



Episode 3

Reading Aloud is Like Comfort Food Guest: Tsh Oxenreider

Today, I'm chatting with Tsh Oxenreider, one of my favorite bloggers and very likely one of your favorites, too. Tsh of course, is the inspiring voice behind TheArtofSimple.net, a very popular community blog that publishes stories and practical tips from a collective of writers all dedicated to simple living. They talk about the art and science behind living a little simpler and a little unconventionally. She also hosts The Art of Simple podcast and recently published a book called *Notes from a Blue Bike: The Art of Living Intentionally in a Chaotic World*, published by Thomas Nelson.

Tsh and I are going to chat about what reading aloud looks like in her family, how the ebb and flow of her family life is impacted by books and reading, and how travel (something her family does a lot of) fits into the read aloud equation.

Sarah: Hey Tsh!

Tsh: Hi! How are you?

Sarah: I'm doing great. How are you?

Tsh: I'm great. Thank you.

Sarah: Well, I'm super excited to talk to you. I have wanted to sit and have a cup of coffee with you for like forever so this is the next best thing.

Tsh: I'm so glad. I've got my coffee right next to me so there you go.

Sarah: Perfect. Why don't you tell us a little more about your family?

Tsh: Sure. Well, I am married to a guy named Kyle. We've been married for 12 years almost. And we have three kids, ages almost 4, 6, and 9. And we have lived in a lot of places. So we've lived overseas. I'm originally from Texas so we've lived in Austin and now we currently live in Bend, Oregon. So that's us.

Sarah: And you're getting ready to go on this huge epic adventure right?

Tsh: Yes in the fall. So September 2014, my family and I are going to travel around the world going westbound. It's something that we've been planning for about five years now.

And because Kyle and I both work from home and because we homeschool, we can pretty much pick up our lives and take them wherever we go. So that's what we're going to try for a year.

Sarah: That's awesome! And you're going all over the place, right? In that year, is that right?

Tsh: Yeah. That's the hope. We've got a few pins in the map as how we're calling it, places we definitely want to hit up and then we're just going to play it by ear and see what happens in between those places so we're doing that little ebb and flow between trying to have a plan but also leave room for flexibility. But we would like to hit as many continents as we can, if not all of them, and then be done by a year from now or so, next summer.

Sarah: Very cool. Where are a couple of places that you absolutely don't want to miss?

Tsh: Well, it's funny we each have our list of places. My daughter can't wait to go to China. My son, he thinks Madagascar. Although I've told him several times, we're not going to Madagascar. My 6 year old, I think he thinks he's going to meet a lion named Alex.

Sarah: Yes, I was going to say that.

Tsh: So the thing about certain places is that we want to make sure—well not make sure—but you know we live frugally, so it's not like this trip is going to be some extravagant sort of thing. Most places we're going to visit are going to be on the way to other places, it's kind of how we're thinking of it. So Madagascar really isn't on the way to anywhere. So I don't think we're going to hit it unless we find some amazing flight.

I am excited about New Zealand. Never been there, been to Australia and we're going to be there but I'm super excited about New Zealand. And we'll go back to Turkey and spend some time there and just visit old friends and honestly, cross off some things from when we lived there that we never got to do.

And my husband is excited about... he's a mountain climber. He's from Oregon originally. So he's excited about some of the more mountainy locations like some places in South America and maybe seeing Kilimanjaro. He has spent some time on the Alps but even seeing more of that in Central Europe. So yeah, lots of places we're going to see.

Sarah: Oh that's awesome! I just think that's going to be awesome for the rest of us to be able to watch through the blog.

Tsh: Yes. It will be fun. And we're in the middle of creating a travel site that will go with it. It's going to be a channel on the blog just for the trips.

Sarah: Well, let's talk about your family's read-aloud habits. So what does reading aloud look like in your family right now?

6:00 What reading aloud looks like in Tsh's home

Tsh: Well, our absolute, never-missed read-aloud time is at night before bed. And I'm sure that's the case with lots of parents really but the way that looks like for us right now is my husband and I take turns. So every other night, we go back and forth. And each kid gets to pick out a book so we're talking three books and they vary in lengths and style.

Sometimes Calvin and Hobbes is picked. Sometimes it's a chapter book. But my thought is there are some books that are a little more highbrow or a little, not so much intellectually above my children, but richer in literature. And I want them to dive into those. I want them to just truly enjoy the pastime of reading and being read aloud to. And things like Calvin and Hobbes, they're just simpler books, are just as fun and just as important I think.

Sarah: Yeah, memory building kind of stuff.

Tsh: Memory building, yeah absolutely. And just some of those characters that you read when you're younger with those shorter books. Those become some of your favorite, yeah like what you said, memories, and just such an introduction to art, and good cadence of words and fun characters and humor. And so there are some great shorter books out there and so we don't stress as much at night our choice in books. But we also read at other times of day. We have quiet times every afternoon, all ages. And so usually for my younger ones, I'll read a short book to them. My older one will just go on her own and maybe read. And then at breakfast, we read aloud too. So we read...

