

Stories from the stacks

Submitted by Library Director,
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You may be asking, "What are stacks?" Well, it's a term referring to a series of shelves for storing books... what many people would call 'a library'. But stacks sound sedentary and sterile, like piles of paper that lay unused until someone digs in like an archeologist sifting through sediment to uncover information about cultures or creatures that left their mark in the past. The layers are time capsules and the fossils in the layers tell tales of life in the past. Librarians are the archeologists who know where and how to find the best stories buried in the stacks. It's intriguing! It's exciting! And so are libraries!

My history with libraries goes back a long way. My father was the map curator at the University of Alberta from the early 1970s to his retirement in the late 1990s, so I literally grew up in a library. He never had the official title of 'librarian' only because his master's was in meteorology,

but everyone knew him as the 'map-man' and respected his knowledge of the collection he pulled together on a shoestring budget.

I remember visiting him at work when I was 8 years old, and the awe I felt stepping into the map library. Over the span of his career he built one of the largest collections of maps and atlases in North America. It wasn't just impressive, it was awesome! My father used to say that 'a map contains as much information on one sheet of paper as any book on any shelf... for those who know how to read it'.

The U of A map library provided a whole new perspective to the term "stacks". The entire sub-basement of the Tory Building was allocated to the collection, and the space was full of cabinets with topographical maps, geological surveys, marine charts, etcetera. And whatever couldn't fit into the drawers, like globes and relief maps, were piled on top of the cabinets.

He used to joke that he had a sedimentary filing system (layer upon layer). But he knew his stacks with uncanny precision. Someone could come into his collection looking for a 19th century map of towns and villages of Yugoslavia and, after a brief conversation with the person, my father would walk to a pile on a table in a back corner, finger his way down three inches and like a magician he'd pull out exactly the right item. I watched him do this more times than I can count. It was amazing how he knew exactly where to find the 'just-right' item to satisfy the person's request. Particularly when every available flat surface was used to organize and catalogue maps coming into the collection... and that's where I came in.

I started working for my father during the summer when I was 13 years old, plotting air photos and stamping maps. I loved working for my dad during the summers, not just because he paid me (out of his own pocket and below minimum wage), but

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Thought for the week

*Don't live the same year 75 times
and call it a life.*

how to create an environment where people felt welcome. I learned to understand the meaning of service! It wasn't about the item, it was about the person looking for the 'just right' item.

There was always music, there was always coffee and there was always time in his day to stop whatever he was working on to serve someone by giving them his undivided attention. He devoted his life to the service of others, and he impressed upon me a commitment to the same.

For those who are familiar with

our October quote by James Cash Penny: "It is the service that we are not obliged to give that people value most."

Like the map collection, our library sometimes feels claustrophobic with the stacks of books, magazines, DVDs, etcetera. But it's the services we provide and the kindly spirit in which we provide them that impact people's lives in the most meaningful ways. So, from the staff and board of Drayton Valley Library, we look forward to serving you in 2022.

Happy New Year!