

# More Stories!

Forum

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## Love of Libraries

by Robert J. O'Connell

I suppose I always knew that I was different from my brothers and sisters. Where did my love of books come from? Did I sleep in a bookcase as an infant? Perhaps imprinting works on children. Where was my favorite place as a youth, besides the dinner table and bed? The most important place was the corner of Montgomery St. and Columbus Circle in Syracuse NY, formally known as the Carnegie branch of the Syracuse Public Library. There, I always felt at home. Not that being "Bookish" was discouraged in any way by the family, just that it was viewed as curious by everyone except my Aunt Kate. She always had a good book for me to read.

My school, St. Mary's Academy, was just two blocks away from the library. It was easy to go there after school. There it was quiet, stately, and full of books and people who read and cared for them. I started off in the Children's room on the first floor. There was a small problem though, as you were only allowed to take out three books at a time. As this meant only part of an evenings entertainment, I had to sit on the floor and read several more before I left to go home. Most of the books in the children's section were of the Dick and Jane variety and were quickly consumed and held little continued interest. But the children's section also had a rather large collection of nature stories. I suppose today you would call them Anthropomorphic novels as the lead characters in them were always animals. So you got the story from the perspective of the deer, wolf or bear. As an inner city boy these always were of great interest.

But there came a time when I had read everything of this ilk in the children's section. After an extended negotiation with the children's librarian it was finally determined that I was serious about reading and would respect all of the books. Although way to young, I was then issued a regular library card. This allowed

me to access the whole adult section of the library and to discover the most engrossing region of the building. This quickly became my favorite reading place. In the center of the building was a rotunda covered with a large skylight. In this large space there were at least four stories of book shelves each level connected to the other with wrought iron stairs and standing on thick glass floors. The floors were designed to let the light from the skylight illuminate the shelves of books. These glass floors were thick and pale green in color so that the light there was wonderfully cool and bright. I would lie on the glass floor, rest my head on a book taken from the neighboring shelf and prop the book I was reading on my knees and read for hours bathed in this shimmering light. A very happy place.

At the time I was very interested in how things worked. So science in the 500 section was a favorite place in the stacks. There I read with great interest about the "Magic Bullets" of Dr. Paul Ehrlich who won the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1908. His curiosity about how chemicals interacted with the body lead to many important discoveries about diseases and their potential cures. The 400's were also full of good things. There I read Homer's Iliad and Odyssey viewing them only as complex adventure stories with a bewildering variety of characters. Only latter, in college, did I learn that they were also considered great literature. The 800 section held my interest for a long time containing, among others, both Clemens and Dickens. During these hours I also found the wonders contained in the dictionaries shelved in the various sections. Word origins and definitions are still fascinating topics to me.



It is sad to say that the building shown above is now empty and that most of my time with books is now spent on the internet where it is possible to quickly get the information you want. But you can't get that wonderful smell of a freshly opened old book, that had long been stored on those remembered shelves.

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