



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
December 10, 2004

“Imagination gives you the ability to experience new realities. You are trapped in the suffocating darkness of a subterranean cave. You are flying on the back of a magical dragon ...Your mind expands. Your senses sharpen. You are never bored.”

-From “Spotlight on the Library,” by Mary Jacobs; David A. Howe Public Library newspaper column

I’ve been working on an article about library columnists for library school. I hadn’t given much thought to other columnists – who they are, what they write about – until a few years ago, when I came across a piece written by a librarian in Fairbanks, Alaska. His article came up in a Google search on unusual libraries, since he had written one on the same topic. I knew there must be others who write columns like mine, so I did some searching and came up with quite a few.

I emailed each of them, to ask them if they would be willing to answer some questions about being a columnist and many of them responded. Reading their answers and their columns has been a great experience for me; in part, because it is reassuring to find others spending time writing about libraries and books. Also, these writers are comfortable putting their thoughts and ideas into words; consequently, they are articulate and forthright and it

is a pleasure to read what they have to say.

The geographical range represented by these columnists is amazing. They include the David A. Howe Public Library in Wellsville, New York; the Lucius Beebe Memorial Library in Wakefield, Massachusetts; the Douglas County Libraries in Douglas County Colorado; the Salida Library, in Salida, Colorado; the Hickory Public Library, in Hickory, North Carolina; and, the San Juan Island Library, in Friday Harbor, Washington.

After reading their columns and looking at their libraries’ websites, I have a strong urge to go visit each person. And I realize that is probably one of the reasons for a library to have a column: it gives a personal voice to an institution. And even a service institution like a public library can benefit from becoming more approachable.

Like the range of locations, the column topics are also

broad. Some of the columnists focus on new books and events, like storytimes or book groups. Other columnists are more personal. A favorite of mine is one of the columns written by Lauren Stara, from the San Juan Island Library. Her column is called “View From San Juan Island Library,” and it appears in the *San Juan Islander*.

By the way, I’m sure most of you know where San Juan Island is, but since I had to look it up, I can tell you that it is one of the approximately 175 San Juan Islands considered large enough to have a name. Apparently there are anywhere from 460 to 780 islands, depending on whether the tide is in or out and they are located off the coast of Washington State and British Columbia. San Juan Island is part of the state of Washington and the state ferry services it.

Anyway, Lauren Stara’s column, which was called “I

Was a Teenage Library Dog,” was ghostwritten for her dog Jasmine, on Jasmine’s thirteenth birthday. It is funny and charming and even includes a photograph of Jasmine.

There are also columns on homework, parenting our parents, archaeology, and even librarianship. That one, written by Jamie LaRue, in Douglas County, Colorado, extends an invitation to readers, especially those born after 1965, to consider becoming librarians. He gives some compelling reasons and I have to say, I think he makes a good point. Working in a library, like using your imagination, is never boring.