

Comments by Jon Margerum-Leys

On Sunday, Julie and Emma and I sat down to think about what to say today. We tried to picture Meagan with us, strong and healthy. If you could take a minute and picture her with us now: Oval face, slim build, brown piercing eyes, window to that combination of a blazing intellect and a soul willing to let you in with her. What would Meagan say about this dedication? I know she'd be pleased. She really wanted our school to have a library, it was something she felt was lacking. Last spring Meagan interviewed some of the teachers, asking them which books they wanted this collection to have. The first line from that interview was "I think our school needs more books."

Julie said on Sunday: "I miss her enthusiasm. She had a lot of appreciation for a lot of things. Sometimes the simplest things. . . pancakes, dinner." And definitely books. She had an astonishing memory for book titles, authors, stories, whole big chunks of text.

Meagan was always reading, right from the very start. When she was less than a year old, she would go to the book stand for book after book after book. I have memories of her holding out books for me to read before she could even say the words to ask for me to read them. There was one evening I had read her eight books and she came back with a ninth one. She stood there with her hand outstretched in silent request until I read her that ninth book. I think I still know most of the words to the board book "Tickle, Tickle".

At that time, Julie was working nights as a labor and delivery nurse. I'd take Meagan, and later both girls, to the library or the bookstore and we'd spend hours and hours. Meagan was always very careful, almost reverential with the books. She always remembered where they had come from and would put them back where they belonged.

One of the most mortified times I've ever seen Meagan was the first time she threw up. We were snuggled up in the rocking chair in her room, reading the Jan Brett version of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. It's a beautiful book, one of Meagan's favorites. Suddenly out of nowhere, as kids sometimes do, she threw up all over it. I think she felt as badly about the book as she did about throwing up.

Before every birthday party in Vermont, California, and Michigan, when parents would call and ask what Meagan wanted for her birthday, it would always be books. Even at other people's birthday parties, the books got Meagan's attention. At Emma's second birthday party, when it came time for gifts, some were books. On the video, Meagan is so excited. "Look, Emma, books!" At two, Emma was a little less excited, but Meagan thought it was great.

We read books out loud every night for many years. For a long time, it would be both girls and Julie or me or both of us, sitting together and reading books together in one of the girls' bedrooms. When Meagan got older, we would read her a different book than Emma, as their interests differed. Julie tells me she'd be embarrassed if I told you what grade she was in when we finally stopped reading books to her at bed time, so I won't tell you.

In the sixth or seventh grade, she was reading *Treasure Island* and remarking on how gross it was. But she kept on reading it. Emma can picture her out by the picnic table, turning the pages and saying “that’s gross”, reading more, engrossed in the story (bad pun intended)

She would get in trouble sometimes for reading when she should have been doing something else. We’d call her in exasperation and she’d say “But it’s an exciting part.” It seemed as though all the parts were exciting parts to Meagan. Maybe they were.

Meagan was good at reading out loud and listening to people reading to her. For three summers, Julie and the girls would have daily handwork time. They would sit and cross stitch or do other handwork and would trade off reading duties. When I hear her voice in my mind, it’s often her reading voice, sharing a story aloud.

During her stays in the hospital, we also read to her. Among other titles, we read her “The bean trees” and “Winnie the Pooh”. Even as she matured into an exceptionally intelligent young woman, the classic children’s stories were always favorites with Meagan. She was thrilled with a high quality copy of *Peter Pan* which we gave her in the sixth grade.

Between seventh and eighth grade was Meagan’s last full healthy summer. She spent part of the time that summer volunteering at the West Side library in Ann Arbor. She had seen a sign in the Dexter library saying that they were hiring high school students. She started volunteering at the West Side library so that she would be able to get a job at the library when she was in high school.

When we were sitting down planning this dedication, Emma said: “Meagan has all these books picked out for me. Last spring, she set out a whole list of them.” Meagan did have a lot of books in mind for Emma to read. I’d like to think that’s what we have here: A challenge to all of us from Meagan, which we are partly meeting today by dedicating this space. And which we will meet in the years to come by thinking of her when we have the experiences which she would have wanted to share with us. When you come to the exciting part in the book, read a well-crafted sentence or two out loud. Meagan will be sitting in the chair across from you, nodding her head in enjoyment.