



## Episode 12

# The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared

Guest: Alice Ozma

**Sarah:** I am so excited about today's podcast, I can barely stand it. If you read my blog at [AmongstLovelyThings.com](http://AmongstLovelyThings.com) or follow me on Facebook or Twitter, you may have seen my recent gushing about Alice Ozma's fantastic book, *The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared*. This book is amazing. It's a memoir of what Alice and her father call the Reading Streak. But really, it's not a book about books. It's a book about the incredible relationship Alice and her father forged over a habit of reading aloud day in and day out without missing a single day for eight years. This is **the** book. I can honestly say I haven't read anything that better articulates the hunch I've had that books are the currency of really deep and meaningful relationships and that sharing a book really uniquely weaves together hearts in a way that can't be replicated.

Alice, welcome to the show. I am so excited to chat with you.

**Alice:** Oh, thank you so much for having me. Gosh, that gushing. You really set me up here. Now I feel like I have to live up to these expectations.

**Sarah:** Oh, I think my listeners are used to my gushing, although I don't think I've gushed quite as much about anybody else as I have about your book. It's just such a great... it really caught me off guard. I don't know what I was expecting because I had just found the book and kind of ordered it on a whim and started it the day it came. But it totally caught me off guard. It was so well done.

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4:57 **Alice explains the Reading Streak and how it began.**

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Many of our listeners probably don't know what the Reading Streak is or how it came to be, so can you tell us that story?

**Alice:** Yeah. When I was in elementary school, my dad was reading to me every night aloud. He had been but it wasn't an absolute mandatory tradition. Sometimes something came up, someone was sick. We were out late and sometimes on those nights, we didn't read.

But as I started getting a little older, my dad recalled that my sister, who is 7½ years older than I am, when she was about the age that I was at the time we started this, she had said, "Dad, I don't want you to read aloud to me any more. I'll take it from here. I can read to myself." And that had been really hard for him. That was a difficult transition, so when I started approaching that fourth grade-ish age where you kind of want to do it yourself, he was afraid of what he thought was inevitable, that I would say I want to take it from here.

So in order to avoid that, he said, "I have an idea. Let's read for 100 nights in a row and see if we can do it without missing a night." And I said sure. Then we did it. And then we said, "Let's read for 1,000 nights in a row," and we did that too. And then finally, we kind of just said, "Let's read until something gets in our way and we have to stop for one reason or another." And this thing that ended up getting in our way was 3,218

nights later, my first day of college. So we read from elementary school to my first day of college without missing a night, which was a pretty long time and a really incredible thing I think for both of us.

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**6:40 The momentum kept the streak going, along with Alice’s dad’s passion.**

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**Sarah:** Yeah, that’s so awesome. So did you find that like the moment to him was you didn’t want to break the chain or break the streak so the momentum kept you going a lot of times when it would have been really easy to say, “Oh not tonight, we’ve got too much going on.”

**Alice:** Yeah, and I think it was partly that and I think it was also, my dad is a very passionate person but it’s kind of sometimes seemingly random to me what he’s passionate about. But I had never seen him so passionate about something once he had latched on

to this idea that we were never going to miss a night. He was so excited and he was just unstoppable and it really made it so that anytime that it was even mildly inconvenient for me — which it rarely was but there’s teenage years — that did happen where it was kind of tough to get back in time.

But even on those nights, I really didn’t want to disappoint him. I knew how excited he was and I just kind of built off of that excitement myself and it made it a lot easier for both of us to think we were cheerleading for each other.

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**7:44 The reading streak rules.**

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**Sarah:** So then the rules for the reading streak were pretty simple, right? I think you said they were that your dad had to read to you for at least 10 minute per

**This is a book about people.**

This is a book about the living, breathing creatures in the world around us who need our love. This is a book about how books can bring people together, and how that bond can last a lifetime. There are no in-depth discussions of symbolism, no characters are painstakingly analyzed, and no one stops what they are doing to ponder the meaning of a line or a phrase while riding a roller coaster, eating a sandwich, or dancing to a swing band. My father and I did these things, and perhaps they could have made for a good book. But it is not this book.

