

....and then there was *The Secret Garden*.

When I was in grade school our fourth-grade teacher, Mother Mary Basil, liked to read to the class every day following lunchtime. Those 10 to 15 minutes were the best part of having to learn for six to seven hours a day instead of running and playing outdoors.

As 50 rambunctious boys and girls settled into chairs attached to wooden desks, the Ursaline nun cleared her throat and began the final chapter of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*. "Finally," I thought when she read, "The End" finishing the story. "Will she read a girl's story next?"

Mother Basil was ahead of her time. She believed in reading to her students. We loved her way of thinking. She must have thought that the reading time would prepare our minds to focus on the next subject to be taught: math. It worked for me until we came to Story Problems.

I could hardly wait for the day when she would begin her choice for the next read. All the former novels were about boys. It wasn't that I did not like the writings of Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens). It was that the selections were always about boy adventures. *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson was her first choice to read that year. "Where are the stories about girls?" I asked to myself.

...And then there was *The Secret Garden*.

Written by Frances Hodgson Burnett, our teacher's next selection was a treasure to open our imaginations and find the gems and jewels hiding inside novels and inside life.

Burnett was a writer with a gift to grab a little girls' attention. I was lost into a dream of flowers I would then just learn to know the names of: Iris, white lilies, delphinium and roses. (Later in life I would not only put these flowers in gardens I would feature the colors and flowers in wall quilts to bring the garden story to life on my Livingroom wall.) Burnett wrote many other novels, but the one in 1911 moved me to begin noticing my surroundings and to begin writing and to begin quilting, my form of gardening.

Mother Basil was a remarkable teacher. She opened imaginations with her story time, told students about her early days living in a small town and seeing The Buffalo Bill Cody Wild West Show. It ran for 30 years and performed in Montana in the early 1900's. One day she told us that her brother became a nurse. "A nurse, a nurse? We believed only girls were nurses. She told us that boys can be nurses as well and with a smile she said that her brother was a good nurse.

A vast world was surfacing with *The Secret Garden* selection. An entire garden of possibilities filled my senses. I just needed a nudge to open the gate.

It opens wide every Springtime. Hear that squeak of the hinge?

Lana Russ