Sarah: That's awesome. Is that school-related? Or is that...

Tsh: Well for us, the way we do homeschool, we don't really have a clear delineation between school and life. So at breakfast, we'll read usually a chapter from *The Child's Story Bible* by Catherine Vos. And we'll talk about it some. And then we'll either just read a book that we're working on like a chapter book or we'll listen to an audiobook like *Story of the World* or something like that.

Sarah: Yeah, awesome. Jim Weiss reads those and he's going to be on the podcast in the next episode. So, awesome.

Tsh: Yes and he is amazing. And that's such a great audiobook.

Sarah: Reading aloud has sort of morphed for us to... I mean it kind of changes with the way our family dynamic changes because the schedule always changes depending on whether it's summer and there's a lot of neighbor kids around to play with or whether we're kind of thick in the school thing, you know, school year. But one of the things I love about not having a clear line between school and life is that reading can just overflow to like what you're saying, just sort of be like a family thing we do.

Tsh: Exactly, it's just a thing we do. That's right.

Sarah: Yeah. So it doesn't really feel like school time. It's just something we do. Cool. How does it look different than it used to for you? Obviously, as kids get older we start reading chapter books and longer fiction and that kind of thing. Do you find yourself reading aloud less as they get older? Or more or has it stayed steady?

Tsh: If anything, we've started reading aloud more and not less. And I think that has to do more with the kids' ages. I think as they get older, they can take in more information.

9:18 Does Tsh worry about wiggly kids during read-aloud time?

I look at my three-year-old who sits in on story time but by the second book, he starts wandering. Like he's still in the room, but

he's kind of either hanging upside down on the bed or just kind of walking around. I mean he's listening but he's also kind of not fully there. And I think that could be our kid's personality. He's just a very curious busy guy. But I know not to worry about that. With my firstborn, I would think, "Oh my gosh! She's going to hate reading because she's not sitting still." And I know now, that's great. That's just how they are.

And so now, I feel like we read maybe longer because the older two who are 6 and 9 can actually sit there and fully listen to a book. I mean they still wiggle some. But I would say, it's longer and more varied maybe. My oldest when she was two, I remember we were just laughing. We went to this phase where, it was like six months, where she picked the same book every night. And it wasn't even a story. It was a Richard Scarry's...

Sarah: My gosh where you were like pointing and...

Tsh: Yes, exactly. And there was this big book and it was a book I had when I was kid that someone else had when they were a kid so this is the 1963 version so it's been taped like ten times. And so it's falling apart and I'm sitting here trying to hold this big book, trying to keep my two-year-old still and I just got so tired of that same book but I even looked up online if there's something wrong with my kid. This is the kind of parent I was when I just had one. And of course everyone is saying no, that's just the way it is. And they'll grow out of it and of course she did; and so now I feel like there's a lot more variety. I truly look forward to story time. It's not a chore for me. That's one of my favorite parts of the evening with my kids.

11:30 Thoughts on Little House on the Prairie

Sarah: It's mine too. It's probably my favorite thing to do with my kids, that and playing board games. I really like playing board games but I do enjoy reading aloud more now that they're older because I like novels and chapter stories better than picture books for the most part. So I find myself getting excited about a new title or something that I haven't read since I was a kid or something I never got to. I mean, I never listened to *Little House on the Prairie* or any of the *Little House* series when I was a kid which kind of floors me now because the audio books for *Little House* have become a major part of our family life. So those are some of the things that I think are really fun about reading aloud to our kids is we get to...

Tsh: Relive it?

Sarah: Yeah. Relive it or live it the first time.

Tsh: For sure. I've never listened to the audiobooks of that but we have read two of the books out loud of *Little House*. We did the first two, so *Little House in the Big Woods* and then *Little House on the Prairie* and I never read them either as a kid. And I felt in some ways deprived because I feel like, isn't everybody's supposed to have read those as a kid? At least with here in the States. So Kyle and I, my husband, we were just like on the edge of our seats reading them. I just remember the first time, this is several years ago now when I first read *Big Woods* and our two younger kids, my third was a baby, but they were like enthralled and Kyle was on the edge of his seat too. It would be like, "Okay, that's all," and, "One more!"

and he would be like, “Yeah, keep going!” We are all into it. It was really fun.

Sarah: The audiobooks are awesome. Cherry Jones reads them. I don’t know if you’re familiar with her. She’s an actress. But the funny thing is I wasn’t familiar with her and then we’re watching some movie I can’t remember what we were watching or maybe a TV show, I can’t remember now. I sound completely like I don’t know what I’m talking about. I don’t. But... and we recognized her voice and my husband’s like “Oh my gosh! That’s Laura.”

