



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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*"I wish thee as much
pleasure in the reading,
as I had in the writing."*

-Francis Quarles (1592-
1644), English poet

When the lights went out, I was sitting at my desk, checking my email. I barely paused, anticipating that the power would return momentarily. But it didn't - in fact, it was another five hours before I was able to use that computer again.

I've been aware for a long time that technology, in particular computers, has affected the way we work in a library. It has been a gradual change - we didn't start with the fifteen public access computers we have now. We also didn't start with Books in Print online or the ability to check the exact location of a book or a huge database of magazine articles, available all the time.

Well, almost all the time - because where were they when a truck ran into a house and we had no electricity? Someone still had access, but it wasn't us. Suddenly, our library became a quiet (no computers, no air conditioning), naturally

lit large room full of books and magazines and silent boxes with dark screens. When I came out to the reference desk to take my turn, I had the urge to pull a chair into the middle of the room and start reading aloud. It was as if the library had retaken itself - had devolved into its original shape, a peaceful place where everyone moved more slowly.

I miss that library, the library of my childhood. I miss knowing the only noise allowed was whispering and the turning of pages. I miss the simple technology of opening the cover of a book and starting to read, as opposed to trying to explain to someone how to use a computer mouse or how to place a hold. I miss the feeling that library gave me.

And so, the day the power went out, I was happy for a while. But then, as I was asked more and more questions that would have been easy to answer with the computer working and were almost impossible

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without, I realized how useful all this technology has become. It has become an integral part of our jobs and if we didn't have it, the library service we provide wouldn't be as good.

Because, from the reference desk, I can tell someone whether or not a book is on the shelf at the Albany Library, at the University of Western Australia or any other library that has an online catalog. I can print in color, I can look up the lyrics to a song, I can find every picture book in our library system that is about trains. And it's good that I can, despite my longings sometimes for the lost days of computerless libraries.

So, what did I learn from those few hours? I learned that sometimes it's important to look back and compare the past to the present, because it can give a sense of what matters to us. And once we do that, we can keep it in mind and sometimes even recreate it. For me,

this will mean remembering to celebrate the simple act of sitting and reading. Because, for me, it was the silence I remembered and the silence I rediscovered.

Francesca reviewed today's book, which is Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She says this book is about “the life of Griet, a seventeen-year-old girl who goes to work for the famous painter, Vermeer.” One word Francesca would use to describe the book is “colorful” and she recommends it because “it teaches morals and lessons through the life of this girl.”