A Country Without Libraries

March 21, 2011

As a college student I would often spend an entire day reading in a library. It was no great feat since it was located in the small town where I attended college. In the course of a single day I could easily read a hundred pages or more, and there were times when I read more than six hundred pages. But the thing that I have always loved about libraries is the fact that they are so quiet. I have always thought of them as places of quiet study, and they are always quiet.

In the past, libraries were the centers of community. They were places where people could go to read, to study, to find a quiet place to think. They were places where people could go to find knowledge, to find leisure, to find themselves. In the past, libraries were places of peace and quiet, and they are still places of peace and quiet.

But today, libraries are in decline. They are being closed, they are being cut back, they are being ignored. And the reasons for this are many.

First, there is the fact that the Internet has changed everything. People can now find information on almost anything they want to know on the Internet. They can find books, they can find articles, they can find videos, they can find anything they want to find. And they can find it quickly, they can find it easily, they can find it for free.

Second, there is the fact that people are reading less. They are reading less books, they are reading less newspapers, they are reading less magazines. They are reading more on the Internet, they are reading more on their phones, they are reading more on their tablets. And they are reading less in print.

Third, there is the fact that people are spending less time in libraries. They are not spending as much time in libraries as they used to. They are not going as often as they used to. They are not staying as long as they used to. And they are not reading as much as they used to.

And finally, there is the fact that people are no longer interested in libraries. They are no longer interested in the quiet, the peace, the beauty, the knowledge, the leisure, the peace, the quiet. They are no longer interested in libraries.

But libraries are not just places of quiet study. They are also places of knowledge, of leisure, of beauty, of community. And they are places that we cannot afford to lose.

So, I urge everyone to support their local libraries. To go to them, to use them, to treasure them. To make sure that they are not forgotten, that they are not ignored, that they are not closed. To make sure that libraries continue to be the centers of community, the centers of knowledge, the centers of peace, the centers of quiet.

As Groucho Marx said, “I go to libraries so that I can read.” And I urge everyone to go to libraries, to use them, to treasure them, to make sure that they continue to be the centers of knowledge, the centers of leisure, the centers of community.

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Charles J. M. P.

The New York Review of Books
As librarians, we know the value of our community services, and our patrons appreciate their importance as well. But in an increasingly
digital world, we see the role of libraries as community and cultural centers at times undervalued, and occasionally under fire. When
shrinking municipal budgets combine with the nonstop technological revolution, public library services that focus on building community
face-to-face, inspiring and educating patrons about art, literature, and music, and helping patrons engage in civil discourse can seem
quaint. But it is precisely those shrinking budgets and the “bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries
build communities.”– R. David Lankes. “To build up a library is to create a life. It’s never just a random collection of books.”– Carlos MarÃ­a DomÃ­nguez. “The truth is libraries are clubhouses for free speech, controversy, and community.”– Paula Poundstone. “In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us to swim.”– Linton Weeks. “If I was a book, I would like to be a library book, so I would be taken home by all different sorts of kids.”– Cornelia Funke. In other countries, public libraries are focal points for the community, are socializing places for the elderly, provide educational
support for children, are great places to meet people without being bugged to buy or eat drink something. They are the place where
people can access the internet when they have no computers at home. Far fewer, I suspect, than the millions libraries have turned out
over the last hundred years. Their slow disappearance is a tragedy, not just for those impoverished towns and cities, but for everyone
everywhere terrified at the thought of a country without libraries. Subscribe to our Newsletters. Best of The New York Review, plus
books, events, and other items of interest. The popularity of libraries in Britain is indicated by the fact that, in a country without identity
cards, a person’s library card is the most common means of identification for someone who does not have a driving licence. Counties
are the oldest divisions of the country in England and Wales. Most of them existed before the Norman conquest. They are still used
today for local government purposes, although a few have been ‘invented’ this century (e.g. Humberside) and others have no function in
government but are still used for other purposes. One of these is Middlesex, which cove