Tsh: Right. I love that.

Sarah: Yeah. The whole series is really good. I think those ones might be especially good to listen to on audio because there’s so much description. Sometimes I have a hard time reading books that have lots of description without sounding like I’m...

Tsh: Reading a text book or something? Yeah. So is *Little House*—did you find that at a library or an Audible or...

Sarah: We listened to those at the library but I should check and see if they have them on Audible. I bet they do.

Tsh: Well, you know sometimes older books are even on [LibriVox](#) or something where it’s completely royalty-free. I don’t know if those would be, but that’s cool.

Sarah: Yeah. I’ll dink around online, see where I can find them and link them to the show notes so people can find them because those are awesome.

Tsh: Sure. Awesome. Yeah. That’s great!

Sarah: So your family is homeschooled some years and sent your kids to schools some

years. And just kind of whatever works for your family at that time, right? So how has reading aloud changed depending on where your kids are getting the bulk of their schooling then?

Tsh: Well, it’s funny, because we do go back and forth, but the older my kids get, the more I see the value behind homeschooling. At least not at all to say that there’s no value in sending our kids to school, but in terms of our personality and our family culture. As far as reading goes, I feel like we get so much more out of it when we do homeschool and the reason is because we can make it a seamless part of our life, like I said earlier. There’s not this delineation between this book for school and then this book for fun. I’m one of these parents. I’m not a control freak at all. But I just want to make the most of my kids’ time and I want them to read good stuff.

13:45 Reading aloud when her kids are in school vs. reading aloud when she’s homeschooling

And so to me, if we’re going to be reading this fantastic book, there’s no reason to read “something else” for school and then something for fun. We read the quality stuff. Just for school/life/whatever you want to call it. And so it’s not to say that you can’t have amazing story times when you send your kids to school because I know of some people who make that happen. It’s just harder. When our kids were in school, I didn’t see them all day. And then when you pick them up, they’re tired and so they need their downtime. They need lots of playtime. And then honestly, we didn’t get much story time in until bedtime.

So I've really, really missed that part of parenting.

And we could read over breakfast but it was a lot more rushed because we had to be somewhere at a certain time, whereas, at home we don't start school till 10:00 and that's because my daughter, my oldest, is a major sleeper-inner. And I just figured that's because she needs it. I'm not going to fight it. So she wakes up about 9. And she just has some alone time. She's usually playing in her room by herself then comes downstairs. She knows she has to be down by 9:30. It sounds so amazing. And that's when I've already eaten breakfast and so that's when we usually do a story time over breakfast.

Sarah: Awesome. What are your family favorites?

**17:05 The best age to read
*Winnie the Pooh***

Tsh: For reading aloud? That's a a tough question because there are so many good ones. As far as our favorite picture books, I'll start with that. Some of my favorites are *Frog and Toad* because there's such good dialogue and so much of the plot and the things they say to each other. It's just funny. But it's not "ha ha" funny. It's witty funny. And so it comes out better when you say it out loud versus just reading it. And it's one of those things you want to share and because I find it funny, sometimes when the kids don't even get it, it has a bonding experience. I'll explain why it's funny. The same goes for *Winnie the Pooh*. We read the complete tales of *Winnie the Pooh* and the *House at Pooh Corner* this past year. And those are big books.

Sarah: They are big. I've never read those. I keep seeing them recommended everywhere but I've never done it so you guys love them, huh.

Tsh: Well, I have to say they usually are recommended for kids far too young. They are books I would say minimum of age 8. Eight to 12 is the best age for *Winnie the Pooh*. It sounds funny because we decorate our baby nurseries with Winnie the Pooh. But the humor is completely missed, I think, too young.. that's not to say you can't enjoy. My younger guys were 6 and 3, and they were fine and they laughed. But I don't think they understood it until I explained it or they heard their older sister laughing. Just the verbiage that they use, the words, the voices... they are so well-read out loud. I'm so glad we had that experience together. I teared up when we read the last chapter. Like when it was time to say goodbye, because it was so good. I was sad that we were done. But then we could do it again.

Sarah: That's awesome! My oldest three are 8, 10, and 12. So we're going to do that then.

Tsh: Oh yeah. they will like it. It's fun. They are so funny.

Sarah: Cool. And do you guys listen to audiobooks?

Tsh: We do. Yeah. We check out a lot from the library especially when we're about to go on a road trip. That's a great way to get audiobooks, and now that's not to say our kids sit perfectly still and never talk during audiobooks. I would say a lot of times in the car, either a collection of short stories works well or a book with short chapters, so *Paddington Bear* we really liked. Now we're

listening to Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. And those are read by Jim Weiss.

Sarah: Oh I was just going to ask which version you are using.

Tsh: Jim Weiss, and those are so good and the kids laugh because of his voice, the way he does the characters. And those are good short stories. You can listen to one between now and Costco kind of thing. And so those are great.

