

The coolest grown-up I ever knew: My teacher



By Elizabeth Moore and Special to CNN

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Elizabeth Moore/CNN iReport

Elizabeth Moore, last on left in second row, in her fourth-grade class photo with Barbara Belt, left, top row.

Editor’s Note: Elizabeth Moore fell in love with storytelling because of her fourth-grade teacher, Barbara Belt. The Maryland resident shared a tribute to her for Teacher Appreciation Week. Moore is a marine conservationist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Her story first appeared on [CNN iReport](#).

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Author thanks teacher for helping her find herself in writing

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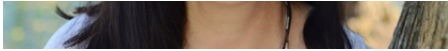
(CNN) — Ms. Belt was by far the coolest grown-up I knew as a kid. And she still is.

My fourth-grade teacher was probably about my mother’s age, but she seemed so young. Ms. Belt was pretty in that clean-cut, long dark-haired ’70s kind of way and mysteriously hip to a child just figuring out she was going to be nerdy her whole life.

I remember loving her from the first day of class. About a third of the way through the year, my love became absolute adoration.



Ms. Belt read to us every afternoon, my favorite time of the school day. “James and the Giant Peach” was strange, and I didn’t like it. The next selection didn’t sound very promising either: “The Lion, the Witch, and the



Elizabeth Moore

Wardrobe.” I have a vague recollection of scrunching my nose up at it and Ms. Belt laughing and telling me to give it a chance.

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I was steadily reading my way through the library at Mannheim Elementary School in Mannheim, Germany, where my dad was stationed in the military. I knew what enchantments lay between the covers of books, but I was also obstinate.

No one was going to make me like anything I didn't want to.

Instead, I fell in love, hung on every word of C.S. Lewis' masterpiece until the breathless end, and tumbled into heartbreak.

Over? How could it be over? It felt like the greatest tragedy that could ever be in my very young life. I didn't know then there were still six more awaiting me in the series, so when I went home, I did the most logical thing: I wrote my own sequels.

“The Chronicles of Trilania” are a three-volume, 27-page epic fully illustrated with crayon drawings. It was an adoring tribute to and blatant copy of the first of the “Narnia” series.

I loved the act of writing, holding a completed story in my hands and knowing it was mine.

When I shared my Trilania stories with Ms. Belt, she was instantly so excited and warm and encouraging – it was just what a shy 9-year-old girl needed.

I didn't know it then, but I was handing her my heart. She very carefully and affectionately gave it back to me.



After a time, when it became clear writing wasn't going to be a passing phase, my mother simply gave me all the paper, pencils and clipboards I wanted and let me go.

I kept churning out stories after that. They were long and

Moore, left, and her siblings at their home in Germany.

exuberant, dense with noble or evil characters, fraught with high-flying emotion and far-flung adventures. There was nothing subtle about them – all pathos and celebration, triumph and tragedy.

Writing was as easy as breathing then, and I could imagine nothing finer than spending my life doing just that. But I grew up and was convinced (or convinced myself) that storytelling was fine as a hobby. A grown-up had to have a real job.

I went on to a satisfying career in marine conservation. But I didn't know how not to write, so I kept going.

As I prepare for Act III or IV of my life, I am turning back to the part of me who is a storyteller first and foremost. I hope to one day give myself the gift of writing stories full time.

I didn't know then what kind of magic my fourth-grade year would turn out to be. I went into fifth grade anticipating miracles, and though Mrs. Melius was lovely, she wasn't Ms. Belt. No other teacher ever would be. But that's OK.

Ms. Belt gave me the greatest gift that any teacher could have: She helped me find who I really am.

This piece was edited by CNN's Christina Zdanowicz.

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