



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Institutions – governments, churches, industries, and the like – have properly no other function than to contribute to human freedom; and in so far as they fail, on the whole, to perform this function, they are wrong and need reconstruction.”

-Charles Horton Cooley,
1864-1929, American
Sociologist

When I travel through the rural areas of the United States, I am frequently struck by the optimism and community spirit represented in the new or remodeled libraries I visit. A good example of this is the recently completed children’s wing of the Grundy Public Library, in Grundy, Virginia.

The children’s librarian there, Kathy McNally, gave me a tour of the library and told me the story of how this recently opened section came to be.

The original idea for expanding the library, which was built in 1974, started about ten years ago. The Friends group sold coverlets, Grundy prints, books, plants and baked goods. The Virginia Legislature gave \$50,000 and the Thompson Foundation gave \$300,000.

Fund-raising eventually included a special committee, which used tips from another successful library campaign in the Galax/Carroll County library system. The Friends were reluctant to spend money on

professional fund-raisers, so they did everything themselves – PowerPoint presentations, choosing a slogan (“Building a Legacy of Learning”) and making every kind of personal and business contact they could think of. They eventually raised over \$1 million, which, in a depressed area like Grundy, is incredible.

As Kathy walked me around, I was struck by the amazing amount of space and light, and the cheerful and welcoming color scheme. It is truly a place where any child or parent would want to spend time.

In the past year I have also visited two new local libraries: the Dublin Library and the Livermore Public Library. (I have to admit that having grown up using the original Carnegie library in Livermore, I still think of the other old Livermore Library as the new one.) Both of these are spacious, with areas for studying, meeting, browsing or just relaxing. Like the Grundy Library, it is a plea-

sure to visit them.

The other thing I like to do when I travel is visit churches, cathedrals, synagogues, mosques, etc. I love the feeling of walking into these hushed yet vibrant buildings, some with architecture so stunning I almost gasp as I enter. A good example of this is St. Jean Baptiste Catholic Church in New York City, at Lexington and 76th. This church reminds me of a geode, one of those rocks that looks so plain on the outside and then surprises you by its beauty on the inside. It makes me happy to walk into a place like that and be, for a short time, a part of another world.

But it wasn't until recently - as I was thinking about the community effort required to build a new library, and as I was considering the feeling I get when I enter one of these buildings - that I found myself comparing libraries to places of

worship. Once I had that thought, I realized how many similarities there are. Both kinds of buildings are in a community and they are places where community members - as well as those, like me, who are only visiting - are welcome.

They are places where you get the same treatment no matter who you are or how much money you have. They are places where different people come together because they have shared interests, be it books or spiritual needs. And, finally, and perhaps, most important, they are places that require an ongoing belief in their critical importance to all involved.