already. It is a straight shot on a commuter railroad. This particular time, however, the conductor found it outrageous that a 10-year-old should be traveling alone, and summoned the police, who arrived as my son disembarked.

When the officer phoned me at home, I told him the truth (while my heart stood still): We had actually inquired of the railroad what age a child can travel alone and were told there was no specific regulation about this.

Later I looked up the official rules: A child only has to be 8 to ride alone on the railroad or subway. Good rule.

(From the book Free Range Kids by Lenore Skenazy. © 2009 by Lenore Skenazy. Reprinted with permission of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)

The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle



I just finished the almost 570-page novel Edgar Sawtelle by David Wroblewski. It took me months to read this mega-novel; especially because I only read at night before bed. There are some nights when I can't read at all because I'm just too tired (and this book was heavy – both physically and emotionally – for reading late at night!). Some nights, I only read a few pages, and then there are times like the night I finished the book – when I actually went to bed around 10:30 just so I could stay up reading for over an hour – and this is how I finally finished the story.

Edgar Sawtelle is an amazing book – it's almost indescribable. It took me a few chapters to get into the book

however, mainly because of the author's extremely descriptive writing style. I wouldn't say it was boring in the beginning, but the narrative is very detailed, and it took awhile to get used to as well as for any actual events to take place. Once the action began, though, it didn't let up, and I was hooked. It's one of those books that I looked forward to ending my day with and one I was sorry to finish. Surprisingly, this is Wroblewski's **first** novel!

The Story of Edgar Sawtelle is set in the early 1970's in rural northern Wisconsin over one summer. It follows the life of a mute boy on the brink of manhood who is forced to grow up really quickly due to a set of tragic family circumstances beyond his control. Edgar's family has been breeding a special breed of dog for generations, and they do more than just breed the dogs. Almost from birth, the dogs are very meticulously trained. The book has been compared to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Although I've never read Hamlet, I read a summary, and the stories do sound as if they have similarities. The descriptive nature of the novel paints a beautiful picture of the Sawtelle's farm and the countryside beyond. There are some very well developed characters as well. That's as much as I'm going to describe of the story because I realized I'm not doing it justice. I wouldn't want to turn off anyone just because I'm writing an unintentionally bad review. I loved the book; I really did – I'll go into that more later. For now, here are some of the raving comments the novel received – most notably from author Stephen King, who knows a thing or two about story-telling himself!

I flat-out loved The Story of Edgar Sawtelle. In the end, this isn't a novel about dogs or heartland America, it's a novel about the human heart and the mysteries that live there, understood but impossible to articulate.... I don't reread many books because life is too short. I will be re-reading this one."

–Stephen King, author of Duma Key

The most enchanting debut novel of the summer... this is a great, big, mesmerizing read, audaciously envisioned as classic Americana.... Pick up this book and expect to feel very, very reluctant to put it down.

– Janet Maslin, New York Times

Nothing quite compares to my experience of reading The Story of Edgar Sawtelle. This debut... is one of the most stunning, elegant books I have ever read... what can deservedly be called a great American novel.

– Lisa Jennifer Selzman, Houston Chronicle

I am completely smitten.... The most hauntingly impressive debut I've read all year.... Edgar might be silent, but his story will echo with readers for a long time.

– Yvonne Zipp, Christian Science Monitor

Overall, a great read, a book I highly recommend. Be warned however, that The Story of Edgar Sawtelle is not for the casual reader. I think that for one to truly enjoy this book, he or she has to be a dedicated reader – someone who truly enjoys reading and has the time to devote to it, for reading this book is an experience. If you are at all interested in reading the book, then stop reading my review now because there is something I must add that will be somewhat of a spoiler.

SPOILER ALERT-SPOILER ALERT-SPOILER ALERT

**DO NOT READ BELOW THIS LINE IF YOU INTEND TO READ THE STORY OF
EDGAR SAWTELLE!**

CONSIDER YOURSELF WARNED!

The ending SUCKS. As much as I truly enjoyed reading the book, the ending came close to ruining the experience for me. Not because of death, but because of the way it's handled. The book ends rather abruptly, and I felt abandoned and ditched as a reader. There isn't any closure. The main character, Edgar, learns and grows so much during the course

of the novel, and he takes us readers with him. But his knowledge isn't shared with any of the other main characters, mainly his mother! And his personal growth is also rendered pointless. And then there's the very last chapter, seen through the dog Essay's point of view, which I just didn't understand AT ALL. What was Essay's choice? I just didn't get it. And I know I'm not alone. It really says something when you do a google search for 'Edgar Sawtelle ending' and all that comes up is a bunch of complaints from readers. That being said, I think it's still worth it to read this book – it was *that* good where a terrible ending didn't ruin it. But it came very close, and I was VERY disappointed when I first finished the book.

