

Avid readers and learners each have compelling personal tales to tell about their relationships with libraries. My connection to libraries has a professional and social flavor, but is also deeply personal. As a professional educator, I constantly encouraged my students to maximize the wide ranging value of library resources. As a state lawmaker and civic leader, I cherish and support libraries because they protect, preserve and promote culture, history and universal learning. While my individual experience with libraries is unique, I often find that my story helps me strike a meaningful chord with other library devotees.

This personal account of love for libraries begins in my small Kentucky hometown. In my elementary school days, I attended a very small county school. We had a modest library where a tight-knit crew of conscientious readers scoured the shelves for educational and creative outlets. The school library's inventory was low but the city helped augment the supply by sending us cars full of new books from time to time. Libraries had a huge role to play during my youth and development, providing memorable opportunities for entertainment, education and imagination. When it was time to seek higher education, my dedication to libraries served me well.

Libraries not only prepared me for school, they helped me pay for it. I paid for my second year of junior college by working in Carnegie Library, a city library in Paducah, Kentucky. I learned the Dewey Decimal system and how to classify books by subject. These functional skills would serve me well in my professional career. But I also arrived at two very important understandings that would eventually guide my approach to libraries as a state policy maker. First, libraries are a welcoming place and offer something for everyone. Second, libraries are essential in a society like ours where we place such a high premium on the importance of multidisciplinary knowledge and understanding.

After relocating to California, my exposure to libraries came around full-circle. One of my first west coast jobs was that of technical librarian. Richard, my husband, was a full-time researcher who approached libraries as though they were perfect places to pan for gold. When our daughter Mary came along, libraries became a family affair. Although she is developmentally disabled, Mary loves to read and librarians have always made her feel right at home. She has spent countless hours happily volunteering at local libraries and insists on integrating library visits into family vacations.

While I have ample examples of what libraries mean to me on a personal level, perhaps the most important aspect of libraries is that they house our culture and history; a library acts as the conscience of the society it reflects. The perennial relevance of libraries is most directly demonstrated in the timeless words of the Spanish-born American philosopher George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."