

I first started listening to stories when my mom read to me. I grew up on Dr. Seuss, and our copy of *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* was battered and falling apart by the time it was retired.

My sister and I would ride our bikes to the library in the next town over from our home in Trevor, Wisconsin, and rent as many books as we could--including our first books on tape. We almost inevitably caught colds and sicknesses at the same time, and we'd listen to the books while languishing on the couch. I can't recall the titles, but there were some excellent stories we missed as we fell asleep!

But I stopped listening to audiobooks for quite a long time. My mom developed an addiction to them while I was at college, and any time I was home she'd have her headphones in while gardening, and was always curating her library waiting lists. Meanwhile, I'd rediscovered a love for fanfiction, which is how I reentered the audiobook game: podfic.

After graduation I was asked to come teach at a music summer camp, and I decided to try out some fan recorded fanfic for the commute, only to find a staggering amount of content made with such care, and all for other fans. Hundreds of hours put in by amateur narrators, and I had some great stuff to listen to on a long drive back and forth to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Almost inevitably, I ran out of podfic. I needed something to listen to, so I went back to my roots: the Redwall Books by Brian Jacques. Books that I had read over and over, and with full cast recordings including the legendary raconteur himself! After his death in 2011, hearing his voice read me the stories that had first kindled my love of fantasy was sublime. They were so good, I even hunted down old tape versions that were obsolete in the era of digital borrowing and Audible.

I left off on listening during my first year of teaching to develop a drinking habit and go down my own writing rabbit hole...and then I got the email that I had audio credits expiring, so I crowdsourced some recommendations, and after multiple reputable sources kept telling me the same thing, I finally bought *The Eye of the World*.

The rest, you might say, is history.

I was hooked. I devoured the entire *Wheel of Time* series in just under two months. Eighteen days of fifty spent listening to it in every spare moment, and some I should have spent sleeping, immersed in Robert Jordan's story of ordinary people becoming extraordinary.

When *A Memory of Light* was over, I felt a kind of loss; what do I do now?! I bought *The Way of Kings* by Brandon Sanderson in a kind of panic, and Michael and Kate delivered me another great story, this time unfinished, with more to come.

Over the next two years, I listened to an average of two books a week, and not short ones. I became my mom, listening at all times, and we went back to the beginning--this time sharing stories with each other and recommending things back and forth. She has yet to listen to *The Wheel of Time*, but my sister and I are working on it. Audiobooks gave me the inspiration to find out what kind of stories I wanted to hear that didn't yet exist, so I'm writing my own, and reading them out loud to make sure they might one day make someone else feel as lost as I did when they are over.