This book is about the act of reading, and the time spent doing it. This book is about the 3,218 nights my father and I spent reading anything and everything we could find. The books are important, but the conversations they started, and the bonds they created, are what really matter.

The titles may be familiar. The conversations may remind you of your own. For many of you, this could be a trip down memory lane. But if you haven’t read a single book that we read, or you tend to fall asleep

before you can finish a chapter—even if you’ve never been read to and never read to another person, this book is for you, too.

When I remember the promise I made to and with my father, the books are key players. But the star was, and always will be, the man who read them and the devotion he showed me by reading them aloud.

This book is about the quilt of our lives, and all the patches—some tattered, some vibrant—woven together by the books we read. This book is about remembering what you were reading when your sister moved away, but also remembering what that last hug felt like. This book is about remembering the words on the pages, but never forgetting whose head was on your shoulder while you read them. This book is about growth, and change, and fear, and hope, and triumph, and yes, books. It is about all of those things, because reading never is, and never can be, just about the characters and the plots.

Reading to someone is an act of love. This book is, above all else, a love story.

Introduction to *The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared* by Alice Ozma

night every night before midnight, with no exceptions. Is that right?

**Alice:** Yes. And we would sometimes read... it really depended on where we were and there were those occasions where we were kind of stuck and we needed to read whatever we had. My dad and I — we live just outside of Philadelphia and we are Phillies season ticket holders and at one point during the streak, the Phillies were having a really hot season and we were at a game that was pretty important and we didn't want to go home, but it was clear the game was going to go past midnight and he pulled out the program for the game and started reading to me about the players. And we sat there. I'm a high school student. We're sitting in a Phillies game. He's just reading to me, "Cole Hamels was born in..." going on and on and everyone around us was trying to pay attention to the game and here we are reading in the middle of the 7th inning. But those things happen.

**Sarah:** Oh that's awesome! I just love the picture of that.

**Alice:** Yeah, there were a lot of those kind of strange moments of, you know, people would look around and be very surprised that we were reading where we were reading. But when you have to get it in before midnight, sometimes you got to do what you got to do.

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### 9:01 Reading to older children is countercultural.

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**Sarah:** Yeah, right. And then I think in our culture, or just sort of in general, people realize *oh, yeah you read to small children because they can't read to themselves* but reading to older children who can read to themselves is pretty countercultural. So did you experience any discomfort from your friends or anybody else who knew what was going on who maybe didn't understand what was happening there?

**Alice:** That's a really good question. I don't know if discomfort would be the word and I don't know if friends would be the word. I think that my friends and the people that I chose to really let close into my life completely understood it, partly because it really outlived them. The friends that I made in middle school, this already existed when I met them. So it

wasn't a new thing. It was something that came with the package, so to speak. If you want to be friends with me, you accept this.

My close friends were totally understanding and fine with it. I have these really vivid memories still. They're still extremely clear to me when we would... I'd be out with my friends and I didn't have a curfew because I was a really good kid. So there's really nothing I was doing that needed a curfew. But sometimes we'd be having a board game night or something and I'd say, "Oh, I got to get read to," and so we'd all... a group of six of us would pile into somebody's car, we'd drive back to my house, my dad would hear us come in. He'd come down, offer everybody a soda, whatever, and then I would go up and get read to and they would just sit in the living room and play a board game or play cards and wait for me to come back down and then I would come back down and we would all leave again. That happened a number of times. And in hindsight, it's so strange.

**Sarah:** It totally is, and I absolutely love it.

**Alice:** But at that time, it really didn't seem odd to me at all. The other thing that didn't seem odd, every person in that living room knew why they were there. There was no illusion of why I was going up to do. I would go upstairs and they all knew, "Oh she's going upstairs to get read to." That was exactly how it was, but to me that seems completely normal. I'm sure it didn't to them.

**Sarah:** That's so great. I love how it just seemed totally normal to you like that's just what your family did. That's just what life was like, we read aloud every day.

