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I believe Libraries are Community Treasures

By 'Paula' in Altoona, PA
Submitted on June 17, 2010

When I was seven years old, I had rheumatic fever. During April of that year, I was in the hospital for what seemed then like months, but was really about 10 days. That whole summer, I was confined to bed rest. This was in 1958. There was no such thing as a television in a child's bedroom. No Internet. No video games.

To entertain me, my mother would go to the Ebensburg Public Library and bring me a brown paper bag filled with books. I would finish the books in a few days, and she'd go get me more. At first, I read easy books like the Boxcar Children series, which I loved. Later in the summer, I was reading about Pippi Longstocking and Caddie Woodlawn. That summer, books transported me far from my sick bed and led me to a lifetime of being a card carrying bookworm. Library card, that is.

When I became a mother, I passed the love of reading to my daughter. In fact, I read nursery rhymes to her on the day she was born. Some of the nurses laughed when they saw me reading to my daughter. One of them said in a very serious tone, "Oh, honey, she can't understand you." I replied, "It's okay. She knows my voice." I had been reading to her ever since I had found out I was pregnant.

My daughter's first outing was to the Williamsburg Public Library to meet the library staff. She was five days old. Throughout her childhood, wherever we lived, libraries were an important part of our family's life. Today, my daughter is a librarian, and her father and I could not be more proud.

So libraries have always been important in my family, but not just for books. Libraries are places for borrowing books, movies, audio books, music, games, and puzzles.

But libraries are much more than places for entertainment. Libraries provide:

- Computer access and reference materials that are helpful for job searches. At my daughter's library, a Pennsylvania Career Link staffer is available every other week.
- Much-needed educational story hours and Summer Reading programs.
- Meeting rooms for groups such as Girl Scouts.

- Free wireless Internet access.
- Photocopier and fax services that are not available elsewhere in small towns.
- VITA programs that help low-income Pennsylvanians with their income tax returns.
- Interlibrary loan services that give library patrons access to materials in other libraries.

Anyone who needs information can find it through the public library, and a librarian will be happy to help. During hard economic times, our public libraries are true treasures. Library usage is up across the country, yet funding is down. Many libraries have cut staff and must hold bake sales and raffles to try to make ends meet. This year, June 29 is Library Advocacy Day. I will be celebrating.