



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“The YMCA, the oldest and largest social institution in the United States, has touched the lives of virtually all Americans. It ...[also] pioneered camping, public libraries, night schools, and teaching English as a second language. The Y has provided war relief since the Civil War and served immigrants and refugees from countries around the world.”***

-Andrea Hinging, Curator  
1985-2002, Kautz Family  
YMCA Archives

When I travel, there are two places I visit: the local public library and the local YMCA. I am currently spending a few weeks in North Carolina, visiting my daughter and my very first grandchild, Madeline (there, I knew I could figure out a way of bringing her into one of these columns) and so I have gone to the library and temporarily joined the local Y.

I go to the library to see what it's like, to talk to the librarians, to walk up and down the aisles so I can see how they arrange their collection, what the displays are like, and who is there. I browse the books for sale, walk around the children's section and sometimes use the Internet. I pick up all the flyers and brochures and newsletters - looking for ideas for my own library or simply out of curiosity.

Mainly, I go to the local Y to swim. However, I also love to just be part of a neighborhood Y for a short time, because, like a library, it is full

of people engaged in leading their lives. It's like a community get-together and I get to attend.

But it wasn't until recently that I realized the similarities between these two institutions. It is true that the Y has a membership fee and the library doesn't. Nonetheless, they are both community meeting places. They both serve families and older adults and young singles and lots and lots of children. They both have their own particular personalities, depending on the director, the staff and the location. Rules and services vary, because of budget or community needs or merely tradition. For instance, some Y's provide free towels (Chapel Hill does), some charge a small fee for them, and some don't provide any at all. This is the same for using the Internet at a library: some provide unlimited access for a traveler, some provide limited access, and some don't let me use it at all.

Once I started thinking

about this, I decided to find out more about the YMCA – and, imagine my surprise when I discovered there is something called the “Kautz Family YMCA Archives.” The history of the archives begins with this brief overview: “The Kautz Family YMCA Archives began life as a private collection of key material gathered to facilitate the training of new YMCA staff members, grew into a bustling corporate library, and eventually evolved into a university-based archives which serves researchers from around the world” (<http://special.lib.umn.edu/ymca/history.phtml>).

And it was by looking through these archives that I discovered that volleyball was invented at the Holyoke YMCA in 1895, by William Morgan who “felt that basketball was too strenuous for businessmen.” And racquetball was invented in 1950 at the Greenwich YMCA by Joe Sobeck. The

history of the Y also includes information about their influence on swimming, sports, education, childcare, and bodybuilding – Robert Roberts first used the term in 1881 at the Boston YMCA. And did you know that Golden Gate University had its origins at the San Francisco Y, which was founded in 1853?

As I read through the long and fascinating history of the YMCA, the comparison between libraries and Y’s seemed more and more apt. Social change, community partnerships, innovative ideas, and dedicated professionals – both of these institutions have contributed greatly to American life.