



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Only four Carnegie libraries were built in the state of Vermont. Unlike hundreds of Carnegie buildings throughout the United States that have either been demolished or been converted... the Carnegie buildings in Burlington, Fair Haven, Rockingham and Morristown are all serving as public libraries.”

-From “A Short History of Vermont’s Carnegie Libraries” compiled by Robert Resnik, July 2004

I recently visited my daughter in Burlington, Vermont, where she is attending the University of Vermont. While there, I went to The Fletcher Free Library, which is the local public library. The library’s children’s section occupies the original 1904 brick building, and it is a spacious and stately area, with space for tables, couches, toys and even a sturdy and enticing puppet the-atre for the children to use. Of course, there are also books – on shelves, in bins, in displays. It is an appealing and cheerful room and the children’s librarian I talked to, Rebecca Goldberg, was happy to be there.

As we chatted, she told me about the many children’s activities at the library. One of them was a twice-weekly children’s sing-a-long, led by library co-director Robert Resnik, who plays the guitar, and by Gigi Weisman, a local fiddler. This popular event includes thirty minutes of non-stop songs, sung exuberantly by the

musicians, with help from the room full of parents and children.

I was lucky to have the chance to attend one of these shows, because snowy weather kept some families from attending. Usually, pre-registration is required – and the spaces fill up quickly. Even though the room where the event is held holds 100 people, these events are almost always at capacity.

I loved watching the babies and toddlers crawling or toddling around the room, listening to the music, smiling, and trying to sing along; or just staring, mouths open, in fascination. And, since everyone sat on the floor, the atmosphere was relaxed and cheerful.

I was surprised by how many of the songs I knew; there was “Skip to My Lou,” “You are My Sunshine,” “The More We Get Together,” and “Old MacDonald Had a Farm,” – with the best rooster and cow I’ve ever heard.

One of the most moving

moments was toward the end, when the two musicians simply sang “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” with no instrumental backup, and all over the room, tiny hands reached into the air, moving their fingers to make a twinkling star, and singing those familiar words.

After the show, I talked briefly to the fiddler, who was gently stowing her beautiful handmade instrument. I also spent a few minutes with Robert Resnik, asking him about the sing-a-longs.

I found out that Robert started them in 1990, and Gigi joined him in 1997. Together they perform over 70 times a year at the library, and they are regulars at many folk festivals, including the Champlain Valley Folk Festival, and the Middlebury Vermont Festival in the Green. The library also sells their CD’s - the latest is called *Sweet Potatoes and Homegrown Tomatoes* - and the money from

these goes toward programs at the library.

I mentioned to him how familiar much of the music was to me, and he told me he plays a lot of the songs he learned in the 1950’s. He also explained that it is very important to him to expose the parents to the idea of singing with their children, and to bring live music into the children’s lives.

I had forgotten how much fun it can be to sing these songs that were such a part of my elementary school experiences, and I am so glad I had the chance to revisit so many of them.