



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking makes what we read ours.”

-John Locke, 1632-1704

When I was in elementary school, one of the assignments I hated most was book reports. The reading part was fine - I read all kinds of books, constantly. But I never wanted to write a report about any of them.

I mentioned this to a friend recently and asked him how he felt about book reports. Did he like writing them? I asked. No, he told me, they always felt like busy work and, he added, it seemed like it was just a way to prove I had read the book.

I think that was part of the problem for me, too. I liked to read; I didn't need someone to make sure I did it. In fact, I think writing the reports almost made me not want to read a book, if it meant I then had to write about it later.

The other part about book reports was the description of the story and the characters. What was it about? I would be asked. Who was your favorite character? How does

the story relate to your own life? These questions made me feel as if the book was separate from me. It pulled me away and forced me to look at it critically - something I didn't want to do. I knew - know, I guess I should say, since I still feel the same way - that books are written by people, they don't just appear. But there is something magical about a book you love; it takes you to a place and world that you live in while you're reading. As a friend of mine once said, "It was the kind of book where you wonder what the characters are doing when you're not reading it." To focus on the story as if it didn't exist, as if it weren't a real world, took away that wonderful feeling of living in the book.

I understand teachers assign book reports to help children look more closely at the books they've read and to see how reading a book can affect how they think and feel. And I know there are children

continued on page 2

who like to write the reports – I had friends who didn’t mind at all.

In fact, I’m hoping there are some of those people out there right now because, I have to admit, I actually started writing this column to solicit book reviews for this column.

Writing a book review is simpler than writing a book report and you don’t have to analyze anything. Basically, I want to hear from people who have read a book they enjoyed – not necessarily a bestseller or even a new book – just an engrossing one. I have book review forms, but would be happy to accept emails, too. The basic structure is: Title, author, a brief description of what the book is about, a word to describe it and a sentence about why you would recommend it. That’s it.

So, if you aren’t like me and you don’t mind doing it, I’d love to hear from you.

This week’s book review is from Clementine and the book is Ben Mikaelson’s *Petey*. This book is about “the life of a man who is born with severe cerebral palsy and how, after years in an institution, someone discovers he has a normal mind trapped in an inflexible body.” One word Clementine would use to describe this book is “moving” and she recommends it because “it gave me insights into the human potential for caring.”