Why I Love The Library!!!

I have had a love affair with libraries since before I could read. My mother brought me with her to the Tesson Ferry Branch of the St. Louis County Library when she checked out Romance Novels, and I enjoyed the contemplative space where I was allowed to wander through the shelves of books, pick one out, settle into a comfortable chair, and look at the pictures. When I learned to read, my mother made sure I was signed-up for the summer reading program. For each book I read, I was given a star to place behind my name on the chart. Sometimes the numerous stars would require taping another paper behind my name to accommodate the growing chain of stars. In high school, I visited the library nearly every day of my senior year. I had accumulated the required credits necessary for graduation, and I chose to spend much of my time wandering the stacks, finding books, and reading for hours. As a college student, I had the pleasure of working, studying, and thinking in Pickler Library on the campus of Truman State University, Kent Library at Southeast Missouri State University, and Ellis Library at the University of Missouri. There is not physical space on campus that better demonstrates the mission, values, and culture of a college like its library.

The library has always been an oasis in a world of distraction, noise, and half-truths. It is a sacred place - not only because it houses books, art, and space for thinking, but also because its space allows for and promotes diversity, individuality, and curiosity. The library provides crucial space and materials to nourish ideas, develop thoughts, and challenge opinions. The library is a warehouse of ideas waiting to be discovered. The centrality of a college library to the education of its students cannot be overstated and must be maintained to ensure the integrity of higher education.

In the current political climate that stresses assessment and measurable outcomes, it can be easy to dismiss the power of serendipity. It is unfortunate that we, as teachers and librarians,
are at the mercy of the “idolatry of data,” when metrics matter more than thinking, and when library renovations require reminding those in control of the purse string that not everything can be reduced to numbers on a spreadsheet. Stumbling upon a book, album, film, or article can provide a pathway to a new way of thinking. Working with a librarian to locate credible information, reading and understanding how that information fits into a student’s life, and evaluating one’s own thinking will lead to a richer connection with the wider world. Curiosity and what James Patterson calls “long-form thinking” are not easily measured, but they lie at the heart of a library’s existence. Without the library and the librarians, we are not a college. We will be reduced to training students to get jobs – not teaching our students to learn for a lifetime.

If undergraduate education exists to create critical thinkers and life-long learners, then the library and its mission to distinguish between knowledge and information should be at its heart. The important work of teaching Information Literacy to our students stands in competition with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Instant Messaging. The digital expectations these social media platforms promote are not conducive to deliberate thinking. For our students the world of ideas seems to be shrinking even as our technical capacity to share and access content is increasing. Any investment in the library is a valuable investment in the future of our student’s lives.

Works Cited
