



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“You don’t mind my asking, but what color was this balloon when it was a balloon?”

“Red.”

“I just wondered. Red, my favorite color.”

-From A.A. Milne’s
“Eeyore Has a Birthday”

An extended listserv conversation about the narrators of audio books caught my eye recently. For many years I commuted to Fremont from Albany and books on tape made a huge difference in my irritation level as I encountered the usual slow or even stopped traffic on the freeway. Listening to a gripping story, read by an accomplished narrator, can make a trip that seems interminable into a trip that is over too soon. My co-workers and I had numerous conversations about our preferred readers and we were faithful to them – frequently listening to a book simply because of the narrator.

So, I was glad when this topic was brought up and even happier others seemed to feel as strongly as I do about the importance of the reader. The original question was posed as a thought: “The idea is that, over and above genre, pace, characterization, mood, etc., the narrator can make or break somebody’s desire to read/listen to a book all by

him/herself.” The librarians – who represent all kinds of libraries, from school libraries to public ones to academic – enthusiastically agreed with this premise and most shared some of their favorite readers.

A few of the people have spent a great deal of time thinking about, listening to and reviewing audio books and they included recommended links to websites or blogs. One of these was to *Audiofile* magazine’s online presence, *Audiopolis* (www.audiofilemagazine.com/audiopolis). The wonderful part of this site is there are audio clips included in the reviews, so listeners can decide for themselves whether or not they like the recording. I tried several of these and I particularly enjoyed the snippet from *Igraine the Brave* by Cornelia Funke, read by Xanthe Elbrick.

One of the contributors, Mary Burkey, provided a link to a piece she wrote for *Audiofile* (www.audiofilemagazine.com/features/feal1007.html). Titled “Talking the Talk: An Audio-

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book Lexicon,” it starts with: “Can’t find the word to describe what you hear? This newly compiled dictionary will encourage careful listening, guide critical review, even facilitate an audiobook discussion group at your public library or coffee shop.” Included in the article are several pages of definitions, like “outro: information at end of production” and “page rate: how long it takes a narrator to complete a page of text, also known as pick-up and reader acquisition rate.”

Other contributors noted that if they didn’t like the reader, it could put them off the books, because the voice of the narrator stays in their head. I have had that experience but eventually the voice fades and I am left with the words again.

And then there are the voices that I am glad to have in my head. Our family can recite long sections of *Winnie the Pooh*

because of two old LPs we still own: *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and *More Winnie-the-Pooh*, both read by Maurice Evans. “Eeyore has a Birthday” still makes us laugh, as we recall the slow sad voice of Eeyore as he suddenly realizes his popped birthday balloon fits perfectly in his empty honey jar.

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Other recordings I have particularly enjoyed have been Will Patton’s narrations of James Lee Burke novels – I can’t imagine

anyone else being Dave Robicheaux – and the amazing recording of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, narrated by Sally Darling.

As I was writing this column, I realized there are many books I say I have read, when I have actually listened to them. There should be a word specifically for that experience, but I haven’t come up with one yet. Any suggestions?