**Alice:** Yeah, and it really didn't strike me as a remarkable thing until I was in college, which it's saying something. I'd like to think I was a fairly self-aware teenager but of all the things that I thought were abnormal or quirky about me, that was not one of them.

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### 11:43 Why write a book about the reading streak? Alice's amazing journey to publishing.

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**Sarah:** Okay, so when did you decide to write a book about the reading streak?

**Alice:** It's kind of an unusual situation. It more fell into my lap. I didn't really pursue it per se. But I was an English major in college and I started looking at grad schools and I was applying to the University of Pennsylvania and I wrote a ton of essays because the program I was applying to, you have to write something like 16 essays. It was absurd. And the last essay was kind of a "choose your own ending" kind of essay. It was write about whatever you want, which was really stressful to me because I didn't know what they were looking for.

So initially, I was going to write about the time I met an astronaut which was actually a really great story, but I said I'm going to write about my reading streak with my dad because — and this was my logic — if nothing else, this is a really strange story. And if it's a really strange story, they're going to think I'm really strange. And if they think I'm really strange, they're going to want to meet me in person. So I'm going to get an interview. And if I get an interview, I can take it from there. That was my whole logic.

So it was a bit unusual. So I wrote this essay along with the other ones and I sent it to the head of my English department. I went to Rowan University in South Jersey. And I sent it to the head of the English department to proofread for me and she said, "These are great, fantastic. This last essay, this one about your dad is really interesting. Do you mind if I send it to the head of PR at Rowan?" And I said, "Absolutely, but I don't know why." So she sent it and I went for an interview with the head of PR who thought she was going to include something about this in a newsletter for Father's Day, and so she was interviewing me and about two hours later, she said, "I have way too much to put in a newsletter. Do you mind if I send a pitch about this to *The New York Times*?"

And my reaction was something like, "Oh, you can do whatever you want, crazy lady. They're not going to look at it." And she sent it and something really fast like a week later, I got a call from *The New York Times* saying, "Do you want to us to interview you and talk about the streak?" And I remember during this whole

process... I'm telling it as kind of a long story, but my point is at no point did I realize what a big deal this was.

So *The New York Times* called me and said, "Can we come interview you?" And they gave me a time and I said, "Oh no, I have class at that time so this just won't work." I didn't even come back to them with another time, but we ended up being interviewed. They ran a piece in *The New York Times* and the Sunday that the piece or actually — this is a funny side note — the night before the piece came out, Saturday night, we had seen it in advance and I said to my dad, "Wouldn't it be funny..." We're going to bed and I said, "Wouldn't it be funny if we woke up tomorrow and our lives from that point on were totally different?" And he laughed and said something totally dismissive.

And then the next day, I woke up at maybe 7:30. My phone was ringing and it was the first of dozens of calls I got saying, "Do you want to write a book about this?" The first person to call was an agent and then there were editors and all kinds of people who were saying, "Hey, what do you think about writing a book?" And initially, I think I kind of resisted because that's a big scary thing to think about and I was a senior in college and it was also the week of my finals. And I had a cold. So I was kind of not paying attention to it and then finally they, I guess, wore me down and so... The article came out on a Sunday. And not the next Monday, not the day after, but a week and a day later, I had my agent and my book contract and I had signed my contract. It was a matter of eight days.

**Sarah:** Oh my goodness! What a whirlwind. That had to have completely taken you by surprise. I'm really surprised because your writing is really spectacular. So the fact that you weren't pursuing something with it sort of floors me. That is amazing.

**Alice:** Well, I was an English major so I was writing . Writing has been one of those things that keeps falling in my lap throughout my life because when I was in high school I won two national writing contests and in both cases, I was essentially doing it for the money. I just needed like scholarship money so I entered one and I won a thousand dollars, and I was like *whoa*,

*hmm, this is an interesting way to pay for college* so I googled something like “biggest scholarship prize essay contest” and found *Newsweek* does one. And I found the *Newsweek* one and I entered that and I won that. It’s like *okay this how I’m going to pay for college*. So I had been writing but I wasn’t pursuing it as a career.

