

Lessons of a Smalltown Library

The Groton Public Library has always been a second home of sorts for my family. My brothers and I were raised on twice-weekly trips, each of us carrying home a bag that weighed nearly as much as we did, and we would always make one last stop there before vacation. We even felt our first taste of fame when getting to populate the Children's Room display case for a month with an impressive array of Lego creations. I distinctly remember helping my mom set up for the Groton Reads events she helped coordinate, feeling much more important than I was, as the assistant who had not yet graduated from the Magic Tree House series.

In eighth grade, by which point my attendance at the library had faltered somewhat, the Children's Room was looking for volunteer shelvees, which I saw as the perfect opportunity to get reconnected. I found myself in a room barely changed from the one I had grown up with, albeit this time in a different role. After learning the Dewey Decimal system from my childhood librarian, I began shelving, seeing many familiar titles, and getting to know the library's inner workings, happy to help out the place that had given so much to me. It was a joy to spend extra time around so many books, reading passages here and there as I returned them to the shelf, and to provide support to such a local institution.

It is not often we get to revisit the pillars of our childhoods, and when we do, things are not always as we remembered them. However, volunteering at the library, where I had spent so much time growing up, I felt quite the opposite. I had the unique experience of seeing two perspectives of a place I knew intimately, and coming away with only more respect for it. I

learned how hard people had worked to give me a safe and happy upbringing, and how much of this I had taken for granted. I forged my first professional relationships, learning the intricacies of a well-written email and other practical matters, but also appreciating the respect with which I was treated by librarians who had watched me learn to read not ten years before.

The greatest takeaway from my time at GPL was how important an asset the library is to its constituents. The Children's Room, especially, provides an invaluable service to young families and new readers, instilling a love of learning in as many children as possible, and doing so in a warm and comfortable environment. The summer and winter reading programs encourage hundreds of children to continue reading all year round, widely seen as the best of such programs in the area. The librarians I worked with went well beyond what was expected of them, working constantly to improve, and forging deep connections with regular patrons. I myself started to recognize some of our most avid readers in the Children's Room and had the privilege of watching them grow from Berenstain Bears to Harry Potter. I realized too that the Lego Club I headed was not just another hour of play, but something families looked forward to all week, allowing kids to create what they might not be able to at home, as well as building new friendships. I strongly believe everyone can fall in love with reading; it is simply a matter of finding the right books, and for so many local adults and children alike, there is no better place to do so than the Groton Public Library. I will never again take for granted the services of a well-kept library; the joys of the books within, the devotion of those who care for it, nor the stories to be told by patron and paperback alike.