

Courtney's Corner

A love affair with libraries

Full disclosure, I had originally titled this column 'Library love affair' in an attempt at some alliteration. However, on second glance I realized that might give us all false expectations regarding the contents herein that I, unfortunately, cannot meet.

But while the libraries in my life may not have provided a venue for romance, they have given me many other things.

The library of my youth is an original Carnegie (something my library and architecture nerds will appreciate) with an extensive addition that was built long before I was born. In the summer, a portion of the walls are covered with green vines leading to the entrance, creating a warm welcome. I remember walking in the front doors and up the two extremely wide staircases to the children and youth section, with its bookshelves full of stories and the play/programming area always inviting and frequently busy. Later, when I was far too cool to be seen in that section I would stop at the top of that first flight of stairs to peruse the fiction sections, arms loaded down with new worlds to explore, new characters to meet and mysteries to solve.

At that time I took for granted all I had access to for free. Now, as a person with more expenses than I could have dreamed then, I have a far greater appreciation for what access to the services provided by libraries and their

staff means and just how vital it is.



The majority of libraries have low fee, or no fee memberships, making them a truly accessible service for everyone. One of the last truly accessible services where socio-economic circumstances aren't a barrier.

I have never visited a library that required you to show your membership when entering, only when wanting to take out materials. This means that even without a membership you can walk through the doors, sit and read a book, maybe even participate in programming.

For years I did just that at the Drayton Valley Library. I was a member of a writing group, but didn't actually have a membership card despite it being a free service. It was only during Covid that I signed up for a membership card in order to access some of the online services offered.

That's right, online.

Libraries haven't remained stagnant over the centuries of their existence. They have evolved to meet the needs of patrons and reflect the world in which they exist. The services and programming offered through libraries have the ability to foster opportunities and support those seeking learning, in whatever form works best for them.

There are schools of thought that the days of brick and mortar libraries are past. That in an age of immediate access to information (some of which might almost be true), digital media, and on-demand everything they are an unnecessary public service.

To those who question the relevance of libraries in today's world I have many things to say, but mostly this; libraries have always been about more than books on shelves. They are a gathering place, or a safe space. A place to meet friends, or discover new worlds. Libraries are somewhere to share interests with others, or find peace and solitude. Libraries have never been just books on shelves, they are vital communities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests. And we need them more today than perhaps we ever have before.



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