The Game's Afoot!

What a fun April 1st it has been!!! Tangents was visited once again by the Mad Hacker (sounds like a forgotten villain of comic book stories). Like many of my fellow tangenteers, I too have been doing a bit of light (or not so light reading) in my spare time. I recently checked out a collection of stories featuring the world's greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes (sorry Caped Crusader).

To me, going back and re-reading something you were assigned to read in school is much more entertaining the second time. I am finding myself thoroughly enjoying reading adventures that gave me headaches the first time around and reading many others for the first time. I enjoyed reading one story featuring "the woman" Irene Adler (*A Scandal in Bohemia*).

My favorite, thusfar, has been *The Five Orange Pips* that finds Holmes and Dr. Watson up against members of the Ku Klux Klan.

I learned something new in this story: the name for the organization takes its name from the sound a rifle makes as it is being cocked. The story itself fascinated me because Holmes is (in some ways) less than successful in solving the case. The reader sees, through Watson's eyes, the detective's reaction. A good way to develop character in showing not only triumphs but personal failings as well.

Something Wicked This Way Comes..

Strange thing. I remember reading the Bradbury novel, and seeing the movie. But, I am now watching the movie and I can't seem to remember it at all. Oh, I remember the basic story, but I don't seem to remember any of the details. I remember the carnival coming to town, and of course Mr. Dark. What I'm not sure of is how different the book is from the movie. I will have to read it again.

So far the movie is very good. But now my youngest just stopped it to watch a TV show... Hmm, am I going to have to get another TV just to watch what I want? I guess not, she'll be leaving on her own soon enough.

What I did find out is that Bradbury actually adopted his novel and wrote not only the screen play for the 1983 movie, but a stage play and radio play. The stage play was written in 2003... Wonder what the royalties on that show would be. Could it be done on a small stage? Where would the Carousel fit? I would love to play Mr Dark... Hmmm...

Maybe we could do another "Stage" version of this play.

Interesting.

The Last Show

It was a happy and sad time today. Our show ended and we ended the day tearing down the set. Life outside the theater can begin again. Things can be accomplished, chores done and life again resumes. There are movies to see, books to read, daughters to tend to. From daughters and their new families, marriages, graduations, starting college life goes on. My life in the theater ceases until after the fall. There will be shows, they will do it without me.

There is talk of taking our show to the OCTA regional competition this June, unfortunately, I will not be able to make it. My daughter is planing her wedding for the same weekend. Family comes first. I don't think I would miss a wedding.

This fall, my oldest is expecting her first child. This will also take up a bit of time or more.

My youngest is finishing her final year of high school, and plans to attend college next fall. This will also take up much of my time.

Life does not stand still, life move on.

More thoughts on our show in another post. It was an event that many enjoyed but it was still too few. I'm not sure how to get the word out to more, but they missed one of the best shows I've been involved with.

Fortune And Glory Kid...

Fortune And Glory

I used to enjoy reading movie novelizations. I enjoyed digging deeper into the film by reading what was going on inside the minds of the characters and reading the parts that ended up on the cutting room floor. I recently came into a copy of the movie-tie in to *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. While everything from the movie was present, there were minor differences (Willie does not cause Indy's gun to fly out the window of their moving Duesenberg while being pursued by a group of Chinese gangsters). One major difference (and definitely a scene that had to be cut from the film that established the PG-13 movie rating) involved phallic symbolism that would have disturbed me as an 11 year old.

My favorite part of any novelization is getting to see inside the minds of the main characters. What makes them tick? What are their real motivations for the actions they perform? When (if ever), does Indy change from an archaeologist who is out to achieve "fortune and glory" into something more?

There was a lot of humor inside the inner workings of Dr. Jones' companions: the sultry nightclub singer Willie Scott who is accidentally thrust into the adventure and Indiana's 12 year-old bodyguard, chauffeur, and Man Friday, Short Round. I loved reading about the young Chinese orphan's penchant for thievery, religious idoltry, movies, and sports of the 1930s. Very entertaining read.