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Picturebooks

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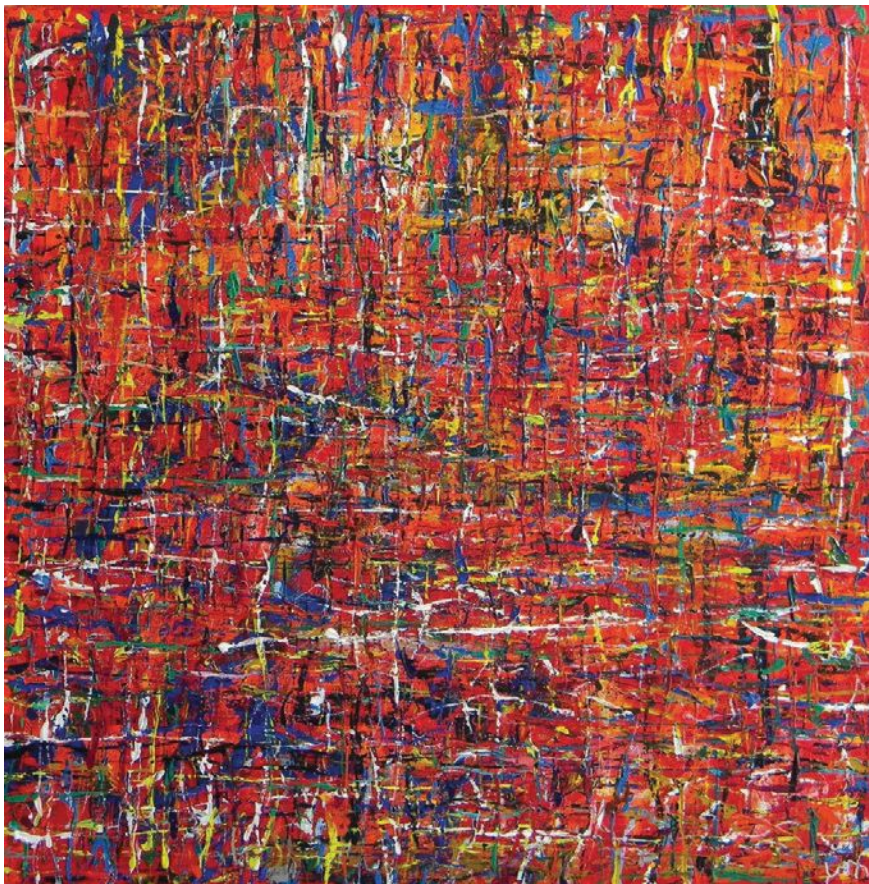
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‘Wired’



W.E. PUGH '76
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Picturebooks

BY MAUREEN SCHLANGEN

My son Trevor Schlangen '16, struck with a momentary wave of nostalgia, sent me a text a few months ago, inquiring about a picture book he remembered — *The Grouchy Ladybug* by Eric Carle.

I cringed.

“I don’t have that book anymore,” I texted.

“How? Why?” came his reply.

Gulp. Is there a “guilt-ridden mother” emoji?

When my sons were little in the 1990s, I developed a moderately expensive book habit. At the time, I edited a raft of niche publications at the *Dayton Daily News*, one of which was a parenting tabloid called

KidSense. It featured a monthly column by Jean Gaffney, a local children’s librarian who was later named to the national selection committees for the Randolph Caldecott Medal and the John Newbery Medal, two of the most prestigious honors in all of children’s literature. She had impeccable taste in literature, and if she wrote about a book or an author, I knew it would be a treasure. She was never wrong.

“I still have a bunch,” I tapped back, “but over the years, I’ve been giving them to kids who visit the house or need a good book. I like to spread good stuff around.”

I wasn’t even aware *The Grouchy Ladybug* was a favorite, though I do remember

reading it to him dozens of times. He started asking about others.

“*Officer Buckle and Gloria?*” Whew. Have it. Thanks to this book by Peggy Rathmann about a dog that enlivened a police officer’s soporific safety presentations, both Trevor and his brother, Joe '20, can drop often comically timed tips such as “Never stand on a swivel chair,” or “Never leave a thumbtack where you might sit on it,” or the always handy, “Never use water on a grease fire.”

The inquiries continued with a flood of pleasant memories as I sat in front of the bookcase.

“Patricia Polacco?” he texted. I’d kept a couple by this acclaimed illustrator ... but I’d long since parted with the best one — *Babushka’s Doll*.

“The Pueblo one?” He meant *Arrow to the Sun* by Gerald McDermott — a story with striking parallels to Christ’s Nativity. Have it.

“*Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins?*” Long gone was Erich Kimmel’s retelling of a Jewish folk tale about a sharp-witted traveler outsmarting monsters intent on keeping him from lighting the menorah.

“What about the one with the green three-leaf?” That’s Susan Meddaugh’s *Hog-Eye*, a hilarious tale of a pig outwitting a wolf with tricks that included convincing the wolf to roll around in poison ivy. Also long gone.

Then he named two by David Wisniewski, whose breathtaking but heartbreaking *Golem* won the Caldecott in 1997. I’d kept that one, but not the one he and Craig Attenweiler '16, Trevor’s friend since UD Children’s Center (now the Bombeck Center) and now the best man in his wedding, loved even more: *Rain Player* tells the story of a Mayan youth named Pik who challenged a god to a ballgame called pok-a-tok to end a devastating drought.

I had forgotten how much I read to those kids ... but Trevor hadn’t.

“You found a lot of excellent books with excellent art,” he texted. “I thank you for giving me that appreciation.”

I apologized for giving away so many of these works that he and his brother clearly valued.

“No,” he texted. “*Rain Player* deserved to be shared. Keep sharing them. They all deserve to be shared.”

Schlangen has worked in Roesch Library as UD’s institutional repository manager since 2014. At the time she was buying all these books, she never imagined she’d end up working in a library.