**Sarah:** Wow! Okay. Well, when a calling falls into your lap like that...

**Alice:** You got to go with it.

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### 16:33 Reading as a healing balm.

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**Sarah:** Exactly. So let’s talk a little bit about your childhood, which was not easy. You don’t come right out and say that in the book, but the heart-wrenching story of your mom leaving pulled on every single one of my heartstrings. I was crying when I read that part of your book.

**Alice:** Oh no, don’t cry.

**Sarah:** But I think what amazed me is how the simple act of reading aloud to you for ten minutes a day had this really healing effect. Anyway, from my perspective as a reader, it seems like your dad sort of metaphorically cradled you in his arms when he read to you. It was like how he carried you through that rough time and so... Well, a good illustration of this is when you talk about your hundred-day mark in the book. You say when you first achieved that first milestone of your reading streak, the two of you decided to celebrate at Flick’s. Tell me about that. Tell our listeners about that, because I love that.

**Alice:** So we were trying to think of what to do for our hundred-day mark and for us this is a really big deal. I want to say this is a bigger deal than a birthday because it was something we had worked together. But growing up, money was very tight. I mean as an example, when my sister got accepted to Yale and it was this dream come true for her, we got a medium Papa John’s pizza with one topping. I mean that was like the big celebration.

So clearly, we’re not throwing around the big bucks for celebration. But we had talked about what should we do that is our big celebratory moment for our hundred days. And we decided to go to this little local cafe which I know now doesn’t exist, we went to this tiny little cafe called Flick’s Cafe, very mom and pop, greasy spoon, in my hometown. And we decided to get pancakes and celebrate with pancakes. And it was just a very simple thing, but it was “us” time.

And I think that that’s so important because that’s what the streak was about. It kind of almost didn’t matter what we were reading, it was about the time we spent together, and I think in that same way... Sure, we could have celebrated it with a fancy dinner or a day at a theme park. But ultimately, it came down to just spending time together. So going to that local greasy spoon and getting a stack of pancakes, that’s good enough for us.

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### 18:48 You will never regret the time you read aloud to your children.

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**Sarah:** Okay, let’s talk about the Foreword, which your dad wrote and is really amazing. It’s one of the best essays I think I’ve read on reading aloud and what it means to read aloud and why. So let me read a little selection from it.

If you have been read to as a child, you are much more likely to read to your own children when they come along. Create a family tradition that can be passed on.

The greatest gift you can bestow upon your children is your time and undivided attention. As the years advance, you may reflect upon your life and see that in some areas, you have regrets about what you took to be a priority. No one will ever say, no matter how good a parent he or she was, “I think I spent too much time with my children when they were young.”

I underlined this like three — there’s like three lines underneath it, because I thought *oh my goodness, that’s right*. I think as a parent — and I have six kids — I think we get so... there’s so many different things clamoring for our attention and we get our priorities kind of mixed up and we get distracted by just the daily stuff, but to think about you’ll never say, “I wish I hadn’t read

to my child as much as I did.” That’s never something anyone would say. So I think that was a unique thing to think about.

**Alice:** Yeah. And I think about that quote a lot too, which is interesting because I’m only 26. I don’t have children yet. I just got married so I’m in a very different place in my life than he was when he was writing that. And yet that quote really resonates with me. And I think really what I boiled that quote down to... I think he is talking about reading and children and I don’t want to take away that message because that’s the message he’s conveying, but I also think there’s some sort of an underlying message there that’s just you will never regret the time you spent with the people you loved giving them your love and attention and really being present with them.

And I think that that’s a super universal message that no matter where you are in your life — maybe you have kids, maybe you don’t — but I think about that all the time just when I’m spending time with my husband. Put the phone down. Close the laptop. Let me pay attention to what you’re actually saying. Let me be present with you. I think that that’s a really universal message.

