



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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*"Time, time, time is on
my side, yes it is"*

-from The Rolling Stones'
"Time is on My Side"

Ever since the semester ended, I've had these lyrics going through my head - which probably tells you something about what music I listened to as a teenager. Of course, it isn't really the song, but the word - time - that has been on my mind.

In this season of giving and receiving gifts, I've been thinking that the most valuable gift is time. Time to do what I want, or not do anything at all; time to spend with my friends and family; and the time I'm counting in the lives of those relatives who will not be here in another fifteen to twenty years. I'm even looking at the time long since spent, when I was a parent of young children and years seemed so numerous - even everlasting, in the case of those long nights up and down with a young baby.

I don't know when it became clear to me that time is the one thing you can't get back. Money, if you have a way of earning it, is replaceable. So

are most of the objects around my house. But minutes spent are minutes gone and consequently, they should be spent well.

Okay, so what does this have to do with libraries? Well, a few weeks ago I was reading one of the Newbury books - Joseph Krumgold's *Onion John*. The main character, Andy, is struggling with his father's desire to have him leave town and go to college. Andy wants to keep working in the family hardware store and his father tries to explain why that's not a good idea. When he asks his dad what's wrong with the store, his father says: "It's not this store...The whole business is old fashioned. Every customer comes into a hardware store, you've got to find out what his problem is and figure out what to do about it. You've got to talk to each one personally."

Andy isn't convinced, so his dad explains: "...it's the super market, that's the big way to operate today, where

the customer takes care of himself. What’s new, modern, the thing that’s up to date is self service...”

The description of hardware store customers could easily be one of public library users. People who come into a library are not always sure what they are looking for - sometimes it is the subject that is unclear; sometimes it is the title or author of a book. And librarians take the time - as Andy’s dad says - to talk to each person, one at a time.

This concept is particularly evident in the children’s section, where I’ve been spending my time for the last few months. The pace at the children’s desk is slower than at the adult one. We get fewer questions and so we are able to be more relaxed about answering them. When a child asks me for a book recommendation, for instance, I walk over to the shelves and point to individual

books. We talk about the kinds of books that might be appealing; I mention favorites, so does he or she. I may spend five or ten minutes doing this, as we try to find just the right title or titles, and as I get to know this particular child’s reading preferences.

I love these interactions, not only because the child will walk away with books, but because it allows me to give that one thing that I have come to value above all else: time.