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Kids and Blueberries and Maine

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TRAVEL TUESDAY

Destination: Maine

Books: by Robert McClosky

A GUEST POST BY BRETTE SEMBER



Blue Hill village across the bay

When I was a child, each summer my family rented a beautiful old cottage on Smith Cove on the **Penobscot Bay**, near **Blue Hill, Maine**. I spent hours exploring the shore, turning over rocks, poking at mussels, finding feathers, digging for clams, and even swimming in the frigid water.

Many afternoons were spent with a good book on the old porch swing, overlooking the deep blue waters, green islands, and the foggy smudge that was **Castine** across the bay. We also picked wild blueberries in a nearby field, visited

an old grocery store, and enjoyed boat rides. Mornings were cold and evenings chilly, but the sunlight was spectacular on the water in the daylight. I fell in love with . And with **Robert McCloskey**. Robert McCloskey was not a native Mainer, but his children's books showed that he had fallen in love with Maine just as I had.

As long as I can remember, **Blueberries for Sal**, **One Morning in Maine**, and **Time of Wonder** were my favorite picture books. In them, McCloskey perfectly captures the cold water, rocky coast, and incredible wildlife. I felt as though I was living those stories which were set in the same portion of the coast we visited.

In **Blueberries for Sal**, a young girl goes blueberry picking with her mother in a field and happens upon a mother bear and her baby who are also picking and eating the wild blueberries. Kerplink, kerplunk, kerplunk was the sound McCloskey ascribed to the blueberries hitting the bottom of the tin bucket, the same sound I heard as we picked them – but we didn't see any bears. The field we picked in seemed identical to Sal's with bushes set among large boulders. As a child, I was sure it was the same. The book is filled with McCloskey's lifelike pen and ink drawings that exactly captured the Maine I knew.

In **One Morning in Maine**, Sal experiences a typical (and wonderful) Maine morning. The morning is cool and Sal is appropriately dressed for a summer Maine morning in a warm robe and slippers, then pants and a sweater. She plays along the shore while her father digs clams and she slips and falls on the wet, slippery seaweed that coats the rocks. Out comes her loose tooth and disappears in the gray mud along the shore. Sal spends most of the morning worrying about the lost tooth, but as she does so McCloskey shares the little details that define Maine – the seaweed that is used to cover the clams her father has dug, the small boat they take to the grocery store, the inimitable Maine characters who own the store and local garage, and my favorite line in the entire book, "clam chowder for lunch," something I used to repeat as a child, with a Maine accent. The pen and ink drawings in this book are just as wonderful as in **Blueberries for Sal** and were like snapshots of my life in that magical place.

Time of Wonder is another McCloskey Maine picture book, but this one is more poetic and is about the colorful drawings which bring the coast to life. We stopped going to Maine when I was about 12, but I never stopped loving it. When I got married, we went to Maine on our honeymoon and even were able to take a drive and find the cottage my family stayed at. A few years ago we took our children to Maine and they fell in love with it too – but they were already readers of McCloskey's books and knew just what to expect!

Thanks, Brette, for this charming look at a childhood love. And I hope you get to make a trip to Maine really soon. Now it is our readers turn to chime in with their favorite childhood vacation. Did it come with a book attached?



Blueberries

Brette writes often about travel, food, and home arts and is the author of more than 40 books about food, law, health, family issues, business, finance and textbooks. She blogs at [Putting It All on the Table](#) and her personal web site is [Brette Sember](#).

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