For quiet times, my daughter sometimes will listen to audiobooks in her room. And that's a great way for her to tap into the classics, I feel like a little more. While she's doing something else, building something with Lego yet being read out loud some book that would seem maybe intimidating to tackle on her own, but it's great for her. Even the easier books, she's listening to like *The Boxcar Children*, she's checked all those out at the library and those are great.

Sarah: My kids really liked those audio *Boxcar Children*.

Tsh: Right, right. And that's a great time just to tap into some of those like *Peter Pan*, not hard books that books that have just slightly older language I would say.

**20:00 Are audiobooks second best?
Or are they as worthwhile as
reading to yourself?**

Sarah: Yeah. My oldest daughter really loved listening to *Little Women* when she was a little too young to read it herself. And now, she did read it after she listened to it, so maybe it just sort of like opened the door for her.

Tsh: Sure. It's funny we kind of think of audiobooks as sort of the second best to reading them yourselves. I mean parents tend to think that way, like, "Well, I would prefer her to read this on her own. But I guess the audiobook is the next best thing." And they're two different acts of course, listening and reading. But if you think about it as adults, we love being read to. We love talk radio. We love podcasts. We love audiobooks. So why shouldn't our kids? We all love a good story being read to us so it's the same thing for them.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. And that's something that Andrew Pudewa talked about a little bit. In the first podcast, he talked about just what's happening in our brains really when we're listening to stories being read aloud. And it's something totally worthwhile and not really subpar to reading yourself. I know that is the default I have, too, is to think that if they can read it to themselves it would be better than if they listen to someone read it to him. And he sort of just blows that all out of the water, like that is not true. There's something totally different for their vocabulary and their ability to string together really well-formed sentences and so it's cool.

Tsh: That's cool. I'm going to have to listen to that one. I'll listen to it when we're done recording.

Sarah: Yeah, it's episode one. Well, I did ask my Facebook friends if they have any questions for you and one question I got from Jill was what has influenced your read-aloud choices other than your immediate family's preferences?

Tsh: I don't think of a difference between reading aloud and just what we have in our

library. So silent reading or reading aloud, a lot of my choices come from recommendations from people I trust. So I don't know if you've heard of the book *Honey for a Child's Heart*.

Sarah: Yes, I love that book.

21:31 Where Tsh goes for ideas of what to read next.

Tsh: Okay, I refer to that book quite a bit if I need a good idea or so. One of my really good friends who's also a blogger named Heidi Scovel, she's got great taste in books so sometimes I'll just go to her site and like, tell me what to read.

Sarah: Oh awesome. What is her site?

Tsh: Her site is Mt. Hope Academy. I can check that link.

Sarah: Oh yes, okay I know.

Tsh: She's great. She's so good. And I guess I have a pretty good grasp of what might be twaddle and what might be quality and so I try to steer my kids in that direction, at least in terms of what we buy. I tend to find authors and stick with the authors a lot, which can be good or bad. I like building up a collection of Robert McCloskey or Kevin Henkes or books like that. But I know there's probably tons of authors that I have yet to try that I need to. And so, I would say that just learning as I go and then picking up some of my favorites and sticking with them.

Sarah: Is that something you feel like you have learned along the way, how to pick good books? Or is that something you just kind of felt like you've always known how to do?

Tsh: No, it's not something I've always known. But you know the idea with twaddle, that Charlotte Mason phrase that books that are just dumbed-down literature, water down, absence of meaning. You get a sense of what they are. It's one of those "you know it when you see it" sort of things. And so I leave that kind of stuff. I'm not like a black and white "No, that shall not enter my house because we are highbrow in our home," but I stick to that more with the library, letting my kids, "Okay, if you want another book on hamster care, sure. If you want another Garfield comic book, okay. But we'll check those out at the library."

Because I want them to just enjoy the process of reading. But as far as buying books, I want everything on my shelf to be really quality and a lot of that just comes from word of mouth, hearing what other people recommend, and trusting them and trying it out. And sometimes if I'm not sure, we'll check it out at the library first. So there's a book by Mo Willems that we checked out three times at the library, and we finally decided we should just buy this one for our home. And so we did. It's *Country Dog, City Frog?* No, *City Dog, Country Frog*.

Sarah: *City Dog, Country Frog*. I don't think I've seen that one.

Tsh: And my kids just loved it and I loved it too and so we just waited. I saw it at [Half Price Books](#) and just snagged it up. So it's a lot of trial and error in some ways.

Sarah: Yeah, when it comes to twaddle, I know that I don't read twaddle aloud because that's like torture. So trying to read aloud something that's just Junie B. Jones or something that's like torture! But when my

kids are going, when they've learned how to read and they're kind of going to that fluency stage where they need to read a lot, and a little bit underneath their reading levels, they get faster at it, they do read like stacks of... I know my second daughter went through this phase where she loved the Disney fairy series which I thought was just like horrid. And I would never read those out loud. But I also didn't stop her from checking out a stack of them at the library and then later it helped her... I know Susan Wise Bauer says to do that, too. She say to let them just read lots and lots and lots of things that are a little below their level and it makes their fluency speed up.

