

## READING

by Shelli Sivert  
 photography by Randy Nielson

# The difference a story makes

Storytelling traditions run deep in Amy Carr's family. Reminiscent of the old American radio drama, Amy's father used to call home when he was away on business with "Children's Story of the Hour." She and her siblings would huddle around the speakerphone for the latest chapter. His stories were always true historical events told from the eyes of fictional children that captivated his young audience.

Storytelling goes far beyond "once upon a time." It creates meaningful interactions with family, engages children in the world around them and is accessible to anyone. The power of a good story can, in a small way, even change the world for the better.

"I come from a family of unofficial storytellers," Amy says. In addition to enjoying her father's incredible stories, she admired her mother's voracity for reading. "I rarely saw my mother without a book."

Her parents had not set out to become storytellers; it was simply the way they connected with their children. On family outings, they told stories in the car. When any of them got in trouble, they knew a story was coming.

As a mother of three, Amy raises her children with the same philosophy. Her children like hearing about when she was a child: embarrassing experiences or how she got out of scrapes. "As an adult, I've become really fascinated with the real-life stories," she says. "It's in those stories that children can find their identity."

Amy looks back and relishes the stories her family shared. But it wasn't until an eye-opening experience in college that she realized the impact that sharing stories can have on children. While student teaching in inner-city D.C., it became clear to her that the children who performed better in school were those who had parental interaction at home, including reading and storytelling. "In every case, the children I felt the most confidence in ... were the ones that had that positive interaction with their parents."

Even more profound was discovering that the "home connection," as Amy calls it, could not be replaced by anything the schools did. After finishing her bachelor's degree in elementary education, she taught in the Provo School District. Amy continued studying these trends while earning a Master's degree in administration. "[The inner-city trends] were just as obvious when I came to Provo to teach."

Amy cites many reasons why some parents lack that level of

communication with their children. "Sometimes it was as simple as parents not knowing what to do. Sometimes it was parents not realizing how critical an element they played in their children's educations."

She was able to help parents learn valuable skills when she stopped teaching full-time and became a storyteller for the Provo Library infant and toddler program. When parents brought their children to story time, she shared tips on telling stories at home.

"It was a wonderful opportunity," Amy says. "I not only had the chance to interact with children, but to help their parents gain confidence in their abilities to teach and touch their children's lives through literacy."

According to Amy, telling stories is the fastest way to get children interested in reading. "Before they can read on their own, before they can recognize letters, it's the earliest form of literacy they can identify with."

When her family moved to American Fork, there was no infant and toddler program at that library. So, she helped start one. "The response was overwhelming and I was humbled at the sincere and dedicated effort parents put forth to provide their children with meaningful experiences."

Her most recent project was creating a library at her son's charter school. She teamed up with another woman who had a passion for reading and a degree in library science. Coupled with Amy's knowledge of books, they transformed an empty room into a beautiful library chock full of the best children's books.

As a board member for the Children's Literature Association of Utah and the book editor for *Wasatch Woman*, Amy stays active finding great books. She is constantly absorbed in books and stories for young and old — even teens — admitting a fetish for Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. Growing up, she enjoyed Laura Ingalls Wilder, Nancy Drew and Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Amy's enthusiasm for storytelling and reading is truly contagious. "There's something about telling a story that becomes a conversation." Although life has not turned out exactly as she planned, she could not be happier with where her path has taken her. "You come to realize that what you are doing in your home and your community is your own piece of saving the world." ww



## *look who's talking?*

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Storytelling goes far beyond "once upon a time" for Amy Carr. This mother of three — Hannah, Jacob and Matthew — believes the power of a good story can, in a small way, even change the world for the better. Amy uses storytelling as a way to connect with her children, family and community.