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Growing from the heart

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My affinity with Oregon libraries began more than forty years ago in rural Josephine County. Raised in a family of avid readers, library outings were an important part of our weekly schedule. My mother had a passion for mystery and intrigue. While my brother and I were happily occupied in the children’s room, she would head off into the stacks in search of the latest Agatha Christie or Dell Shannon. Her love of reading had a powerful influence on us as children, establishing a pattern we would follow later with our own families. Because the public library was a welcoming place, and my introduction to the world of books a happy one, I’ve maintained a strong connection to libraries wherever we’ve lived.

During the early 1970’s, I worked in the circulation and reference departments at the Jackson County Library System. Cross-training opportunities in branches, periodicals and children’s services provided a broad level of experience that served me well in later years as our family was an itinerant one. My husband’s profession required frequent moves to small towns around Oregon and I discovered that volunteering was an excellent means of becoming involved in each new community. As soon as we finished unpacking, we’d head off in search of the local library. Offering to shelve books and provide weekly story times was a great icebreaker, and one guaranteed to make friends with staff and townspeople alike.

Today I am the director of a small rural library system in northeast Oregon. The variety of skills and experience I’ve gained from more than three decades of library work have been essential to the position I now hold. My job description includes the usual requirement for knowledge of collection development, youth services, reference, cataloging and budgeting, and I often find myself filling the roles of three people in a single morning. The challenge of “doing it all” is balanced by the unique opportunities that come from living and working in a small community.
self juggling meetings and book orders with story time schedules and requests for curriculum support materials from one of the area schools. The Troy and Imnaha branch libraries, located in one-room schoolhouses in remote canyons, serve as both school and community libraries. Requests for materials about ancient civilizations or the seasons are followed by appeals for books on pruning trees or raising rabbits. Responding to requests from these remote locations is a challenge in itself. Concerned about timely delivery of materials, but constrained by a limited postage budget, the solution came in the guise of the local sanitation crew. Now our garbage truck drivers volunteer to transport boxes of books to the canyons on their regularly scheduled pick-up days.

This arrangement is due to a close association with the Child Care Resource & Referral director whose husband is one of the drivers. The library/CCR&R partnership was formed four years ago with the advent of the library’s Training Wheels program. This service to daycares and preschools provides onsite story times, monthly newsletters for parents, and circulating boxes of children’s materials. The success of the program is largely due to the support of local partners and additional funding from a state library grant. It’s meeting challenges like these that invigorate me and remind me each day why I do what I do.

I have grown in this job in ways I never expected. Ultimately funded the Training Wheels project. When faced with the task of describing the need for reliable transportation on remote canyon roads, I resorted to taking pictures of the roads I traveled and the ancient police car that served as my library-on-wheels. I have learned that communicating need and being passionate about a program may be as important in successful grant writing as the mechanics are. It is my belief that a strong commitment to service, knowing how to stretch dollars, and a sense of humor are vitally important. Being passionate about what I do carries me over the difficult times of budget reductions, personnel issues, long hours and short pay. Being passionate also helps me stay open to change.

I am a librarian today because of parents who first introduced me to the magic and wonder of books, and dedicated library staffs who nurtured my love for reading. This profession has provided me with opportunities for professional as well as personal growth. I have been able to pursue an interest in working with children and families, and have participated in collaborations to develop community outreach programs. Partnerships with local and state agencies have increased my awareness of current issues, and have challenged me to rethink the library’s role in serving families.

I have worked with librarians from around the state and am privileged to call many of you friends. Your commitment to libraries and your willingness to lend support and encouragement has inspired me. There isn’t anything else I’d rather be doing than working in Oregon libraries.

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