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By MELISSA BLAKE

## Blake: Learning from women in fiction

*Editor's Note: This is the second of a two-part series examining feminists in the wonderful world of fiction.*

Last week, we explored some enchanting costume ideas based on the strong women in fiction. Let's continue that trend this week, minus the costume ideas – although, if you did decide to use one of my costume ideas on Halloween, I'd love to see a photo of you cracking your best independent-woman smile.

Thanks in large part to my mother, I loved to immerse myself in the world of books as a child. I'd read everything from *The Babysitter's Club* (I've read every single book!) to the *Sweet Valley High* series (did you hear they're making a movie?)

And seeing as how I watched everything that little thing called a television had to offer, I figure I earned my status as a talking-head, media expert by the time I was 10.

Yet it was always the strong, take-charge women I remembered long after I'd shut a book or turned off the TV.

"Fiction is a great teacher," says Debbie Mandel, author of the book *"Addicted to Stress: A Woman's 7-Step Program to Reclaim Joy and Spontaneity in Life."*

"The fictional [woman] takes back her power and removes her mask to let her real identity emerge."

Well, these four women sure taught me a thing or two about that...

**Lucy (Charlie Brown):** As she once proclaimed in song, "Lucy is the boss." And she was. And always will be. There's nothing she can't do, from throwing sarcastic barbs to a poor Charlie Brown to dispensing advice as a wannabe psychiatrist. And of course I can identify with her in her never-ending quest to win the affections of a certain introspective piano player named Schroeder.

**Betty Suarez (Ugly Betty):** I'll admit it: I've been hooked on this show from the beginning. Betty's unrelenting determination to make it in the magazine world always spoke to me, for obvious reasons. She never let anything – evil bosses, guys, a dim-witted mean girl – get in her way. Plus, she knew what was most important in life aside from work: family.

**Wilma Flintstone:** She may have lived in the prehistoric ages, but her independent and sassy personality made her way ahead of her time. She was a forward thinker, the original woman of the (cave) house. Her husband, Fred, couldn't hold a candle to her; not that Fred was even a very bright candle himself.

**Jo March:** With her father off fighting a war, Jo kept the home fires burning, a home that included her mother and three sisters. She dreamed of becoming a writer and wouldn't let anything get in her way – not even a boy's advances.

"Jo is a rebel, but she's also loving and loved," says Monica Rico, assistant professor in women's and gender history at Wisconsin's Lawrence University. "She shows that you can be yourself and still be accepted by those who know you best, even if you don't fit in with social expectations."

Adds Rico: "I think that women respond to images of fictional feminists because often, we encounter these characters when we are young and impressionable. They present us with images of powerful women who, unlike our mothers, older sisters, grandmothers, neighbors, etc., are not involved in setting rules for us or reminding us to do our homework. We are thus free to imagine ourselves filling their shoes, pursuing new adventures."

Indeed. Here's to new adventures.

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