

The Ethel and Ira Levine Maurice Sendak Collection

In 2015, Ethel and Ira Levine of Silver Spring, Maryland gave a large portion of their Maurice Sendak Collection to the Library of Congress. Many of the items are on display in the Children's Literature Center.



“Mrs. Levine’s Sendak-kids, which she gave as part of her collection”

In the article below, Mrs. Levine described how the collection came about.

“During a high school Humanities class in high school, a friend introduced us to Where The Wild Things Are. She began her presentation by handing out keys to our imaginations. I was hooked for life when I became introduced to Max, making mischief of one kind and another. The following year, while browsing at a college book store, another friend began to read Sendak's Alligators All Around, part of the Nutshell Library. We quickly dissolved into hysterics, reading about the alligators ordering oatmeal and x-ing x's. It was difficult to regain our composure! As an elementary school teacher, some few years later, I began to share my love of all things Sendak with my students. Visitors to our classroom were greeted by Hooray for Everyday, a Sendak and Krauss poster. I tried to embrace that philosophy, daily imprinting it upon my students. As a parent, I sought to instill Sendak's art, humor, wisdom and kindness into the books I shared with my children, offering them a nightly treasure trove of his comedic wealth and promise.

As the wild rumpus of amassing took shape, life-long correspondences and much cherished friendships developed. And as the forest grew in Max's room, so did my collection, with the walls of our home becoming the world all around. Our travels took us to foreign book shops and museums, with Sendak posters adorning our hallways and Wild Things figures nesting in corners of the house. Carol King, singing Really Rosie, accompanied us on car trips as we scouted-out Sendak materials in musty shops and out-of-the way museums.

I recall that once an international student teacher joined our school staff for a year. I lent her my Japanese translation of The Wild Things, which she read to her class. Later, when her visa expired and she had to return to Japan, she returned my book, accompanied by an origami crane and an evocative good bye note, indicating her hope that upon her return, she would find her supper waiting for her in her room, still hot.

After more than forty years of zealously collecting Sendak materials and working in the public schools, retirement loomed. A celebratory trip to the comfortable and often-visited Sendak repository, the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia was planned. It was there that I had an epiphany about how critical it was to begin sharing my vast and dearly beloved collection with others. My heart repeatedly broke as I began to make preparations to donate our materials, so that others might be able to love them as dearly as I had. In keeping an old Yiddish adage in mind, I began to be comforted, however, in knowing that laughter is heard farther than weeping. As such, I can envision you, the viewer and reader, smiling sweetly and taking my love of all things Sendak into your hearts, making into your own.

Ruth Krauss's (1954) I'll Be You and You Be Me, with pictures by Maurice Sendak, includes a poem “if I want to give it to a friend.” Her words echo what is in my heart at the donation of our Maurice Sendak collection: “...some dark for daytime
and some sun for nighttime
and a hug...”

Hooray for Books!
Ethel Levine”