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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 An homage to libraries and librarians

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 It's no wonder librarians are special people who quietly
3 go about their work in support of learning, literacy, and legacies

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 A LITTLE GIRL learning to read sits in a chintz chair in her
6 bedroom, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in her hands. She found the
7 story in the local library, thrilled that she can read and follow the
8 tale page by page.

9 That little girl was me. I was excited that I could read,
10 and that story launched my weekly visits to the library. Later,
11 when I could read more advanced books, I would take out at

12 least two books a week, and I would immediately sit in my chintz
13 chair to start reading them.

14 Soon I graduated to biographies of heroic girls and of
15 interesting and important women, like Martha Washington and
16 Abigail Adams. I have loved reading ever since.

17 Our library was full of promising tales, both true and
18 fictional. I remember creeping along the shelves, my hands
19 touching the dark wood, as I searched for books, first in the
20 children's section and later among the young adult shelves and
21 then from the marvelous seas of adult offerings.

22 I was thinking of this in recent weeks because April was
23 National Library Month, which celebrates the critical role
24 libraries and librarians play in expanding our knowledge,
25 encouraging our curiosity, facilitating our attempts at research, or
26 simply helping us find a good book to curl up with on a snowy
27 day.

28 * * *

29 IN THE DAYS before the internet, long drawers of index
30 cards would tell me where to find a book. If I wasn't successful, a
31 librarian would help me, which often led to a conversation about
32 what I wanted to read.

33 Later, when I began to visit historical libraries that had
34 long rows of tables with green glass lamps where serious scholars
35 worked, I was fascinated by how intense they were.

36 And I have been lucky enough to visit amazing libraries
37 in several countries, like the Trinity College library in Dublin,
38 where the Book of Kells resides. Written more than 1,200 years
39 ago, it is known for the beauty of its stunningly illuminated
40 borders on the manuscript pages that people wait in line to see.
41 There's also the Bodleian libraries in Oxford, England, comprised
42 of 23 libraries.

43 Lots of historic European libraries are amazing. They are
44 beautiful, both for what's inside but also for their exquisite
45 architecture. They're worth a visit, if not a pilgrimage.

46 But you don't have to go abroad to see a world-famous
47 library. The New York Public Library in Manhattan is known for its
48 huge research collections, its marble lions at the entrance on Fifth
49 Avenue, and its Beaux-Arts architecture. It houses the Gutenberg
50 Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the real Winnie the
51 Pooh doll!

52 One historic library to note is the Pack Horse Library
53 Project, established as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works
54 Progress Administration (WPA) to help lift the United States out of
55 the Great Depression from 1935 to 1943. It was an interesting
56 initiative, because it provided roving horseback libraries to boost
57 employment and literacy.

58 * * *

59 IT'S NOT ONLY libraries I admire. Librarians are among the
60 special people who make libraries work. And they go all the way
61 back as far as Eratosthenes of Cyrene (276 BCE-194 BCE), a
62 Greek mathematician and astronomer who was the head librarian
63 at the Library of Alexandria in Egypt.

64 Some other famous librarians include Benjamin Franklin,
65 who founded the Library Company of Philadelphia and served as
66 its first librarian, and Lewis Carroll, who was also a librarian
67 before he wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. And the artist
68 Marcel Duchamp worked as a librarian in Paris.

69 Thankfully, there are also activist librarians, like the ones
70 who refuse to remove banned books from their shelves and even
71 showcase them.

72 Barbara Gittings was a radical librarian who promoted
73 LGLBTQ literature. She also created the first gay caucus in the
74 American Library Association. And Effie Lee Morris, an early 20th
75 century librarian, advocated for library services for children,
76 visually impaired people, and minorities, becoming the first
77 Black person to hold an administrative position in the San
78 Francisco Public Library.

79 It's no wonder librarians are special people who quietly
80 go about their work in support of learning, literacy, and legacies.

81 Some of them are heroic, like Belle da Costa Greene, a
82 prominent librarian and manuscript expert in the 20th century
83 who passed as white while curating the rare book collection of
84 financier J.P. Morgan. She hid her identity to navigate a racist
85 society and became a powerful cultural force, serving as the first
86 director of the Morgan Library & Museum.

87 * * *

88 SO, I'M BELATEDLY thankful for librarians and libraries,
89 especially in these difficult times that call for solace and quiet
90 pleasure.

91 Reading new works by favorite authors, or new ones, is
92 like comfort food. They soothe us, perhaps inspire us to be
93 courageous, and often gives us hope. As writer Neil Gaiman has
94 said, "Libraries are the thin red line between civilization and
95 barbarism."

96 Albert Einstein was right about libraries, too: "The only
97 thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the
98 library."

99 Next time you visit a library, give the librarian a high five
100 or say "thank you." It's well-deserved and bound to make their
101 day.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

102 **ELAYNE CLIFT** (elayne-clift.com) has written this column
103 about women, politics, and social issues for two decades.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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