



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Dear Librarians,

Thank you for letting me and my class come to the library. I learned a lot. Oh and don’t worry I’m still reading.”

-From “Your Library Connection: Eyes of a Child” (Independence Iowa Public Library website)

Class visits are an important part of my job as a children’s librarian. These 45 minute visits begin with a presentation by me and end with the chance for each child to pick a book or two to check out. During the school year, I do about two of these a week and I am impressed every time by the wonderful questions and comments and the intense attention during my talk.

We always begin in the large meeting room, where the children sit on the floor and I sit on one of those child-size chairs. During our time together, I read a book or tell a story, demonstrate one of my favorite string figures (currently Apache Door, a figure that looks much more complicated than it is) and tell them about the kinds of books we have in our collection. I usually recognize several of the children, if they are regular library users and they usually recognize me. There is a responsibility that goes along with that recognition – I realize I am not just the children’s librarian at

the Albany Library, but I am also the face of a public library. That means, I may be the person they talk about thirty years from now as they think back on early library experiences. That fact was one of the first comments one of my daughters made when I took this job, since she has such strong and positive memories of the previous children’s librarian. I take that idea seriously because I want the visit to be a lasting and happy memory, one that will draw them into any public library, and inspire them to bring in their own children some day.

But another aspect of these visits is the thank you letters I receive from some of the classes. When these notes first started coming in, I was surprised and impressed. Having spent years overseeing my own children’s thank you letters, I know the amount of work they can be for the adult involved. So, when I received my first batch of thank you letters, I was

not only awed by the beauty of the drawings and the heartfelt words, but the parent part of me was happy to see these children being taught a skill that will serve them well all their lives.

The first ones this year were in a manila envelope, with each letter of my name and address individually chosen and taped on – all different fonts and colors carefully arranged. Inside, each child had been given a sheet that started with “Dear Julie” and then there were lines for writing on and a spot to draw a picture of a favorite part. It is amazing to have so many wonderful portraits of myself reading a book!

The most recent group of letters are in a book, beautifully tied together at the top with two ribbons. The children had been given photocopied pages with the outline of an open book on them. On each side of this book there was room to

write a short letter, and then the whole page could be decorated. The compilation of these pages was addressed to the children’s librarian assistant and to me, and each child had written a note to us.

I treasure all the thank you letters I receive from students – they carry the creativity and words of children who are lucky to have teachers devoted to giving them life lessons and the means to learn them.