

I like big words and I can not lie.

Hello Friends, and Happy New Year to you.

As I spent time recently getting my Audio Bible (more on that in the Notes From My Keyboard section below) together for the narrator of my upcoming book, *Welcome to Mansfield*, I was inspired to write this month's essay about audiobooks.

I will let you in on a dirty secret of mine. I didn't always love audiobooks. Gasp! I know. I'm sorry. I was wrong. I'm wrong a lot, so this isn't a huge shock, but I was really, really wrong about this. I used to think that audiobooks were cheating. Young, dumb, and wrong me used to think that if you didn't sit down, and read every single word of the story, then the experience lacked value. Keep in mind that I was well aware that every single elementary school teacher in the world reads to kids. I was read to as a kid. Hearing stories allowed me to visualize stories in a way that actually helped me become a better reader. Visualization is a huge part of my writing process. I see the whole thing play out in my head; a skill I first learned from *hearing* a story. Still, I was just a stubborn doofus who said audiobooks were not good. Ugh.

Fast forward to some point well into my adulthood after I had kids (to whom I read all the time) when everything changed. I needed to take a long drive somewhere by myself. Normally, I would just listen to music. I love music. I listen to music all the time. I am listening to Weezer's *OK Human* right now (because they have a song on there about audiobooks, but also...it's Weezer and they make good writing music). However, I was teaching Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* that semester in my American Novels course and while I didn't *need* to read it again before teaching it, I *wanted* to read it again because that book is amazing.

I knew how long the trip would take, and I would be alone for all of it. I saw that my local branch of the library had an audio version of the book read by Ethan Hawke, one of my all-time favorite actors. I thought, "well, I can try it just this one time, right? It may be cheating, but I have to drive and I have to read the book. It's just one time. I've already read the book 10 times in my life." I went on and on justifying why I should give it a try until I wore myself down and picked up the books on CD on my way out of town.

I put disc one in the player and through the magic of Kurt's words and Ethan's voice, all the things I loved about the book burst to life. I became unstuck in time. I flew away to Tralfamadore with Billy Pilgrim. I survived the firebombing of Dresden. It. Was. Spectacular. How could I have ever been so wrong about anything before? I mean, I knew I was an audio learner, so I should have just known it would be like this, but young, dumb, and wrong me was so stubborn.

That, my friends, was that. I was hooked. I checked out CDs and Cassettes and Playaways (self-contained MP3 players that had one book each on them). The number of books I read instantly doubled. I could read in the car, while working out, or doing stuff around the house. If I was awake and not listening to music, I was listening to a book.



Now through the magic of the elves who run the internet, I can get books delivered directly to my devices. I have four library cards (don't judge) so I can have access to all the audiobook options.

Cloud Library and Hoopla Digital offer amazing app-based services, but my favorite service is still Overdrive (also called Libby) because I can download books directly to my old-timey MP3 player. I don't have to worry that a phone call or text will interrupt me while I'm reading. I am so into audiobooks, that I spent a few years writing audiobook reviews for *Audiofile Magazine*. I pick up advanced listening copies from Net Galley. I have

favorite narrators. I just today finished a book that was objectively not great, but because it was read by the ever-spectacular January LaVoy, I finished. She, along with Fiona Hardingham, Jayne Entwistle, and the iconic Jim Dale fill out my Mt. Rushmore of narrators. If one of them is reading it, the odds are, I am going to pick it up even if the book doesn't look that interesting.

I would love to hear what you think about audiobooks. Who are your favorite narrators? Do you see the actions play out like a movie when you listen along? Let me know. Send me a message on my website or on Instagram or Facebook.

Notes From My Bookshelf

Well, I did the thing I said I would do at the end of the year and on December 31st, I finished *War and Peace*. I have a lot to say about it, but I am going to save that for an upcoming podcast. Keep your eyes and ears peeled for that. It will be on Comics in Motion.

So far this year, I've finished 14 books. I would love to say I've loved them all, but that would be a fib. I have really enjoyed reading Chandler's Marlowe books, I finished the first two already. They are fast-paced and super fun. Paul Tremblay's *The Cabin at the end of the World* was a tense and enjoyable mystery/horror adventure. I plan to see the upcoming movie adaptation, so I thought I would give it a read first.

The other two notable books from the early part of 2023 that I really enjoyed were Nick Hornby's *Dickens and Prince*, a book where he compares the genius and creative output of the two artists, and star of the TV adaptation of one of his books, Minnie Driver, put out a memoir called *Managing Expectations*. She reads the audiobook herself and is as funny and charming as you would expect her to be.

Notes From My Keyboard

I wrote another 1000 words this morning bringing *That Other Dashwood Girl* up to 33,000 words and 105 pages. I am feeling great. The Kinks have accidentally become the soundtrack of this book and that has been a pleasant surprise for me and for my heroine, Maggie. I am enjoying myself immensely and I hope that when this one makes it into the world in 2024, you will enjoy it as well.

Now that you've read my essay, you can imagine that when I found out that 4 Horsemen was not only going to publish my book series but was going to make an audiobook of them all and make them available on library services, I was full of joy and soaring high. They asked me to make an Audio Bible, which, for those of you who don't know, (I didn't know until just a few months ago), an Audio Bible is a document that explains the speaking patterns, accents, and auditory ticks that characters have. I also record a sample of how I want the names pronounced. Most of my names are straightforward but keep in mind, my UK friends wouldn't pronounce the H in my given name, but since my book takes place in America, if I wrote myself into it, which I most certainly did not, I would want the reader to know that it is Anthony, not An-tyony.

I can't wait for you all to be able to hear the words I've written come to life. Although, I will be pleased if you want the old-school, printed book as well!

Thanks again for subscribing,

ARF

