



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“For the third consecutive year, Reading is Fundamental has received a high rating from Charity Navigator, America’s largest independent evaluator of charities. In December, Reader’s Digest recognized RIF in its 2003 list of ‘The Best Charities: Who’s worth trusting with your donated dollars.’ RIF was described as a trustworthy, well-run charity.”

-From “Frequently Asked Questions,” www.rif.org

In case you have never heard of Reading is Fundamental (RIF), I thought I would share some of the information from their website.

“RIF’s History” tells us that former teacher Margaret McNamara started RIF in 1966. She began by giving free used books to four of her students. Since then, RIF has changed and grown, so that now it is a book distribution and reading motivation program that operates “in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. RIF is also affiliated with programs in Argentina and the United Kingdom.”

RIF’s mission statement tells us a lot about what drives this organization. It is inspiring reading, particularly for a librarian. RIF’s mission is to:

- Ensure that every child believes in the value of books and the importance of reading.
- Assist children and their families with the fundamental resources children need to become motivated to read.

- Lead in the creation and development of national, regional and local collaborations building strong community-based children’s and family literacy programs.

There is also an answer to the question: How many children does RIF serve? Since this program started with 4 children, it is impressive to read the numbers now: “RIF provides 4.5 million children with 16 million new, free books and literacy resources each year.”

As you can see, the focus of RIF is on the link between books and children. Every aspect of their website supports this idea, from broadcasts to information about donating to an extensive collection of tip sheets on reading. These include “Keep Kids Reading This Summer - Take Them to the Library!” and “At Home Vacation Ideas.” It is wonderful to find so many well-thought out and upbeat suggestions for ways to encourage children to read. I particularly appreciate the focus on public libraries,

since a large part of what they do is to donate books to children. It is clear that they think – as I do – that we are all working together, whether we know it or not. Bookstores, literacy programs, libraries, newspapers, magazine companies, and comic book publishers – what we have in common are our readers.

So, what does RIF say about public libraries? Their summer suggestions list is broken down into: Parental Perks; Benefits for Kids; Something for Everyone: Teens, Too! and Bringing Families Together. Parental Perks includes the idea that library visits give parents a chance to spend quality time with their children. I see this every day in our library – a parent sitting with a child on our small couch, reading aloud, or a parent and child browsing the picture books together, as they decide which ones to take with them. RIF also mentions sum-

mer reading games, which are a large part of the summers at most public libraries. No matter how they are played, summer reading games tell children we value reading.

Another RIF tip sheet is called “Tips for Back to School Reading and Beyond.” This thorough compilation of suggestions gives even more support for ways to incorporate the pleasure of reading into a child’s daily life. As a reader of cereal boxes and toothpaste tubes, I particularly appreciate their “Everyday Opportunities,” which include “don’t dismiss road signs, menus, billboards, cereal boxes and lots of everyday items. Read aloud anything with words and present reading as a way to discover the world.”