

A Library Experience

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I have always loved libraries. My childhood library, the Kent Free Library in Ohio, holds an almost magical quality in my memories. The children's area was in the basement and could be accessed by elevator or a metal spiral staircase near the adult service desk. It felt like stepping into another world every time I walked by the reference librarian, who only furthered the charm by winking at me as if to say she was in on the secret. Once I ascended into it, the room was cool in temperature and dim in lighting, making it feel like a cave in the humid summer. This feeling was compounded by the sidewalk level window, giving you a view of grass, flowers and feet passing. Winding your way through a maze of book shelves you would eventually find the reading carpet. Once you selected a book from the shelves the children's librarian would greet you by name and then point to a spot on the carpet just for you. I remember lying on that carpet for hours reading. Now, when asked to go to a happy place in my mind that is the place I think of first.

Working in libraries for the last fourteen years, I have strived to give what my childhood library was for me to the children I serve. It's not the physical space I want to give, although a spiral staircase is a really cool way to enter a room. For me, I want to give the children and families I serve the same sense of belonging I felt every time I entered that children's room.

The librarian was always there to greet us. She had a smile on her face and took the time to learn our names, and she somehow remembered something about us. I want to do this for the children I see each day. I can't promise that I will remember everyone's name, at least not at first. But, I can promise to always have a smile on my face to let everyone know that I'm genuinely happy to see them.

I remember the children's room of my childhood was full of purpose. All the books and the toys were there for the purpose of learning. Sometimes the lessons learned were easy, such as a square shape goes in the square hole. Sometimes the lessons were harder to grasp, such as the act of sharing a toy with another. I love that the children's area of the New Ulm Public Library is filled to the brim with books and toys that help the children with fine motor skills, critical thinking, and social skills. These skills help us to learn how to read, believe or not.

The children's room seemed to be so calm and quiet when I was a child, but I'll tell you that I don't want to re-create the days of "shushing" children and parents. I want to hear children laugh and parents in conversation. The art of having fun is so much more important than the quiet of the library of my youth. Having the opportunity to

communicate with one another, face to face, is valuable experience for children to have each day, parents too.

The selection of books seemed endless to me as a child in my library. I know perspective is relative and when you're less than four foot tall, everything seems pretty big. I also know that spaces in libraries differ and the size of a collection is not always dictated by the size of the room. I love that the New Ulm Public Library is part of a cooperative, and that books move back and forth from the libraries involved in the system five days a week. That service, along with our digital library and streaming service, make this library so much bigger than its physical walls.

Long before I worked in a library I felt that a visit to the library should be a positive one for children. I wanted for my children the same magical experience I had as a child. I want that for your children now. How else are they going to learn to love the library if we don't make it a fun and inviting experience?