



MARISSA MEYER + JESSE TAYLOR

FIRST BOOK DONOR SPOTLIGHT



HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN ABOUT FIRST BOOK?

Marissa + Jesse: We're pretty sure we first found out about First Book by doing a search on Charity Navigator. At that time there were already a number of local organizations that we liked to support, but we wanted to connect with some more national and worldwide organizations for a bigger impact. It was especially important to us to find organizations based around books and literacy that are working with young people in underserved areas.

WHAT ABOUT FIRST BOOK'S MISSION SPEAKS TO YOU?

Marissa: I was such a huge reader growing up, and books were always an enormous influence on me (to the point where I now write books for a living!) – and I can't imagine how different my life would be now if I hadn't had as much access to books. I know firsthand how they can change lives for the better, and I believe that no child should be without stories and reading material that speaks to them.

TO YOU, WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF A GOOD BOOK?

Marissa: Characters that you both admire and relate to, facing off against a problem that, on the surface, seems impossible for them to overcome. It can be a quiet problem—like unrequited love—or a big, explosive problem—like trying to overthrow an evil regime. Either way, if it seems like the protagonist has no hope of getting what they want, it's sure to keep me turning the pages to try to see how it will turn out.

HOW HAS WORKING CLOSE TO PUBLISHING CHANGED YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON ACCESS TO BOOKS?

Marissa: When I was getting my Master's degree in publishing, I remember first hearing about the practice of pulping books when they don't sell. So many books end up being destroyed, and the thought turns my stomach, especially when we then realize how many households in America don't own a single book. How many children who don't have board books or picture books or chapter books, will never know the pleasure of having a parent or grandparent read to them while they snuggle up at night. It is a problem that I know can be solved, and I'm so grateful for all the work First Book does.

IF YOU COULD SPEND THE DAY WITH A POPULAR AUTHOR, WHO WOULD YOU CHOOSE AND WHY?

Jesse: Some of my favorite contemporary authors are Christopher Farnsworth, Joe Lansdale, and Tod Goldberg, and I follow them on Twitter so I feel like, thanks to social media, I do get to hang out with them in some ways. However, the author of my favorite book and one of the few books that I've re-read over the years is Lawrence S. Ritter, who wrote The Glory of Their Times, which interviews many star players from the early days of baseball. He's no longer with us, but I would have loved to sit down and hear his stories.

HOW DID READING IMPACT YOU AS A CHILD?

Marissa: Reading was all I ever wanted to do! My mom would try to take me shopping and I would inevitably end up sitting inside a clothing rack, nose-deep in a book instead. I loved that in books, magic was real, heroes were real, soul mates were real. Stories really turned me into a dreamer.

I would ask them to imagine their childhood with no books at all. That's the reality for way too many kids. If that thought makes someone half as sad as it makes me, that's why they should support First Book.



WHAT ARE YOU READING RIGHT NOW?

Marissa: Flirting with Fate by J.C. Cervantes

Jesse: The Last Policeman by Ben H. Winters

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY INVOLVING SCHOOL OR A TEACHER?

Jesse: Easily my favorite memory of school and books is the BOOK IT! Program with Pizza Hut. It encourages kids to read, with the reward of a free personal pan pizza. I read a lot of books during those summers! I just looked it up and am happy to see that the program is still going on. What a great incentive.

WHAT MIGHT SOMEONE BE SURPRISED TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

Marissa: That we met in a bar! (Very traditional, but odd because neither of us are “nightlife” sort of people.) But a few friends had invited me to go out dancing, and the moment I laid eyes on Jesse, I had an overwhelming sense that the entire reason I was there that night was to meet him. He asked me to dance and we’ve been together ever since.

YOU GENEROUSLY DONATE TO FIRST BOOK. WHY? WHAT WOULD YOU TELL SOMEONE WHO IS THINKING ABOUT SUPPORTING FIRST BOOK’S WORK?

Marissa: I would ask someone how many books they had in their house growing up. What were some of their favorites? Do they have happy memories of being read to? Then I would ask them to imagine their childhood with no books at all. That’s the reality for way too many kids. If that thought makes someone half as sad as it makes me, that’s why they should support First Book.

FIRST BOOK SERVES OVER 525,000 EDUCATORS THAT WORK WITH KIDS IN NEED. THESE EDUCATORS PURCHASE BOOKS AND RESOURCES OUT OF THEIR OWN POCKET DAILY FOR THEIR STUDENTS. WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT WOULD YOU PASS ALONG TO THESE EDUCATORS?

Jesse: Marissa and I know some of those very educators. We have family members who are teachers and librarians and we know that is a reality for many of them. I hope they know that they are valued and appreciated, and they are making a huge difference in kids’ lives.

