

My Lifelong Library Journey

From the Old West Church to Guilford's Little Library You've Got to Love Presented at Brooks Memorial Library, November 17, 2008

I remember the old West Church Branch Library in Boston's West End where I would curl up by a spiral staircase and avidly read Landmark series biographies and the Golden books. The library was in one of the first churches in Boston—an early 18th century beauty. I discovered my love of books there, my love of the endless learning the stacks can hold.

Then, as a teenager, I remember the Codman Square Dorchester/Boston Branch Library and the young, attractive, eager librarian. She had recently got her MLS and how vital she was to the growing interests of my best friend and me in literature and philosophy—existentialism, specifically and how she introduced us to Camus and Kafka and Golding and egged us on to think and dialogue in hushed conversation in the stacks. All the other boys were out playing stick ball in the setting sun and there were my friend Marshall and I and an eager young librarian yapping about existence and nothingness and the absurd in the quaint environs of Codman Square.

And how that eventuated in bringing me to this place, our beautiful Vermont, where I continue to read books in libraries, large and tiny, all over the State; experiencing small and some time large communities of readers who sit as a unit, a core, a critical mass of learning ---discussants from all age groups, but particularly our elders-- passionate to talk about books and ideas and to relate what they read to their human experience---as Vermonters, visitors, citizens, and just plain folk.

Here, in this library, I have been awed by the wisdom and intelligence of elders who every two weeks, in dreadful snow and sleet and ice even, showed up to sing the praises or dis a book while engaging in lively, thoughtful sharing of ideas. At the Dover Free Library, the snowbirds of Florida, well-read to a T, can't wait to begin, and park their cars early to get a good seat so that we can come together—a somewhat refugee community in the hills of West Dover—to share thoughts and feelings about books and inevitably to relate them to what it feels like to be a mother, father, grandmother, elder, a human being moving closer to the end—wanting to share the feel of that too. And the tears and the laughter!!!

Having led discussion groups all over our state, I can testify to the vital learning that takes place in groups which bring people of all ages together to discuss books, share opinions, share their lives. It's really quite remarkable and rewarding.

And, today as a trustee of the Guilford Free Library, I see this same attraction of the library for children, adults and seniors who crowd into the tiny space that is our library to use computers, research, obtain inter-library loans, and take advantage of the varied programs intended to reach all sectors of that town we love called Guilford.

Each of these instances is a testament to the library's place in community life—in providing moments and hours when we come together to read together, discuss the great issues of the day, of the world, our town, our own lives.

As a book discussion leader, there are so many ah! moments I have seen when I look into the faces in the room and see that something illuminating has struck the reader, some new lesson, a revelation, an addition to what we knew or thought we knew.

This is the place of libraries in lifelong learning. In my own experience as in many others, from our early years to our senior years, libraries have provided and will continue to provide the space and resources in which we add to what we know, learn the new, investigate the old, become richer, fuller, more knowing citizens, readers and human beings.

Thank you.

Richard Wizansky,
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