

WinkWorld September 2003

Just when I thought I could sink no lower than reading *Pokémon* to Luke and Wyatt, *Captain Underpants* became a part of our lives. However, Mom assures me that I'm young and will sink to depths I can't even yet imagine. In addition, she said this as though it were a comforting thought!

I've written before that Wyatt, Luke, and I have read the *J.R.R. Tolkien* and *Redwall* series. We've read umpteen Norse, Celtic, and Southwestern myths and legends. The three of us lap up these stories. The boys love the tales of adventures, and I love the exquisite use of language of the writers. I proudly noted the rich vocabulary these books gave the boys. However, what they didn't do was teach Wyatt to read.

"Honey," Mom told me over the phone a month ago, "you've got to quit reading all that hard stuff to them. Those books are too intimidating for Wyatt to pick up and try to read himself."

That is when the *Captain Underpants* series by Dav Pilkey began arriving in our mailbox. I must admit, had it been anybody other than Mom sending these, I would have immediately donated them to someone else. Wyatt was beside himself with glee. *Finally*, he too owned a *Captain Underpants* book, previously spoken of in only hushed and reverent tones when I was out of earshot.

And so we began. First, I read three pages for every forced paragraph which I could get Wyatt to read. Our beloved other series of books lay collecting dust on the shelves, and in the high desert of New Mexico, this doesn't take long. Within days, Wyatt's reluctance to attempt to read lessened dramatically, and we were now taking turns: one paragraph read by him, for every two pages I read. Within two weeks we were taking turns every other page.

"He's reading!" I thought to myself, "He's reading about some weird little dude saving the world in his BVD's, but he's actually reading!"

I sat on the bed every night and tried to muffle my giddiness behind nonchalance, as Wyatt sniffs out performance expectations better than any Labrador-and then promptly shuts down.

"Mom," I called, "it's the damndest thing I've ever seen. He's reading!"

Next the *Goosebumps* series began arriving in the mail. Having already given up any semblance of literary pride, we dove in-and Wyatt read even more.

James Hillman writes in *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* that to encourage our children's inherent strengths and sense of destiny, we must allow them to gravitate toward what holds their passion and interest, even if that includes pulp fiction of which we don't necessarily approve. I assumed he meant condensed versions of the Classics. I am a literary snob in recovery.

Last night when I walked into Wyatt's room, he greeted me holding up the Hercules book his brother checked out from the library.

"Mom, tonight I'm going to read to you."

"Great, Wyatt!" and I climbed up onto his bed, and he read this book to me that he'd never seen before in his life. Of course, I help him with words when he stumbles. He is definitely a sight word reader. Phonics and phonetic rules confuse him almost as much as they do his mother.

Apparently a twisted little, underwear-wearing superhero taught my son to read. He swooped into our lives at just the right moment. This was the month Wyatt learned to read. Who would've thought being able to read "poo poo" was the key to literacy?

Now, if you'll excuse me, *Captain Underpants* is about to save the world from the attack of the talking toilets. Wyatt has promised not to keep me in suspense any longer and read it to me.

Or, as Captain Underpants says, "Tra-la-la!"