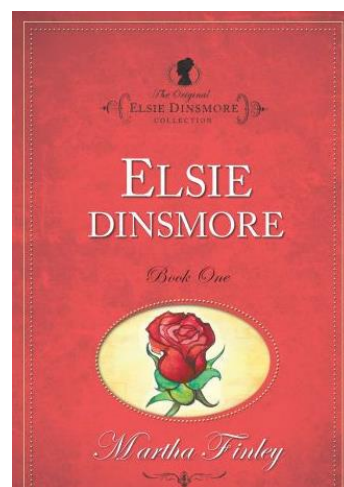
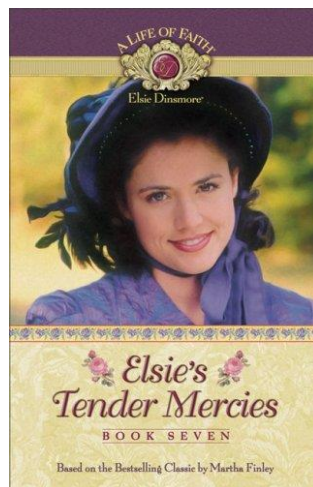
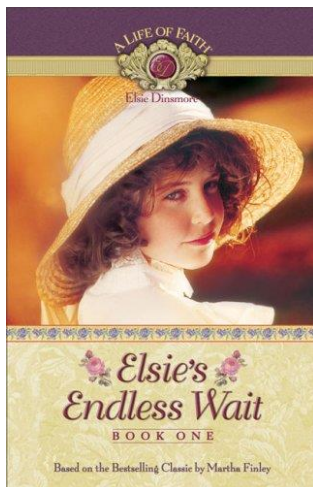
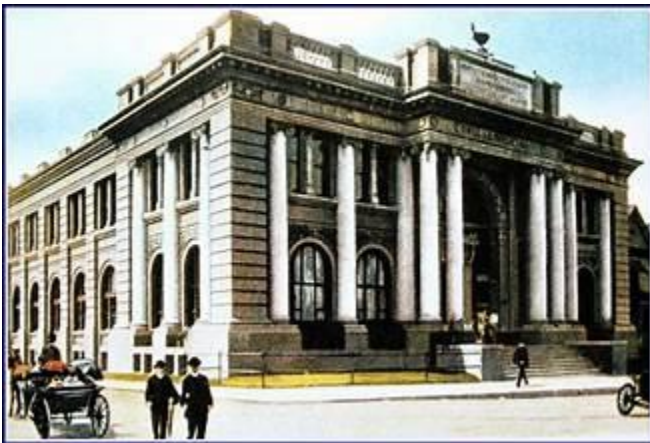


Reading

When I was growing up, I had several good resources to satisfy my voracious reading appetite. The first was the family breakfast room, adjacent to the kitchen, which had two opposite walls covered floor to ceiling with book shelves, filled with a great variety of books. Some did not particularly interest me, notably a four-volume History of Texas, impressively bound in black leather. I felt obliged try to read those books but found them unbearably dull. Looking at them today (they're still taking up too much space on my bookshelves), I agree with my early judgment about that particular history, and unfortunately that experience led me away from history for too many years. If nothing else presented itself in those days, I would take out random volumes of a very old, green-bound encyclopedia (it was called *International*, I think) and would read whatever article presented itself wherever I opened the book. Sometimes I found the reading rewarding and would further pursue the direction the article suggested - I wasn't entirely against fact. But I soon determined that make-believe usually had the greatest appeal for me, and generally I would choose to reread the few books of fiction on the shelves. There was a set of red-bound Elsie Dinsmore books with their treacly contents relating Elsie's blameless search for the approval of her remote father. Mother found my reading of such books of questionable value, one of the few times I remember her addressing the content of my reading. I remember thinking, with considerable amusement, that she must not have liked the books when she was a child, for they must have been hers. While I quite agree with her now, then the romantic plight of the poor little rich girl was just the sort of thought-numbing material I was interested in. But Mother was likely to try to pry me away from whatever book I was wrapped up in so that I could practice the piano, dust the living room furniture, which I hated, or even play outside. I remember also the lure of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and *Girl of the Limberlost*, both books that I occasionally revisited. There was *Message to Garcia*, or some such title. I didn't understand the book or why my grandmother had mentioned it to me as one of her favorites, but I read it anyway. My reading was simply omnivorous. I had a happy enough childhood but I clearly found the most appeal in books which were most unlike real life as I knew it, pure escapism.