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#### **21:04 Rehearsing prior to reading aloud? Yikes!**

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**Sarah:** I think you’re totally right. I agree completely. So I am fascinated by the fact that your dad rehearsed every day before he read to you. In fact, that caught me off guard every time you mentioned it. So for our listeners who haven’t read the book yet, let me just give them a heads up. Alice’s father was a children’s librarian who read aloud for his job every single day and then of course he read aloud to Alice every single day. Yet, before he read aloud their chapter each day, he would go off by himself and rehearse that day’s selection. So Alice, tell me about that. Why did he do that, do you think?

**Alice:** Well it’s an interesting question. I think part of it is, when it comes to reading, there’s a certain amount of my dad that is perfectionist. He wants to pick the right book. He wants to read it correctly. He wants to... This is the thing he thinks he does best in life, so he wants

to do it as well as he possibly can. And I think that also there’s almost an element there of competitiveness even though there’s no one he’s competing with. No one else is reading to me. I’m not giving him scores at the end. But he still wants to be the best at reading to me.

So that’s an element of it and then there’s also sort of this element of — I don’t want to say censorship, that’s too strong of a word. But I think he was really big on *let’s read whatever books appeal to us but if there’s something that I feel you can’t handle at this point in time, I’ll just remove that sentence, or curse word, or whatever it may be.*

But it was interesting because he was removing things... For better or for worse, this was just the nature of reading with my dad. He would remove things that were actually super relevant to what was going on in my life. I kind of touch on this in the book a little bit, but we read several books that had to do with coming of age and puberty and dating and whatnot and he would cut all of that stuff, despite the fact that I was the same as that character. And this was all super relevant. He would cut that.

And I really can’t ding him for that. I don’t think it’s what I would do as a parent. But on the flip side, I can see that that made him uncomfortable for whatever reason and I’m so glad that he at least... If censoring it was the way he had to get through it, at least we still read that book rather than saying, “This makes me uncomfortable, we’re not even going to touch this.” And I always did kind of go back later on and figure out what it is that we were missing. Because it was kind of obvious if he would skim a lot, then it would be obvious and there’s a chapter about that.

But I think he handled it as he knew best, and as somebody who in general is very opposed to censorship, I’m surprised that I’m not incensed about it now. But that was his way of getting through a book that he otherwise wouldn’t have picked up. And if that’s what he had to do then I’m glad we still tried those books.

**Sarah:** That chapter in your book had me cracking up laughing. I mean it was just so funny. I could totally see my husband doing the same thing actually reading to

our daughters. So that's really funny. But yes, as I have read books before where just depending on what we've been going through in our family life or whatever, I may weed out — or curse words or whatever — weed out something or other. And it is really awkward to do that in the moment and I never rehearse before I read, so maybe I could take a page out of your dad's book there. [laughter]

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**24:28 Was she aware of the unique treasure her father was giving her?**

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**Sarah:** So as a kid, were you aware of the unique treasure your father was giving you or was that something you didn't really realize was so unique and special until you got older?

**Alice:** I really don't think I realized, like I said, until college. I mean, it was just such a natural part of my life that I didn't even question. And if someone had said, "Tell me the things that are unique about you," I would have made a list of 25 things before it even occurred to me, *oh my dad reads to me every night* because it was so ingrained. It was so just a part of who I was and who we were as a family. It was totally accepted. So it didn't strike me as unusual and even when I say it didn't occur to me until college, I mean there were three weeks left of college when I was like, "Ha! This is unusual."

And I really never paid it any thought. For example, my now husband, then boyfriend, knew it had happened while we were in college because we started dating in my freshmen year of college, and it was never a topic of conversation. And I wasn't ashamed of it. It wasn't like, *oh, that's embarrassing*. It was just so normal to me that it never came up in passing. It was like what am I going to talk about, breathing and drinking water? It was just a totally natural part of life.

**Sarah:** Oh, that's awesome. Well that's actually really encouraging from a parenting perspective too because I think sometimes we work so hard to do these things that we think are going to make this big impact on our children and maybe subconsciously or not so subconsciously, we get frustrated when they don't appreciate it. So that's really helpful...

