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Stephanie Haker

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom: The First Seed In My Garden

A told B, and B told C, "I'll meet you at the top of the coconut tree."

"Whee!" said D to E F G, "I'll beat you to the top of the coconut tree."

Mom said it was almost quiet time, so I dumped a few more sprinkles on my ice cream, not because I hated quiet time, but just to make a point of being obstinate. Actually, quiet time was probably my favourite part of the day. We'd gather in Brother's bed, and through our reading I was given language. I could express myself. I got to identify with my friends in books I'd read, and felt like I had more relationships than just my cousins before starting kindergarten. I learned to keep books with me, carrying them around like a garden in my pocket.

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"I have a surprise for the two of you during quiet time today," Mom told Brother and me. Our excitement couldn't be contained, and we knew that it would be a very good night, because a surprise always meant a new book. Stories came to life when they passed through my mother's lips. It had something to do with her teaching elementary school. With every reading she gave us just enough time to look at each picture, and she'd use her authentic, emphatic voices throughout.

With brushed teeth and a belly full of ice cream, I climbed into Brother's bed with him and Mom. Daddy sat at the foot of the bed. We had assumed our positions and now were ready for Mom to begin our nightly reading. "Daddy," she said, "would you go get the surprise for the kids?" I always thought it was funny that she called him Daddy in front of us, because we knew his name was Paul, and we felt grown up for knowing. He walked out, and came back in with a wrapped gift. Brother and I ripped it open together carefully, like we were going to reuse the paper for our next book.

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom! Will there be enough room? ... The whole alphabet up the...OH, NO!

The first time Mom read *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* to us we were taken aback by the letters' personalities. Mom could read it in this slightly sassy voice that we began to emulate; we'd say everything that way, with just a little more attitude than normal. "Get a grip, Mawj," I'd say with my little hands on my hips. Mom and Dad thought it endearing, and neither of our mouths were ever soapy with punishments.

We begged Mom and Dad to read it to us every night for a few weeks straight, and because I could read pretty well at this point, I would read the book during down-time to Brother, using a combination of memorization and reading. These were the few times we weren't fighting to the death; *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* was something of a saviour for a few years in the Haker family.

Skit skat skoodle doot, flip flop flee. Everybody's running to the coconut tree. Mamas and Papas and Uncles and Aunts hug their little dears and dust their pants.

One day, when Mom picked us up from the babysitter, she told us she had a surprise for us in the car. We jumped in and *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* was waiting on the seat for us. We were happy, but didn't think this warranted a surprise. I remember her fiddling with the radio in the driveway, and then something magical occurred. *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* was being rapped all around me in our minivan. Brother and I flipped through the book, page by page with the rap, trying to anticipate when and how each word would be said. Mom giggled up front because she knew how we already loved it.

Car time had always been good time. We'd talk about our days, practice math fast-facts, sing the alphabet song, learn vocabulary words. And for weeks on end we listened to the rap version of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. We memorized it, sang it like a song

around the house, felt the sweet taste of the honey words on our lips as they escaped. We felt that we had the power of language within us.

And the sun goes down on the coconut tree. But Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, look there's a full moon.

A is out of bed and this is what he said, "Dare, double dare, you can't catch me. I'll beat you to the top of the coconut tree." Chicka Chicka Boom Boom.

It's not that *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* changed my life. It could have been any other book, and as long as we owned it, held it close to our hearts, and let it grow within us, it could be ours. But *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* was that book for us. It was the book that made me love language, love the way literature brought together a family, love the way that I could know myself. I carried that love with me, nurtured it, and brought other books along for the ride. The garden grew up, thicker and taller and wider, and continually is growing. I am needing bigger pockets these days, and am pulling more books along like flowers. All thanks to *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.

References

Martin, B. Jr., & Archambault, J. (1989). *Chicka chicka boom boom*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks

Stephanie Haker is a senior AYA Language Arts Education major at Miami University of Ohio. She enjoys writing, reading, long conversations and dancing. She wants to thank her parents for teaching her to be passionate, for supporting her in all that she does, and for reading to her every night as a child.

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