24:41 The fluency stage and the importance of letting a child read below level.

Tsh: That's right. I actually asked Susan at her house one time because my daughter was 7 at that time and I said the hamster care thing, I wasn't joking at all. There was a phase when she went through, like, we didn't even have a hamster. And she was so fascinated in this small rodent care section of the library and would check out all of these books and I'm just thinking, why?

So I asked Susan and she was like, "Aah, just let her. It's no big deal really. She's just wanting to read something that interests her. It's just an interest. It will pass, maybe, and if not, then she'll pursue that." I said, "Yeah, you're right. I'm way over-thinking this." Book reading should be fun at its core. So that makes me wonder, do you pick out your read-alouds? When it's time for you all to

have read-aloud time, do you pick them out or do you let your kids?

26:00 Sarah talks about choosing read-alouds or letting her kids choose them.

Sarah: Nowadays, I usually pick them although my kids, if there's a book that they've been eyeing or they've been wanting me to read aloud and they ask, then I'll kind of put it in the queue and we'll get to it. But we don't read a ton of picture books. We're going to get back into that phase here, because my kids are 12, 10, 8 and then I have a two-year old and twin 10-month olds.

Tsh: Ah got it. So you have that younger group coming in.

Sarah: Yeah, so we're going to get back into... of course I read picture books to them. And they'll play a bigger part in our normal day-to-day kind of reading aloud again. But for chapter books generally, I choose them. And then the kids just choose their own reading. Although listening to you say that your kids pick the stories before bed, I bet my kids would probably, totally dig that. So if you're reading a chapter book then at night, do you just do a chapter from it and then move on to something else? That could take a while I guess.

Tsh: It does. Yeah we do one chapter. So like right now for example—this has been a new thing for us. We're trying it out. We tend to read two books together. So the three of us, the three kids and the parent will read two picture books together. And then do the goodnight thing and then our oldest daughter will get a chapter read to her in her bed.

Sarah: Oh nice.

Tsh: So that's what's working. I'm hesitant to say that's what we do because we've been doing this about a week now. But it seems to be working so like right now, for example, we'll just let the boys pick something out and there are times I've vetoed something where it's like no we're not going to do that. But a lot of times, I'm pretty okay with something from our shelves because I like everything we own. And then whenever we do, my older daughter, it's whatever book they happen to be reading. Like right now we're doing *The Wingfeather Saga* by Andrew Peterson.

Sarah: I don't think I know that one.

Tsh: Okay. It's really good. We're only on book one so far but I really like it. And so we'll just read a chapter. If the chapter's short, she's like "More, more." I might read two just because I want to know what's going to happen next, you know. I like it as much as she does.

Sarah: I love that. I love it when there's... that's usually how it is I think with the read alouds. I consult that *Homey for a Child's Heart* and then just various book lists that I've found online, or in Susan Wise Bauer's books. And so I feel that by the time we actually choose... when I choose my books and we read them, they're almost always just fantastic and I can't believe I got to be the age I am without ever having read it before.

Tsh: Oh I know. It's amazing.

Sarah: Yeah, and we just moved a couple of weeks ago and as I've been setting up bookshelves, unpacking boxes, I've been floored at how much twaddly junk has gotten onto our shelves I didn't even realize, like

tons of Disney books and TV character kind of cartoony. So I've been weeding through those ruthlessly and realizing that especially as my toddler is getting to that age where she of course just brings us stacks of books. I enjoy reading to her as long as she doesn't bring me *Dora the Explorer*.

28:40 Twaddle on the shelves (and the art of purging)

Tsh: It's funny how that happens. We're pretty ruthless yet I just purged a bunch of books about a month ago as well. And we didn't have a ton, but there was just books that just felt like, you know, this isn't the worst ever but we can just do so much better. And I definitely hold the same philosophy with books about the rest of the house, where I want to look at everything on here and be happy with it. I want to completely feel good about my kids pulling anything off the shelf and I know that they're reading something decent, and that doesn't have to mean *The Canterbury Tales*. It can be *George and Martha* or something. But it's quality.

But the one way I differ from books versus the rest of the house is I am okay with collecting books as long as they're quality. My mom saved a lot of my books from when I was a kid so I am now reading a lot of the books that I read when I was a kid—the actual book not just a copy of it. And that is a very cool experience for me. So I love the idea of being able to pass that down to my kids. So I'm okay with keeping books.

Sarah: Well my mother-in-law gave my oldest two daughters her entire collection of *Trixie Belden* and they're from her childhood and they are really treasured and it's just so

cool to see her name in her handwriting inscribed in the front cover and there's something about that.