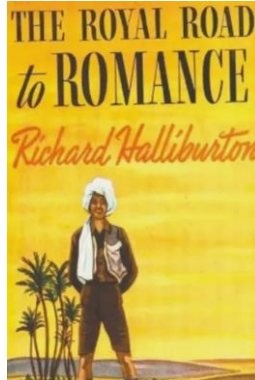
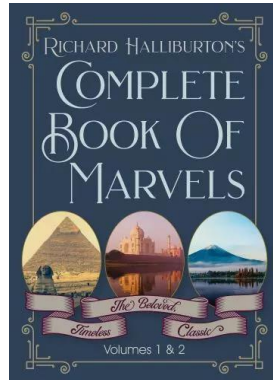
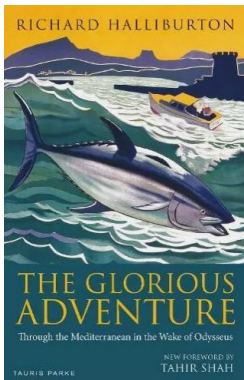


By the time I was ten or eleven, I was allowed to go, usually alone, to the downtown public library, the beginning of a long love affair with the books in libraries. The building was one of many Carnegie gifts across the country of municipal public library facilities. It was built shortly after the turn of the century and was a great heap of classic gray stone located on the corner of Harwood and Commerce Streets, across from City Hall. I was not bold by nature, but my desire to read helped me conquer my fear of going up the steps to the children's library section on the second floor. The main floor had a lofty ceiling, at least the equivalent of two ordinary floors. The stair to the second floor consisted of wide, white marble steps separated by lacy wrought-iron risers. The view through those risers to the lofty, formal reading rooms on the first floor intimidated me until I learned to keep my eyes fixed on where I was going instead of where I'd been. The size of the children's room which occupied half of the second floor combined with the many shelves of books was intimidating, another obstacle I had to overcome in order to feed my reading habit. I later empathized with Thomas Wolfe when he wrote about pacing the stacks in the Harvard Library, frustrated because he couldn't consume all of the books there no matter how fast or how long he read.



I first became acquainted with the children's section through a summertime reading program which directed my attention to certain kinds of books among the generous offerings, thus helping me focus my search for reading material. I started out to earn the golden key which was the prize for any child who completed a prescribed schedule of reading during the summer. But I soon discovered the joy of consuming books in fields I'd never dreamed about. Despite the advice of my favorite librarian who thought the books I chose were often inappropriate for my age, I found a number of authors who always fulfilled their promise of exciting reading, and, a surprise to me, they weren't always writers of fiction. Tops among such authors I discovered that summer was Richard Halliburton, whose continued publishing over the next several years kept me supplied with reading which enthralled me. Halliburton was the first author whose writings I consumed whenever I could find them. In the manner of George Plimpton, who a few years ago had short careers in various professional sports - baseball, football, golf - and entertained his TV fans with the details of serving briefly in those fields, Halliburton wrote romantic books about his experiences such as swimming through the Panama Canal or serving a short time as a prisoner on Devil's Island, then an infamous French

penal colony off the coast of South America. The details of how he managed to get permission to swim the Canal were as fascinating as the details of his passage through the various locks as a diminutive ship, the fee for which was charged by his "tonnage." The barrier of being unable to get permission from the French to go to Devil's Island as a prisoner simply made his determination to do so more intriguing to the reader seeking the excitement of traveling in a forbidden medium. Thus, I was able to satisfy my interest in adventure and, for me, make-believe, at the same time that I absorbed many fascinating details about the geographical world.



Those books introduced me to a world which can include both fact and fiction. [Most of Halliburton's books are no longer in print. However, there is one large volume entitled *Richard Halliburton's Complete Book of Marvels* still on library shelves which should interest youngsters today. Unlike the books he wrote in the thirties, this one is directed specifically to boys and girls. It is a trip around the world, visiting many of the sites he considers modern "wonders." In those visits he incorporates many of the adventures he had originally written about for an adult audience. For instance, he recalls scaling the heights of the Golden Gate Bridge as it was being built and finding himself enclosed in a rapidly gathering fog, unable suddenly to see the bay below him or even the lower parts of the tower he had climbed. The size of the book might intimidate a young reader today, but it has many exciting stories to tell.]

I continued to search out reading material throughout my school years, discovering much to my surprise that some of the books I'd had to read for class took on a much more fascinating guise when I reread them strictly for pleasure.

In the early years of our marriage, I wondered about Paul's preferring to search for an item in the Sears Roebuck Catalog by idly flipping through the pages rather than looking it up in the index, as if trying to outguess the catalog by blind luck. One day I realized that he was doing my "library thing" - enjoying coming across surprising and interesting things even if he took a long time to come across what he wanted, or sometimes didn't find it at all. He would eventually consult the index, just as I learned to consult the card catalog and later the computer. I'm still discovering authors I enjoy by browsing among the books in a public library or in the private library of a friend. I've never really left my early exploring days in the Dallas Public Library when I found Richard Halliburton and a wide world of adventure in books of all kinds.