

## Library Reflections: Where all my best friends live

by Laura Purdie Salas Apr 16, 2022

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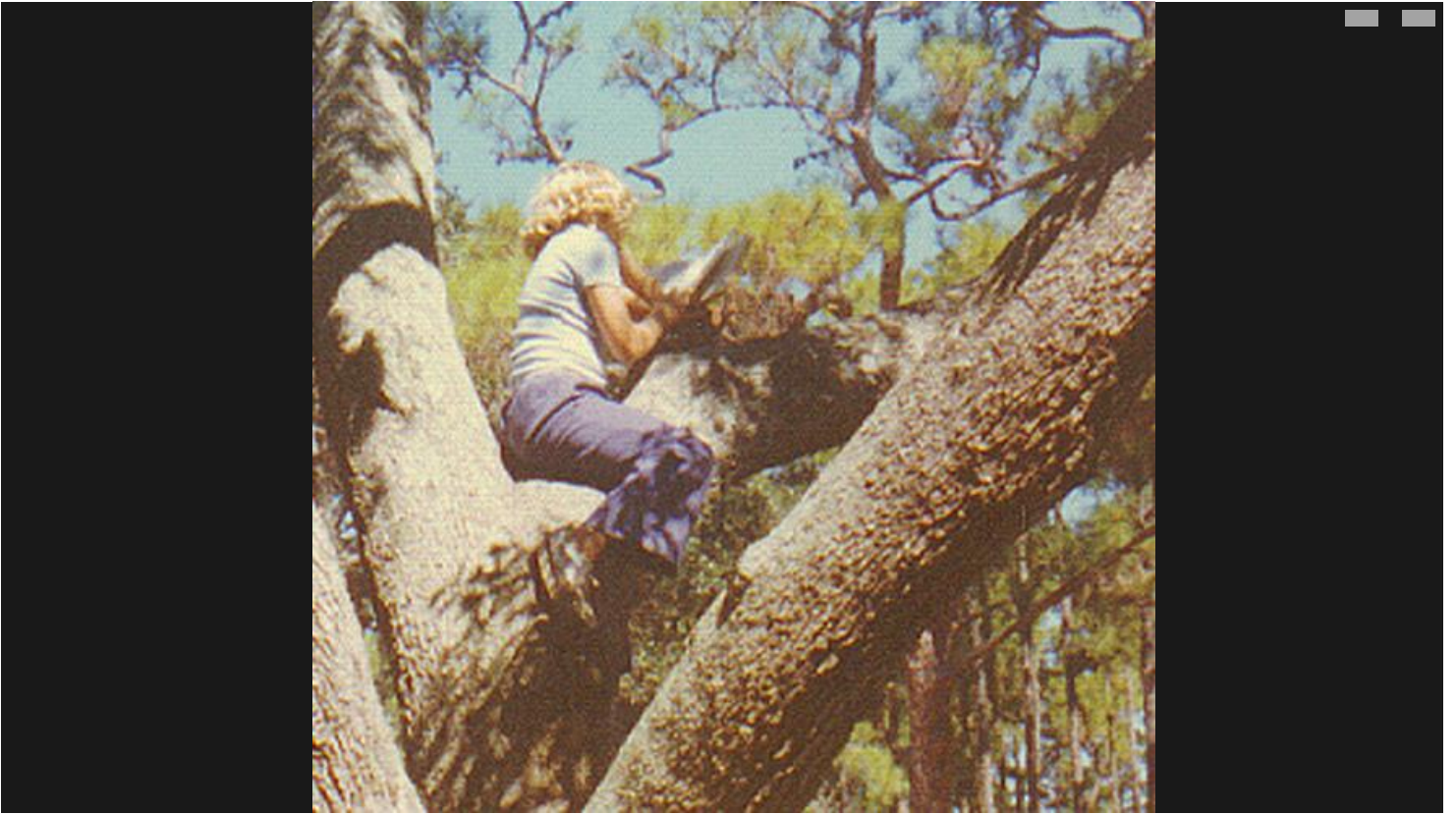


Photo submitted

by Laura Purdie Salas

As the youngest of four kids in a home filled with stern commands and tense silences, I often looked for other places to be. I found those other places in the pages of books. And I found my books at the Winter Park Public Library.

I spent so many muggy Florida mornings riding my Huffy down Brewer Hill with my Pippi Longstocking braids flying behind me. First, I'd swim at the Langford Hotel. Then I'd head to the library, a small white building tucked among moss-draped trees. Sometimes on the way home, my bike baskets full of books, I'd stop and read under one of the huge oak trees on the Rollins campus. It was the perfect way to be all alone and never lonely.

No matter what else was going on in my life, my friends waited at the library. Friends like Babar and Raggedy Ann and Lyle the Crocodile. And even when I got older and started working my way through the mystery section, the library always felt unfailingly safe. Tucked inside the pages of a book, I could be an elephant, a doll, a crocodile or a detective. I could live another kind of life and begin to imagine another kind of world.

The big wooden card catalog, parked in the main room like a giant treasure chest, answered all my questions. I loved the order of it. I loved looking up a subject or an author and finding the secret code that would lead me to those books.

And if the brown behemoth didn't have the answers, the librarians did. Directions for making barefoot sandals? They found them. The Agatha Christie book I wanted that wasn't on the shelf? They called me when it came in. The crumpled-up dollar bills I paid with when I ruined a book reading in the bathtub? They took them without accusation.

As a kid, I wished I could live at the library. White-haired folks leisurely read newspapers and novels, preschoolers sprawled on the floor with picture books, and we all existed there together, separate but interconnected by the beautiful web that books spin.

When I was 13, a more modern library was built. I was thrilled to have more books to choose from, and the librarians were as helpful as ever. But it was that early library that I loved. That I missed. It showed me that I could do anything with the help of a good book and a good librarian. It showed me what a community of readers looked like. And the books themselves showed me the kind of person I was and could become.

I was a voracious reader as a child, and now as an adult, I'm a children's writer. The thought of my own words being friends to young readers, in the same way books were my own best friends, fills me with joy.

Thank you, librarians everywhere! One library shaped me as a reader and a person. And all libraries build stronger communities and kinder kids.

Skywriting

Line after line of inky black birds forming the flocks that shift into words.

Page after page of tales winging by singing a story against a white sky.

Laura Purdie Salas, from "BookSpeak! Poems About Books," winner of the Minnesota Book Award — Clarion/Houghton Mifflin, illustrated by Josée Bisailon

Laura Purdie Salas has written more than 125 books for kids, including "Meet My Family,!" "If You Were the Moon," "Water Can Be..." and "BookSpeak!" Laura grew up in Florida and now lives and writes in Minnesota. She loves to get children excited about reading and writing. For more info, visit [laurasalas.com](http://laurasalas.com)

Minnesota authors were asked to reflect upon the importance of libraries in their life. This series is the result of that request. We encourage you to support and patronize the Walker Public Library as plans move forward with building a new library.