Tsh: It is very cool.

30:58 Shared reading as family culture; reading aloud is like comfort food.

Sarah: I've been trying to talk a little bit on the podcast about building a family culture. We've sort of talked about that with your not separating read aloud, reading books in general from the rest of your family life. But is there anything else that you wanted to say about how books helped form your family culture?

Tsh: We take books with us when we go because we travel a lot. And they've become sort of our connection to our home base and now we don't think of our home base as wherever we're living because we move frequently. We think of our home base as the five of us together.

Sarah: I like that.

Tsh: And so books, especially just treasured books that we've read again and again, become sort of our mainstay. It's like Christmas ornaments. You open them up and like, "Oh this is from aunt so and so." And you have those memories and those things that just immediately anchor you to your family of origin.

Well, I think of books in that way when we travel and so we're selective because they need to be lightweight and thin and all those things but they bring us back to who we are, especially after a day of something foreign.

We're in a new city. We've done nothing but meet new people, eat different foods, do this kind of stuff. And yet at the end of the day, whether in a hotel room or in a tent or sometimes on the plane, we can open up *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* or *Blueberries for Sal* or some kind of book that we've read a hundred times, and it's like comfort food. It's like suddenly, this is who we are. This is something we value. This is a story that's almost part of our own family's tradition.

Sarah: That's so cool. So when you're traveling, you make reading aloud just part of your day just like any other time?

Tsh: Oh yeah. We make it an important part of our day. We do the audiobooks in the car. We'll do it on a plane too. We'll get the mp3s and put them on an iPhone or iPad or something and we'll do that as well. We'll still try and bring books as best we can especially for our younger guys that are still in picture books. I think it's important, the actual act of holding a physical book and turning the pages and looking at the pictures. My daughter is now good with a Kindle so I'm cool with that when we travel.

And we also have this silly little tradition our family has done where we tell what we've called or what our kids have called a magical train book stories. They're silly. Every couple nights, my husband and I will take turns telling them magical train story, and it started on a whim on one of our trips where a brother and a sister have a secret tunnel in their room that leads to a magic train that takes the kids places.

Sarah: Oh cool. And you just make that up as you go?

32:21 Reading aloud while traveling

Tsh: Yeah. Or they'll say like "Let's go to India this time or let's go to Antarctica." And we're like "Okay." And we'll let them add to the story and so it's not a physical book or real story. We just wing it and it's been fun. And I think they'll have good memories of that later.

Sarah: I bet they will. I bet it will be one of those things where you're sitting around the table at Thanksgiving in twenty years and they'll go, "Oh my gosh! That was my favorite one, do you remember that?" and they'll remember way more than you will.

Tsh: Way more, way more. It's so funny how they do that.

Sarah: So now when you bring audiobooks on your travels, how do you do that? Do you use Audible? Do you go buy them?

Tsh: We do a mix. So in the car or if we're not going for very long, we'll check something out at the library and just have CDs. We'll use our computer to play them if we are not in the car. But if we are going somewhere longer, or we just don't want to deal with it, I'll either do Audible or I'll do something like LibriBox or some kind of service where it's the royalty-free books, the ones that are available to anyone. And we'll play it through our iPad or some form of that or I'll import them into iTunes or whatever form it is.

Sarah: Well, this has been awesome. Thank you so much for talking to me and that was really, really fun. I think our listeners are really going to enjoy that. So I have enjoyed getting a peek into the way your family uses books.

Tsh: Oh thank you. It's been really fun. I love talking books.

Leveraging the Library with Your Kids Guest: Pam Barnhill

Heading to the library can be a real challenge but like Tsh and I talked about in today's show, there are so many benefits to making it a part of our family life. My friend, Pam, from [Everyday Snapshots](http://edsnapshots.com) (edsnapshots.com) has some great ideas for how we can leverage the library with our kids this summer. I invited her onto the show to share those so I'm super happy that she's here.

Sarah: Hey Pam!

Pam: Hey Sarah! How are you?

Sarah: I'm awesome! How are you?

Pam: I'm doing great. Thanks.

Sarah: Well, you have some great ideas for making better use of the library this summer and I need all the help I can get because I have been somewhat unmotivated to take my whole crew in.

Pam: I wonder why.

35:59 What can we do to make the most of the library?

Sarah: Right. I don't know if all of our listeners know that I have six kids and three of them are two and under. So heading to the library would be kind of like bringing the zoo

with me. But what can we do to make library visits more pleasant this summer?

Pam: Well, going to the library is such an important part of what we do to foster that culture of reading in our home and with our kids. And so I think the very first thing we need to do as moms is make the library a priority in our home. And we do that by having a set day and time that we go to the library. And so for example, my kids know that we go to the library on Thursday afternoons after karate. And that's when we go. They have it in their head that we're going and so if they have any expectations about what books they would like to get or some topic they would like to read about, they know that they're going to be able to get to look into that at that time.

