



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes.”

-John Le Carre, 1931-

Have you ever been in the library during a class visit? You can tell it’s happening because one or two adults, followed by twenty to thirty children, enter the library, where they are met by the children’s librarian. In the Albany Library, they are then taken to the meeting room and entertained with storytelling, book talks and possibly discussions about poetry or the definition of a library.

Class visits are part of most public libraries and they have been around a long time. Libraries use either class visits or school visits to introduce children to the resources of the library and to foster an interest in books. As Paul Rockwell, the children’s librarian at the Albany Library, told me: “The primary purpose of class visits is to bring children and books together.”

I asked him to describe a class visit to me. What do you do exactly? I wanted to know.

The format, he told me, is basically the same for

everyone, and that everyone includes grades kindergarten through eighth. He begins with storytelling, because he believes it’s important for everyone to be exposed to this ancient art. I agree with him and in fact, I think those long jokes people tell are really a way we have of keeping storytelling alive.

He then does a few book talks. These are short presentations librarians use to give a sample of a book without giving away the plot. Paul gave me an example of a book talk – and he “left me hanging,” as he put it, so now I’m going to have to find this third grade book, so I can find out what happens. The book talks vary, depending on age – the ones for teens may include love stories or scary stories.

He also talks about the different kinds of stories, for instance, westerns or mysteries or survival or science fiction. He explains that if you discover a book you like and then what genre it belongs to, you can

then find more like it.

Next, there is a tour of the library. For the older students, this will include the reference section and the online databases, especially good for those eighth grade research projects. For all of them, he emphasizes that the Albany Library is part of a larger system and so the books, videos and CDs owned by the other branches can be reserved and sent to Albany. Of course, being a public librarian, he talks a little about the democratic aspect of a library and how it is a community resource for all of us.

The visit ends with the opportunity for the students to use their library cards – in some cases, new ones – to check out library materials.

After talking to Paul, I looked on the Internet to see if I could find more information about class visits. The Berkeley Public Library and the Contra

Costa County Library system both provide either these or school visits, as do public libraries everywhere. My favorite quote was from the Blackburn Central Library, in England. When asked how her students enjoyed their tour of the library, the teacher replied: “Well worth coming – a good experience for the children...We hope they will return their books!”

Today’s book review is from Sophie and the book is Sarah Dessen’s *Keeping the Moon*. This book is about “Colie, former fat girl, who moves to Colby with her mom Kiki Spark and while she’s on tour, Colie stays with her Aunt Mira.” One word Sophie would use to describe this book is “invigorating” and she highly recommends it.