



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Rotarians provide humanitarian service, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world.”

-Rotary International
(www.rotary.org)

I was recently invited to speak at one of the weekly Albany Rotary Club meetings. The topic was left up to me, and it wasn't until the week before the talk that I finally sat down and considered what would be most important to cover in my 15 to 20 minute presentation.

Recent speaker Albany Library librarian Richard Russo had used a laptop and projector to demonstrate the Library's online business databases and so I thought about using a similar format, maybe creating a PowerPoint presentation of some kind, for a flashy presentation. But as the days went by, I realized I simply wanted to talk.

I wrote a five-page speech that included the history of how I came to be a children's librarian at the Albany Library. More than two pages were devoted to the jails library service I did for 6 years, because I got carried away making passionate observations about the state of the criminal justice system and the racism of our society so perfectly demonstrated by the

demographics of jails and prisons versus the demographics of the surrounding areas. From there, I detailed every step in my career, culminating in my present jobs, as librarian and newspaper columnist.

Fortunately for the Rotary, I didn't read the speech aloud. I touched on a few of the main points but mostly, as I talked, I came to realize I wanted them to see me as one librarian in a large and varied profession. As I have mentioned in previous columns, librarians are struggling to overcome years of stereotyping. So whenever we have the chance to speak from the heart about our work, whatever it is, I think we should.

The members were relaxed and welcoming, and I enjoyed my brief look into Rotary, which I knew nothing about. And when I got home, I did some research and was surprised by much of the information. Of course, I didn't even know it is an international organization, not to mention that fact that there are more

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than 1.2 million members worldwide.

According to their website, Rotary International is the world's first service club, formed in Chicago in 1905. Their motto is “Service above self” and they represent a variety of occupations and professions. Their name comes from the early custom of rotating the site of club meetings, so members could become acquainted with one another's vocations.

I did have some idea of The Four-Way Test, the code of ethics adopted by Rotary in 1943, because it was recited at the meeting. Created by Rotarian Herbert J. Taylor, it asks these questions:

“Of all the things we think, say or do, One: Is it the truth? Two: Is it fair to all concerned? Three: Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Four: Will it be beneficial to all concerned?”

The Albany Rotary Club was founded in 1929 and it

currently has 39 members, most of whom are small business owners or managers for Albany's city government, school district, or non-profit organizations. On their website, they list examples of recent projects done in partnership with other community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Albany Education Foundation. It is an impressive and wide-reaching list, from sponsoring Albany Little League teams to building/repairing a school in Mexico to drilling community water wells in Africa.

It was an honor to be invited to speak before them and I have come away with an appreciation for their ideals, their dedication and their ongoing commitment to the Rotary precept, “He Profits Most Who Serves Best.”