



Libraries Change Lives...

Libraries not only enhance the quality of our lives, they can influence the way we view ourselves and the world. By exposing us to a variety of ideas, they allow us to think, create, and dream in ways we never thought possible. Libraries actually have the power to change people's lives. The stories you are about to read attest to the life-changing effect of libraries. Some of the stories may surprise, others will delight. Some may make you happy, and others sad. Whatever the affect, the following stories are depictions of power -- the power of lives that were changed because of a library.

Once upon a time...

Once there was an excruciatingly shy girl, so shy that some thought her rude when she didn't answer them, some snobbish and "too brainy." She was also very sensitive, crying over newscasts of poverty, sorrow, and tragedy; grieving over injured or abandoned animals; defending a handicapped child from the cruel taunts of other children. Unfortunately for her, in addition to being an awkward, chubby pre-teen, her family was going through a nasty divorce. For release, she began to write down her emotions onto paper into loosely formed "poetry."

One day she happened by a nearby public library located in a shopping center within walking distance of her home. While there she noticed an announcement soliciting entries of student art: paintings, drawings, etc., for display in the library. Somewhere within the girl welled up the courage to approach the librarian with an almost gruff question: "What about poets? Aren't they artists? Why can't I display my poetry as art?" Instead of replying defensively to this attack, the librarian, being a bit of a maverick herself, paused thoughtfully a moment and then said, "Of course, you are right. Poets are artists, too, and you are welcome to bring in your poetry for display."

So the girl went home, and using colored construction paper, magic markers, and cut-out magazine pictures, she painstakingly assembled two of her poems into graphic presentations. She dropped them off at the library where they were displayed with the other students' work, and she never thought of it again.

Several years later, in reduced financial situation after the break-up of her family, she needed a job and remembered the friendly librarian. Lo and behold, that same twinkly-eyed librarian hired her to shelve books. After many, many hours of shelving, the girl became fascinated with the marriage of illustrator's and author's talents in children's picture books. Each was a work of art in itself. She was further fascinated as she watched the children's librarian read these books to the wide-eyed wonderment of little preschoolers. She decided she wanted to be a librarian, too. So against the odds, she went back to school, put herself through college, and did just that.

And that's how libraries change lives! And sometimes a life can change a library, because eventually that young woman replaced the twinkly-eyed librarian when she retired. And not only that, the young woman helped the community accomplish a 20-year dream to design and build a new facility for the library. Better yet, at the dedication of the new library, she met another librarian who one day became her husband. The two of them became the first husband and wife library directors in Indiana.

Deborah Robinson

I found solace at the library...

When I think of the forces that have shaped my life, I realize that the public library was one of them. Mine was not a happy childhood, for I was beaten by a father who would not allow me to go anywhere except school, and so I lost out on activities that my peers took for granted. When my father was not home, my mother would let my brothers, my sister, and me ride our bicycles the six miles to the library to check out some books. Those were good days for me because I was able to get away from home, if only for a little while.

I loved books ever since I could remember, but we had very few at home and I had no spending money with which to buy any. The library was a blessing, for there I could explore the world and improve myself. Soon I began to envision a better life. I could read the fashion magazines and see how other girls my age dressed. I could read etiquette books and improve my manners and diction. By reading, I could prepare for college and make "friends" that have stayed with me even today.

In every town there are children who suffer the same way I did, children who want to do better but cannot unless given a chance. Transportation is impossible for them, so they cannot go to the movies or share in school activities. They need escape, but not the kind found in drugs or alcohol, as so many young people attempt to do. The library is a good place to counteract all the ugly influences a bad life can have on a child. I am proud to say that the library was a good influence on me. Now I am a college graduate with a good job in the library system at Purdue University, a person who can contribute to society, but most of all, a person who feels good about herself.

Emily Branson

"The library is a good place to counteract all the ugly influences a bad life can have on a child."

Emily Branson

I used to have problems at home so I would go to the library and lose myself in a book. It was the only way I could escape from my problems for a while. I don't know what I would've done if the library hadn't been there.

Devin

I grew up in the projects. My mother was raising five children by herself, and although she was working, there never seemed to be any money to do the things my friends at school were doing, such as going to the movies or going to McDonald's.

I found my solace at the library. There I could visit places I knew I would never really go. One minute I would be with Pippi Longstocking and the next, living in the little house on the prairie. Another time I could read about Abraham Lincoln. The public library opened up the world to a little girl more than 25 years ago. I still find it a way to escape the demands of the day by curling up with a good book.

Rachel Klammer

I know there is a direct connection...

In the fifth grade I discovered in my small hometown public library a series of historical biographies, all with orange covers. I read every one. Now some of the happiest moments in my life come when someone tells me that they read a book I've written. I know there is a direct connection between reading those orange cover books and writing my own books, between what I was in that small Carnegie library and what I am now.

James H. Madison

“The local library adds more to a person's life than space. It enhances, teaches, and influences what we believe and think.”

State Senator John R. Sinks

In every dream there is a moment of realization that your dream can become a reality. That moment happened for me in the public library. An avid reader all throughout my childhood, I found myself approaching the summer of seventh grade too old for any of the summer reading programs. Early that spring the librarian asked me if I would consider taking over the preschool storyhour. Deep in my heart, after the summer was over, I knew my dream of being a teacher was a good dream and a goal I wanted to achieve. For the next five years I worked the summer reading program for the pure joy of the experience. Thank you, Indiana libraries, for the affirmation of my dream.

Barbara E. Leek

Libraries empower the mind. Without them, I would not be in graduate school, would not have published scholarly articles, and I would be a less effective teacher. Libraries have played a major part in my professional life and have actually determined my future as a researcher and teacher.

Michael Dupagne

I discovered libraries early in my life...

I discovered libraries early in my life, which I must confess was ever so many years ago, and cannot remember when I didn't have a dog-eared library card in my pocket. But it was the public library's 1986 program, "Writing Your Memoirs," that truly changed my life!

Despite my age or perhaps because of it, my old romance with genealogy and my new romance with memoir writing became a duo that led — or pushed — me into writing two books, a regional history published in 1991 and a local history published in 1993. Oh yes, libraries change lives!

Anonymous

"By using the library's videos, I can sleep through a movie for free."

Joel Robinson

Providential intervention may be the only explanation for me spending my career as a librarian. My early experiences in libraries were less than positive. One childhood event burned into my memory is the shame, guilt, and embarrassment of returning a stack of long overdue books to the public library. I can still see my father peeling off dollar bills to pay the fine at a time when the money was desperately needed elsewhere. I cannot remember being in the public library again until my senior year. I had to use the public library to finish my senior paper because I had been banned from the high school library for disruptive behavior.

As an adult, I'm making up for the years of library use I missed as a child. At present I'm reading about 12 books on various topics. Books helped me plant my garden and complete my taxes. The library's religion collection helps me teach my adult church school class. The automotive section is helping me restore my MG. By using the library's videos, I can sleep through a movie for free. The talking book cassettes shorten a long road trip. For me, the list is endless.

Joel Robinson