**Alice:** Yeah, I think there's a difference between.. It's not, not appreciating it. It's not recognizing it as unusual. You appreciate it but you kind of think *oh well, of course this is how it is*. And then you have to step back much later on and say, "Wait that was not common. What happened to me was not only wonderful but very unusual." But in the moment... And I think that's a compliment to my father that he made it feel so natural, this thing that to so many people would be unnatural. He made it feel so natural that I never gave it a second thought as being odd or out of place.

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**26:53 The impact of reading aloud on her life now, as an adult.**

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**Sarah:** So you're 26 now. Tell me about the effect on your life now.

**Alice:** That's an interesting question. The effect is kind of broad. So I'll start with just reading in general. I work for Scholastic Book Fairs now, and I actually got that job... They asked me to come and talk about my book and when I was finished talking about my book and everybody was clapping, I kind of looked around the room at all these book-loving people and I leaned into the microphone and said, "I would like to work here." And everyone laughed and I said, "No, I'm serious."

So a few months later, I got a call asking if I was serious and I really wanted to work there. So I've been working at Scholastic for a couple of years now. And so reading in general, plays a huge role in my life.

And right now — my work has kind of seasons and patterns — but right now, I'm in one of the seasons where most of the time, my job during the day for the next two weeks or so is reading books and writing about them. So a lot of the time during the day, I am being paid to read. And then do a lot with the stuff I've read. But talk about growing up to be my father's child, I also am in the profession of reading the same way he was.

So I think that that's a really direct connection. As far as reading aloud goes, it's an interesting question, but it's a context that it doesn't come up as much because I don't have any children in my life and the only person I live with is my husband. And I travel a lot. So we definitely

will do... We'll be reading something and I'll say, "Oh let me read you this." And read a paragraph and he'll do the same thing. And that feels very natural to me. But I actually think it's...

Kind of a related note, he and I are both very — my husband and I — are both very into podcasts. And we will sit sometimes and listen to a podcast while coloring or while playing a word game or just drinking tea. And I think that that is unusual. I think lots of people love podcasts but they listen to them while doing something in the car or running errands.

**Sarah:** And not together. Yeah, on their own.

**Alice:** Yeah, and we'll just put on a podcast and sit and that will be an activity for us. And I think that part of the reason that feels so normal to me is the idea of someone talking to me and telling me a story and that being the activity, that's very natural to me. That feels right. That feels like how my day should end sometimes. So I see that as being very closely correlated.

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**29:30 Advice for parents who want to make reading aloud a priority but struggle with it.**

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**Sarah:** Talk to the parent who says, "I believe in reading aloud. But I struggle to make it a priority like I know I should." What would you say to him or her?

**Alice:** That's a good but tough question from my point of view because it's really hard for me to say, "Here's how you make time for this," when I don't have kids and maybe when I have kids I'll say, "Goodness! How did my father ever do this?"

I do a lot of speaking at schools and libraries and whatnot and those are always a blast. But when a topic like this comes up, I'm always very cautious in how I talk about it because I don't want to sound judgmental or preachy because I have not been in that situation. I truly do not know what it's like to have all of those demands on your time and be raising a kid.

But what I will say is I think that in life we make time for the things that are important to us. And on the flip side of that, we also make time for things that aren't

important to us but just kind of accidentally happen. So what I usually say is look for the bits of time during your day that *gosh, I wish I wasn't spending my time that way.*

A couple of nights ago, I just sat there and looked for the lids for all of our Tupperware and then stacked them by size. And it was like, "There is no reason I need to be doing this. It doesn't even make me feel better." [laughter] So it is just me being anal. There's absolutely no purpose for this or like my husband is always going through and updating all of his apps. And I'm like *I'm sure that's great that your phone is updated.* But my point is I think that there are... Focus less on what is that thing you're going to give up. I think a lot of people say, "Oh but that means I'm going to have to give up work time. Or that means I'm going to have to give up cooking for dinner." And that's not it.

Look at those things that you wish you weren't doing with your time. And then maybe make a mental note, hey the next time I go to reach for my phone and update my apps, or the next time I find myself wandering around my kitchen organizing things that are already organized, I'm going to stop myself and I'm going to do this instead.