Sarah: They probably already thought about it, looked forward to it and thought, "Oh next time we go to the library, I want to look for the next book in this series," or whatever.

Pam: Exactly. Or if they come up with a topic during the week that they're just gangbusters about researching—ocean animals or something—and they're like "Oh yes, we can look when we go to the library." So having that, it fosters that expectation for them. They know that there's a chance coming up that they're going to get to go and look. And then we make it a priority. I think it's so easy for library time to get pushed aside when life gets busy and so if we have it to be something that we prioritize within our lives, no matter what happens, we're really going to try to make an attempt to get to the library this week. This is something important that we do.

Sarah: Yeah, when it has a regular place on the schedule, it sends a message that we don't even have to say out loud. It just sends the message by being a part of your week, right?

Pam: Exactly. So that's the first thing we do.

Sarah: Okay. Make it a priority and make it regular.

Pam: That's right. The next thing that we've done that just made the biggest difference for my kids is we got everyone their own library card.

Sarah: Awesome.

Pam: Yes, even the four-year-old has his library card. And I have to tell you I was really resistant towards this. Our library prints out the little like cash register receipts for the books that you take out and I used to bring home one long cash register receipt and put it up on the refrigerator and then check all the books off and we took them back. Now I have four smaller ones to keep track of. But the difference that it's made in the kids' excitement level and their attitude about going to the library, it really makes it worth it.

38:40 How to keep library fines in check.

Sarah: That's awesome. Well, the hardest part for me in thinking about that is just I have a tendency to run up some serious fines. Do you have a strategy for keeping those fines down with so many different library cards to keep track of?

Pam: The set day and time to go to...

Sarah: Yes. That's right, of course because if you're going every Tuesday, then things don't get out of control. Very good idea.

Pam: Yup. It will help make it a priority, is you know—I don't know about your family, we know we have forty books we've got to get back to the library, so we better be going. That ten cents a pop—I don't even know what it is. It's five or ten cents a pop but when you have forty books...

Sarah: That adds up fast. Yeah.

Pam: So getting the library card, they were so excited. They were so excited to get the card and now they're so excited to stand in line with their own little stack of books and give the lady their card and do the checkout process. So it's just been something that's really made them take ownership in the library visits.

Sarah: Okay. What next?

39:48 What about library events?

Pam: Library events and hanging out at the library. Now I have to say I was kind of an old curmudgeon about the idea of this because libraries, that's where you go to get books to read. There shouldn't be this other stuff there. But I am becoming a convert on the subject of extra things to do at the library because my kids are so excited about going. We went to Lego Club this past month. And it was awesome. They spent a good hour in the community room. They had Lego kits for them to get, and tons of Legos, and other kids, and they got to build things that they are now going to display in the library.

And you ask yourself, what does this have to do with books? Well, I'll tell you. It was 5:00 when we finished. I was ready to go home and get something to eat. They would not let me leave until we had gone over to the children's section and checked our books out for the day.

Sarah: Oh that's great.

Pam: They totally knew what we were there for. They had a great time doing the Legos but we were not leaving that library without them getting their books.

Sarah: Well a lot of libraries have summer reading programs where they have puppet shows or magic shows and concerts and free activities that are really pretty great.

Pam: Yeah. Your library will probably have a calendar that you could even pick up now that has all of the things listed that they're going to have this summer. And just going to those different activities fosters a sense of fun with the kids and they really start to feel like the library is a place where they can go for information, for fun activities, and they have a good feeling about going there.

41:56 Getting to know your library staff.

Sarah: Yeah, they look forward to it and it makes it a happy place. So when they think back on going to the library, it's not something they think of as a chore, which I don't think any child would probably think that, really. But they look forward to it, yeah they do.

Pam: The last thing that I have is getting to know your library staff. My daughter likes to

call our librarian, Miss Librarian. It thrills her to death when she's walking up going "Miss Librarian, Miss Librarian, can you help me find the fairy books?" But it's a good thing. She may not know her name, but she does know that she can ask her for help. She can ask her for book recommendations and we start fostering this really young with the kids, once they reach the age where they're no longer clutching to my legs when I ask them to speak to a stranger. If they have a question or want to know where something is, I encourage them to go up and ask the library staff for help.

Sarah: Yeah and we do that too. And even if I know the answer, I will try and have my kids go up and ask. It's my impulse to answer them because I worked in a library for several years. Loved that job. That was such a fantastic job. So I have Dewey Decimal numbers in my head and I could direct them where they need to go, but I try to have them go ask because I want them to form those relationships with the library staff. So I'm totally on board with that.

