



Rebecca Goss

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## My Reading Habits

**I**T HAS TAKEN ME UNTIL MY FORTIES to feel comfortable with the amount I read. As a writer, I feel I should announce that I devour books. That I am someone who is rarely seen without a book in her hand and can quote verbatim from seminal tomes. Not so. My reading can be erratic, some months greedily consuming novel after novel, then turning my back on books for weeks after that. My younger years, during school and university, saw more consistent reading habits. Between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, I read all the time, numerous life-changing books that defined the writer and woman I would become. But it is not uncommon for me now to experience reading droughts. Dry spells, where the pile of poetry volumes and unbegun novels on my bedside table just *refuses* to tempt me. This often coincides with tiredness, anxiety and the fact that I read a lot of creative work as part of my day job. I work as a writing tutor and mentor, and my desk is home to multiple manuscripts that demand my close attention. I have had to battle with a lot of guilt around reading in my adult life. Reading has felt something of a luxury, something people of leisure can afford to do. Reading a novel for pleasure, in the daytime, has in the past felt as decadent as a solo trip to the cinema whilst my children are at school: something I have often longed to do, but never dared. How can I sit and read, when there is washing to be done, food to be cooked, work to be finished? When the appetite for reading does return to me, after a dry spell, it is gorgeous and thrilling and I cannot wait to turn to a book's pages each night, to unite again with the characters inside. But I accept now, it may not be like that all the time. I read when I can, I read when I want to. There are always books nearby, and for this I am grateful.



The one consistent reading habit I have retained is reading to my children. Reading played an important part in bonding with my stepchildren as we settled into bedtime routines and the new shape of our family. I read to my first and second babies in hospital rooms on the days they were born, and for every day after that. I have read to my children as they sat snug in my lap, splashed in the bath, or lay in the garden on sun-warmed grass. As my daughter heads towards high school, she and I have started to share the reading of a book, each of us reading two chapters aloud before she turns out the light. I love this regular ritual of ours. Because no matter what kind of day we have had, no matter how fractious or irritable we might have been, once we are immersed in the story and listening to each other's voices we become calm, and happily transported to the wonder of an alternative world.