I think that that's a healthier way to look at it because if you try to replace reading... If you use reading to replace something that is important that you do... You shouldn't read instead of exercising or instead of answering a really important work email. If it needs to be done, get it done. But I know at least in my day, there are plenty of things I'm doing that don't need to be done. So I think that finding a way to replace those things would be pretty beneficial.

**Sarah:** Wellm I know that when I became more intentional about just noticing how often I click on the email app on my phone, that I had no idea how much time I was spending just clicking and scrolling. And it just seems like *oh it just takes ten seconds* but yeah, if you do that enough times during the day, especially if you click on any of those emails... Really, if I sat down and looked at my email, responded it at one time, and then all those other times that I'm tempted to check

it during the day, if I put those together, I know I'd have more than 10 minutes. It's just about being more intentional with the time that we're wasting, I guess is what you're saying.

**Alice:** Absolutely. You said it better than I did. Intentional. I'm going to steal that for future speeches.

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### 33:01 The three books Alice would pick from her reading streak.

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**Sarah:** Okay, so this is going to be the toughest question I've asked yet. If you could only keep three books from that reading streak, which would they be? Out of all those fabulous books in the list, which do you think had maybe the most tremendous impact on you or were the most enjoyable?

**Alice:** Interesting. Okay. I actually have a bookshelf of my favorites and I'm sitting in front of it. So I'm looking at it as I'm talking. That's a good question. *Great Expectations* immediately comes to mind. And as I'm looking at this bookshelf, I have to tell you about this bookshelf. This was a gift from my husband who was my boyfriend at the time. When my book came out, he went behind my back and...

Each of my chapters in my book starts with a sentence from the books that we read together, so there's 26 chapters, let's say there's 26 books referenced. And he reached out to people who were important to me and had them buy, each of them, one book that started those chapters and then write why they picked it and a special message to me. So this is like the most beautiful gift I've ever received...

**Sarah:** Oh my goodness.

**Alice:** And so now, I'm sitting here looking at these books and they're inscribed from everyone from like the person who directed my plays in seventh grade, to one of my former teachers. And some of these people have since passed away. It's just an incredible gift of love and reading which seems to be a theme in my life.

But *Great Expectations* comes to mind because I think that that's the type of book that initially sounds really

daunting. We read in when I was in high school and you think, there's no way I'm actually going to like *Great Expectations*. We'll get through it but am I going to like it? And we loved it.

And we reference it all the time. And I remember that there were passages where my dad would have to lean the book down on his chest because we were both in tears laughing, just hysterical, hysterical laughter. And so being that surprised by a book was just incredibly pleasant. And so anytime there is a book where I say *that looks a little intimidating, I don't know if that's for me*, I just tell myself, *well it could be another Great Expectations where it ends up being a story that sticks with you forever and you love much more than you ever could have anticipated.*

So that immediately comes to mind. I'm also looking — actually the book's directly next to it on my bookshelf — is *Each Little Bird that Sings*, which is by Deborah Wiles. Deborah Wiles is a fantastic writer in general. We read a few books by her, but this book comes to mind because I've had a number of these relationships, but she's very particular. We read this book and then I was being interviewed on NPR when the book first came out and Scott Simon — we were on Weekend Edition — Scott Simon asked me what books came to mind and I said, "*Each Little Bird that Sings.*" And a couple of weeks later, I got a letter from Deborah Wiles saying, "Hey, I heard you talking about my book on the radio. This is great. I'd love a copy of your book." And we ended up developing a kind of a friendship and I see her all the time at conferences. And at this point, she has met my dad and we always go up and give each other a great big hug. It's just really interesting to be reading about these books and then suddenly know these people. I've developed friendships with a lot of these people. And she's a really big deal author. So there's a part of me that just likes to pat myself on the back whenever I go up to her at a conference and say, "Oh hi, Deborah!" And she gives me a hug... Wow! I am just hugging Deborah Wiles. Like this is nuts.

