



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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*“But words are things,
and a small drop of ink,*

*Falling like dew upon a
thought, produces*

*That which makes thou-
sands, perhaps millions,
think.”*

-Lord Byron, 1788-1824

As the end of the semester approaches, I find myself eyeing the slowly growing stack of magazines on the living room table. I used to be able to at least look through one when it arrived, before adding it to the display on the coffee table. But I no longer have time to do even that and so they have become like dessert – or whatever it is one looks forward to as a reward.

This started me thinking about magazines: What is it about them? I wondered. How are they different from books?

I realized my attitude depends on the which one it is. There are the magazines I think I should read, like *The Nation* and *Atlantic Monthly* and there are the ones I get because some agency has received money from me, like *Teaching Tolerance* and *Quaker Action*. There are also the college magazines, which I really, really think I should read, but can't even manage to open – although if you consider how much money

was spent to qualify for getting them, they are the most valuable of all.

There are also the *New Yorkers*, which pile up so fast sometimes I think they arrive daily instead of weekly. I have had several discussions with friends about this: Couldn't it come every other week? we ask, or even monthly? I enjoy reading them when I can keep up, but when I get a semester behind, as I am now, they become another source of anxiety, along with the weeds in my garden and the fact that I haven't even started my vegetable seeds.

Probably what I should do is subscribe to no magazines. I could instead spend an occasional hour in the periodical corner of a public library, quietly reading and relaxing with the other people sitting there. That way, if I didn't finish a magazine or even pick it up, I would know that it would still be there next time, no guilt attached.

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Whenever I am in that area in our library, I see a wealth of subjects I'd like to read about: home repair, cooking, psychology, news, sports – they are all there, alluring and shiny and full of color photographs, letters to the editor, directions for making something and opinion pieces on how the world is doing.

Maybe that is what is so attractive about magazines: They are current and fast-paced; in ten minutes you can learn a new stitch or find out more about a world event or read a mother's story about her child or look at car reviews. You can dream, be moved, think or be entertained – or, take an hour and you can do it all. I can't wait.

This week's book is *A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly. This book is about Mattie, who learns a new word every day and wants to go off to

college in the fall and be a writer. She is given some letters by a young woman, who then dies unexpectedly. Mattie is supposed to burn the letters, but instead she slowly reads her way through them.

Connelly has based her novel on a real woman, Grace Brown, whose letters she read and, as she says, “Her letters will always haunt me.” One interesting fact to note about this book is that in the various library systems in the Bay Area, it is catalogued as children's, teen and adult. There can't be many books that fit into all three of these categories – maybe *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Doomsday Book*, by Connie Willis.