

Book Baubles for Mother's Day

BOOKBAG

By Mary Anne Duggan



Mothers take an oath of sorts—not verbally but in their hearts. They vow to get up for night feedings, nightmares and other nocturnal adventures. They promise to attend tea parties, wipe noses, carpool, play homework cop and receive little thanks for their maternal magic. Mothers are over-worked and underpaid—at least in a monetary sense—and yet they wouldn't trade their lot for all the baubles in Bloomingdales.

Erandi's Braids, by Antonio Hernandez Madrigal, is a story about the love between mother and child that takes place in a world far from Bloomingdales. Erandi and her mother live in the village of Patzcuaro, Mexico. They live a meager life in an adobe home, where they make tortillas and catch fish with a threadbare net. When their resources run out, each decides to sell their braids to buy a gift for the other. Gifted illustrator Tomie dePaola kindles the reader's compassion in the skillful way he draws the characters' eyes.

Erandi's Braids brings back memories of another pair of black braids that captivated me when I was young. They belonged to a woman named June, who wore them as a child. They were lopped off during an overzealous haircut and saved to share with future generations. Fifty years later, they sit where they have for decades—in the second drawer of her highboy, next to baby blankets and old photos, in the bedroom she shared with her husband for their long, joyous marriage.

June no longer wears braids but she did make a motherly vow that she shared with me when my children entered toddlerhood. "My mother was always very busy cleaning the house—too busy to play with her children," June told me. "I swore I would take the time for my own kids." She called it "floor time," as in "Mary, you've got to spend more time on the floor with your kids." Like June's mother, I have busy-ness in my blood. June's words made an impact on me at a time when I needed a motherly kick in the pants.

Mothers need wisdom passed on from those who have been there, done that. We need someone to tell us to "sleep when the baby sleeps" and "pick our battles." We

need someone to tell us to read *Runaway Bunny* when we want to explain our unconditional love to our little ones or *Love You Forever* to remember that our mothering impacts eternity.

Books also impact eternity and it's a fortunate mother who learns how to spark the love of reading in a child. According to Jane Healy, author of *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don't Think*, an estimated 80 percent of the books in this country are read by 10 percent of the population. We are becoming "aliterate" as a society, meaning we can read but we don't choose to.

Mothers can play a pivotal role in increasing that 10 percent. *The Mother-Daughter Book Club* by Shireen Dodson outlines how Dodson, her daughter and a group of mothers and daughters created "a place to speak freely and grow." Dodson includes tips on organizing and leading a book club and finding and reading books.

In *Tell Me a Story, Mama* by Angela Johnson with pictures by David Soman, a mother tells stories of her youth to her eager daughter. The book is both funny and touching and may jog a mother's memories enough to share her own stories.

Angel to Angel: A Mother's Gift of Love by Walter Dean Myers, is a good book for sharing tender moments. Historical pictures of African-American children with their mothers accompany Myers' wonderful poems.

Emma and Mommy Talk to God, by Marianne Williamson, illustrated by Julia Noonan, is a story of a mother and daughter praying and shows the power of two voices coming together to make the world a better place. Written with religious neutrality, this book ponders the fundamental question, "Is there good in everyone?"

Because most moms are shedding at least a few tears of joy this month, go ahead and plunge into the classic Wilhelm Grimm story *Dear Mili*, illustrated by Maurice Sendak. Be forewarned—this story about a mother's love receives a five-Kleenex rating. It also deals with death and could frighten very young readers.



Mother's Day isn't all boo-hoos and waterworks. *Mommy Doesn't Know My Name*, by Suzanne Williams and illustrated by Andrew Shachat, can set mother and child to giggles. We all have pet names for our children—"Pumpkin," "Peanut," "Sport," "Honey." This story features a literal kid in a literal time of life (preschool) who gets confused by the many monikers her mother tacks on her.

I Love My Mommy Because . . . by Laurel Porter Gaylord shows that humans aren't alone in the mothering business. Illustrator Ashley Wolff shows animals doing what comes naturally—mothering their young. "I love my mommy because she swims with me" shows a grey whale and her calf. An owl's chicks love her because "she is not afraid of the dark."

Like the mother deer who spit-shines her young, June is my informal editor of sorts. She has read everything I've written, including every word of two books. She offers constructive criticism but also heaps on praise, to which I respond, "You're only saying that because you're my mom." She assures me that's not true and I believe her, just like I believe I am her favorite child (even though my brothers and sister would disagree). My mother hasn't read this piece yet. I gave her the day off from editing to say, "Happy Mother's Day, Mom!"



Contributing Editor Mary Anne



Duggan is a teacher mentor specialist for the Scottsdale Unified School District and the mother of Taylor, 10, and Seanie, 8. Reach her by e-mail at bookbag@razkids.com