Pam: And it's so important. And then your relationship with the library staff is also important. Just by having conversations with them about the different kinds of books that you enjoy in your family and the kinds of readings that you like to do aloud when you read aloud to your kids, or the different things that you appreciate, or the topics that you're studying if you're a homeschooling family, the topics that you're studying in your homeschool or what your kids might be interested in. And I really do think these librarians remember this information so later on when your kid walks up to them and says,

"I need a book about such and such," they kind of have an idea of where to steer them.

Sarah: Yeah, we've had that experience where you'll go into the library and a librarian will say, "Oh, I saw a book that would be something that just reminded me of you or that your family would really enjoy." And I love that. I really think that really good librarian relationships, relationships with the people who work in our libraries are just a fantastic resource that's something to cultivate for sure.

Pam: It does take cultivation. They're not going to be able to do that if they don't know you. And so taking the time to do that cultivation is a really big thing that's going to make the library experience so much better for your family.

Sarah: Okay. So make it a priority. Go on a regular basis. Get library cards for your kids. Attend events. And cultivate relationships with the library staff. Did I hit them all?

Pam: That's it.

Sarah: Awesome! But before we go, I want to chat just for a moment about your new summer reading program which is crazy awesome and pretty much different than every other summer reading program I've ever seen. So do you want to tell us about that real quick?

Pam: Sure, I'd love to. We have a summer reading program called Traveling Through the Pages and it is available on my blog if you go to edsnapshots.com, there is in the top menu bar, there is a link to the summer reading program and also on the side bar, there's a big yellow box that you can click on

to get to the summer reading program as well.

And basically what we have done is we have created this group of downloadable printables for you and so when you enter in your email address, you get a link sent to your email and you can download the forms and the different things. And what we've got in there for you, we have a Reading Passport which has, kind of like a bingo grid on the inside and what it does is it really encourages kids to break out of a reading rut and read different genres and stretch out into reading different things for this summer.

Sarah: Okay, because my kids do tend to read exact same things, not the exact same books but just the same genre. So my oldest is really into historical fiction. So to get to read her something else can be...it's just not what she tends to do on her own. I actually have to work at that.

Pam: Yeah, I've got one who's into fairy books.

Sarah: Oh yeah, I have one of those too.

Pam: As they start working through the bingo grid, if they start up in one corner, and they're going to work across or they're going to work down, they're going to come across... If they're wanting to mark off a square, they're going to come across squares that challenge them to break out of those ruts and get into different genres. Some of the squares also have activities for them to do. It might ask them to look at a book of science experiments and choose an experiment to do or look at a cookbook and choose a recipe to make.

Sarah: Very fun.

Pam: Kind of summer boredom busters there. And then we also have our Read Aloud Revival squares to encourage you, mom or dad, to actually read maybe a favorite book from your childhood to your children or maybe a book that's laugh-out-loud funny. So we have the Reading Passport. We also have Reading Reward Tickets so that once they have completed a column or a row, you can reward them. We give you some ideas, but things like a trip to the donut shop or a movie ticket or going to the bookstore to buy a book.

Sarah: Oh fun. Yeah, I like that one.

Pam: Breakfast with dad, you know, any kind of reward for finishing a row or a column. We also have bookmarks that you can print and laminate, a certificate for completing the program and then reading logs to help keep track of the books and the pages that you've read just in case you're also participating in some other summer reading programs this summer.

Sarah: And this is all free. Awesome. So listeners, if you missed it, you go to edsnapshots.com to get your Traveling Through the Pages loot. I've seen it, I've downloaded it. I'm going to use it with my kids this summer and I'm pretty stoked about that. I'll have a link in the show notes, too, so you can find it very easily. Thank you so much for coming on to the show. That was fun to chat with you here.

Now it's time for **Let the Kids Speak!** This is one of my favorite parts of the podcast, the time where kids can tell us in their own words about the books that have been read aloud to them.

“Hi there! My name is Madeline and I live in northern Idaho and I am 13 years old. One of my favorite read alouds is called *The Penderwicks*. It's about four girls, their father, and a boy they meet on vacation. There is sweet, patient Rosalind, sarcastic and impatient Skye, daydreamer and writer Jane, and shy Batty and oh, their lovable hound. My favorite adventure is when sarcastic and impatient Skye turns the oven on broiler when she was making cookies and almost burns the house down. Why did she make cookies and why did she almost burn the house down? My answer is to read the book.”

“My name is Caroline. I live in Idaho and I am 8 years old. My favorite read aloud is *Little Pear*. It's about a little boy in China who gets in a lot of mischief. My sister Erica read this book aloud to my five-year-old sister and to me.”

I would love to feature your child on the show so if your child would like to tell us all about his or her favorite read aloud, then head to ReadAloudRevival.com, scroll to the bottom of the page and click the orange button to leave me a message.

Thank you so much for joining me. I'll see you again soon for another episode of [ReadAloudRevival](http://ReadAloudRevival.com). Until then, go build your family culture around books.