

Phone a Picture Book

Broadcast on EnergizeGreen – October 3, 2009

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Some things that were once powered only by hand in the true greenie tradition, now admittedly, work even better electronically. Take toothbrushes for example, or screwdrivers. Recently, I read that iPhone was coming out with its first children's picture book and I thought, *Why?* Picture books *are* for little kids right? Little kids don't own iPhones do they? Or maybe allowances today are bigger than I thought.

The last picture books I read were so beautiful I *had* to touch them. The power was in the artistry. Books such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Chicken Sunday*, and *Goodnight Moon*. I gave them all voice, along with my children, who memorized every word, asking me repeatedly to "Read it again momma." And when I kissed them goodnight, I left the books in my children's beds, just as they knew I would. And that's when they opened them again, to sound out words and make up their own stories, and turn the pages over and over until they fell off to sleep, dreaming magical dreams. And then in the morning, I'd hear them in their beds, the sound of the book's binding crackling from wear, of the pages brushing against their pajamas, and of their laughter as they recounted each story, sometimes to one other, sometimes to the dog lying between them -- happy to be part of the pack and of this familiar routine.

Were it not for books made from paper, how would you know the joy of being so close to a child you can hear every breath -- sense the anticipation -- turning pages together, waiting, hoping to learn what happens next? It's a tactile experience so basic and so pure that you hope it will live on forever in your child's mind, and that someday, the child will draw from it, recall it -- perhaps when it's needed most. When he or she wants to shut out the world and disappear into the story, and while flipping the pages, returns to this place of long ago -- this intoxicating place you went to together.

And now iPhone thinks we need to replace these paper books with an electronic version. So we can curl up together with "it" -- touch the cold screen. So grandparents can send packages with what exactly inside? So children can know the thrill of standing in line for an author or illustrator to sign the backs of their iPhones? So we can pass these electronic heirlooms on for generations? And are we really going to leave iPhones in a toddler's bed? Will Apple be childproofing these?

All I know is this: A printed book needs no battery. It'll be around long after the iPhone has died. The memory of turning real pages, of smelling the ink on paper, of being a part of the magic -- not just watching it, will last a lifetime.