And then, hmm, a third book, that's really tough. I guess I have to pick and there are a lot of ones that are fighting for my attention here because there are ones

that represent things to us but I have to pick... There's a book called *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*. And I'm picking that because it was my dad's favorite. And it was so — what's the word I'm looking for? I get kind of emotional when I think about this. He picked his favorite book. We read all of these. We read Sherlock Holmes and Dickens and stuff that as an adult he could really appreciate. And *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* is pure middle grade fiction. It is just written for that age group and so for him to pick that as his favorite book, says something about how invested he was in being there with me. This at first was not about him, because if it was about him it would be very easy to say, we read some Shakespeare. He could just say oh the Shakespeare was my favorite part because I'm sure as an intelligent, well-read adult, those were the parts that maybe most connected with him.

But he was so present with me and so engaged with me that he looks back on this and references a book that's for fifth graders. I mean I think that says so much. So that just has a really treasured place in my heart.

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**37:55 *The Reading Promise into a movie? You heard it here first!***

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**Sarah:** Word on the street is that there is a movie deal in the works. Tell me about that.

**Alice:** Yes. That is certainly the word on the street. It's still an unusual thing to be able to talk about it because it's been in the works for a while and then only just recently, over the summer was it officially announced then I was allowed to talk about it so it's still strange to be able to say something. But I've been working very closely with Walden Media and they acquired the rights to the book to make it into a movie and they have already partnered with Relativity. And so it's kind of moving pretty quickly as far as I can tell. And the writer for the project is Doug Atchison who wrote *Akeelah and the Bee*. And that's kind of a serendipitous thing for me because though I have Twitter, I don't really use Twitter, and really the only occasion that I use Twitter, I live tweet the Scripps National Spelling Bee. That is my Superbowl. I count down to the Scripps National Spelling Bee. I wake up that morning, jump out of bed

really excited about it, and for those of you who haven't seen it, *Akeelah and the Bee* is about the Scripps National Spelling Bee. So somebody else who kinds of shares my level of geekdom on the Scripps National Spelling Bee and that love for words is a really solid partner.

So a lot of it is in place, which is surprising. It feels like it's moving kind of fast. But in the real world, it's slow. I guess it's just fast for movie time, but it feels fast for me.

**Sarah:** Awesome. Well, this has been a fantastic conversation and I totally appreciate your time and discussion. And I'm hoping that our listeners will pick up a copy of your book because I think it has the potential to really transform lives and help people see that reading aloud can have a massive impact on their relationships which is what we're really all about anyway. So thank you so much, Alice.

**Alice:** Oh, thank you for having me.

Now it's time for ***Let the Kids Speak!*** This is my favorite part of the podcast, where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read aloud to them.

"My name is Vivienne and I am 5 years old. I live in Perth, Australia. I like *Blueberries for Sal* because sometimes the little boy and the bear eats out of mother's pail and also because the little boy sometimes eats his blueberries without putting them in his pail."

"My name is Coliannie Nicole, and I am 8 years old. I live in Western Australia. One of my favorite books is *The Book of Virtues*. I like it because it has lots of stories and although sometimes they are sad, they have a meaning. And the meaning is clear."

Vivienne and Coliannie, thank you. I like both of those books, too. Listen, I love it when your kids leave me messages that I can put on the podcast. It's simple and easy and you can coach your child right through the message. I can do any editing out of your adult voice if I need to, so as always, no pressure.

Actually, Vivienne and Coliannie's mom Elisa left me this message about the ***Let the Kids Speak!*** portion of the podcast.

“Hi Sarah! This is Elisa. I appreciate this because it’s a book report for my young children. We read all the time and it’s fun to have just a little insight into why they like the different books. I hope you have a great day, Sarah! Thanks, bye!”

I’d love to hear from your kids and I’d love to hear from you, too. So if you have anything you’d like to say about the podcast, leave me a message. Just head to [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com) and click the orange button. It can’t get any easier than that.

Okay. That’s it for today. Make sure you get yourself a copy of *The Reading Promise*. You’ll be glad you did. And if you’d like to find out more about Alice and her work, you can head to her book’s website at [MakeAReadingPromise.com](http://MakeAReadingPromise.com).

Until next time—go build your family culture around books!