

THE NOT-SO- SECRET SHARER SANDI SERKESS SIDE WALKS

I fell in love when I was five years old. I have been faithful to my first love ever since, replacing my flame only with its relatives, mainly other branches of the same steadfast tree.

The neighborhood library is the greatest gift God could have bestowed upon any of us. Actually, it was Ben Franklin's idea originally, as was the fire department, the hospital, the post office, bifocals, and advertising, among other inventions. What a blessed gent. But he must have been inspired. I truly believe that. Some concepts are gloriously beyond human imagination, and the library ... can anything be more splendid on earth? Not much.

I recently adopted a little boy from Romania, a very poor country. He came to me emaciated and freezing, with only shorts and a t-shirt on Thanksgiving of 2000. Not a word of English did he speak. He picked it up quite quickly, however, and soon loved me to read to him as he could finally understand. That summer I took him to the library for the first time to get him a library card and register him for the delightful summer reading program they had for kids. (Read three books and visit the "Treasure Chest". Who could resist that???) When he got his card I brought him into the children's section and told him he could take any books he wanted to read. His words were so innocently lovely... "Wow! These people really know how to share...!"

The history of the West Roxbury Library begins with Betsy Draper, granddaughter to Mary Draper and best friend of Hannah Richards, who lived where Roche Brothers used to be. Betsy lived on the hill, which now houses Parkway Law Offices, and across the street, where the Police Station is now, was her General Store, the only store for miles around.

The Draper house was built in 1700's. Henry Seaver writes, "In 1775 Captain William Draper said goodbye to his wife Mary and went to Lexington to fight. He later lost his life at Fort Ticonderoga. The house stood until 1930 and Miss Betsy Draper was the last Draper to live there; granddaughter of William and Mary. She died in 1871 at age of 87. But she loved books "lent them, kept them, and persuaded others to leave theirs, and her shelf became the first West Roxbury Library -- started in her parlor."

The History of the Library continues in the West Roxbury TRANSCRIPT headline of February 26, 1933:
MISS C L MORSE RETIRES AS WEST ROX LIBRARIAN: STARTED BRANCH IN 1890 AND HAS CONTINUED IN CHARGE
Miss Carrie Morse was born in this town and went to the Boston Public Schools. The library then was one room in Westerly Hall, part of West Roxbury Congregational Church. It started with a small number of books. Miss Morse worked three hours a day for three days of the week and soon the library grew to a whole floor of the building! By 1918, the delegated space was much too small and the library was soon given its own building by the town council. It was the older part of the library we have now. She insisted on the garden in front as Gardening was her hobby. Mayor Peters dedicated the new building. She was the first to dedicate part of the library for children, having homework reference tools and a weekly story hour!

In 1921: number of books was 11,182, and the circulation for the year was 56,692. The largest daily issue was 800, with 181 being the average. Compare those numbers with those for 1932. The number of books then was 21,972; the circulation for the year was 167,706. The largest daily issue was 1029, with 700 being the daily average.

Miss Carrie Morse was the librarian for 43 years, from 1890 until her retirement in 1933. What changes her leadership had wrought!

I first started frequenting the library when I was five. I was a precocious reader... and walker. The first time I walked to Center Street by myself, my mother wasn't home and my father did not know it was my first time. So when I casually asked if I could go his response (He was raking the leaves at the time, I remember quite clearly) was to lay the rake aside, reach for his wallet, and ask, "Do you need any money?" My mother would have fainted!

In those days, of course, there was no computer and the librarian, an elderly lady by the name of Marjorie MacIntyre,

discharged them all by hand. No one liked to see me come. I took out at least ten books a week, and read every one of them. I staggered home with my pile of books, read all night under the covers with the flashlight, and then returned for more too soon. When I discovered *Betsy and Tacy* by Maud Hart Lovelace, I knew Heaven had come to earth. But at this time I was alone in my relationship with the library. Not one of my friends shared my devotion to books.

Then two things happened: homework was one, and my mother going back to school was another.

In my day, homework was not assigned until Grade Three, and then it was pretty simple. But by fourth grade, we were in trouble. There were many definitions to look up and items to research, and very few of us had adequate encyclopedias at home. What a waste of money when the library had at least three sets, each consisting of huge volumes, and was open very convenient hours each week. So my friends began to join me in my walks to the library.

Then my mother, who had been a devoted stay at home mother, making lunches and ironing our clothes, decided to go back to school. I was in Grade Five at the time. She was gone one afternoon a week, the year was 1962, and day care or after school programs were unheard of. But I knew what I was going to do, and my friends joined me. We spent every Thursday afternoon at the Library, writing a newspaper, marketing it, and actually selling it for two cents a copy. And in those days there were no copy machines, so we had to actually rewrite the newspaper ourselves over and over. We had TV reviews and book reviews and jokes and fashions and crossword puzzles. We made up stories and interviewed people and took public opinion polls. We produced about two issues in one year, but we worked hard and had fun. And best of all, we were safe when my mother wasn't home.

By the way, it was entitled "THE FOUR STAR GAZETTE", and do you believe I still have one? Well, I do!!

The Children's Librarian there was an affable, firm lady named Mrs. (Dorothy) Bavichi. She looked out for us, winked when we ate brownies and drank cokes, and helped us in any way she could, even letting us use her stapler for our newspapers. She helped with homework and scraped knees and finding books. She really cared about us (Me and Eve Bookspan and Marilyn Joreess and Joan Fink). I remember her to this very day. I bet a lot of us do, and I know Sheila Scott does.

Sheila is the Head Librarian now of the West Roxbury Library. It is not only a branch library, but also a district library, so it has more books and resources and staff than an average branch library. The current staff is composed of Jeanne Murray, the Adult Librarian, Gwen Fletcher, the Children's Librarian, Suellen Snapp, generalist; Maureen Gillan, head of Circulation and Marsha Robbins, Regine Puntri, and Norah Darla, who are also in her department. George Welchin is the custodian.

Their resources include, but are not limited to, books, audio-tapes, videos, on-line data bases, pc's for public use, archives, vertical files, and so forth. Some of the services they offer are references, reader's advisory, programming, and the interloan library system. The WR branch collection includes more than 100,000 items. Don't forget, too, that a BPL card gives the holder access to the entire BPL collection--more than 7 million books and lots of other resources besides.

This branch boasts the largest circulation of materials of any branch of the BPL. The most popular children's book to be taken out? The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle. The book least circulated? The Trumpeter Of Krakow, a Caldecott Award Winner.

There are many programs, some ongoing as the Children's Story Hour, summer reading clubs, and homework help; adult Book Discussions, and some special events arranged by the Friends of the West Roxbury Library, such as readings, plays, and songfests. They have 300 members and currently two presidents. Christine McDermott and Bob Gaudet. Not to mention the yearly book sale organized by the one and only Marion Joyce.

Sheila has many stories to share, but this one is by far my favorite. "A little girl came in from the parish school down the street and requested a book on cedar mills. I asked her what it was for, and she told me a spring holiday. I thought maybe Arbor Day and looked in the reference catalog, but found nothing. After a bit more delving, I realized she was talking about the spring holiday Passover and its attendant "Seder Meals".

Close enough.

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