

Exploring Libraries on Vacation

By Laura Stoll, Assistant to the Director

When I'm on vacation, I enjoy visiting other libraries. It's fun to see what programs they offer, the services they provide to their patrons, and the variety of new and historic buildings that house them. As I write this column, I'm preparing for a trip to Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah, and I've already tagged a few libraries on our route.

One of those is The Community Library in Ketchum, Idaho. Their website says that anyone can sign up for a card, so I'll be coming home with a souvenir. If that's not enough, it also hosts Gold Mine Thrift, which claims to be "one of the hottest thrift stores in the West, and a purveyor of all things Sun Valley." Ketchum was the final home of Ernest Hemingway, and The Community Library Association maintains the building as a private residence for visiting writers.

Last fall, I took a trip to my hometown of Clinton, New Jersey, and stopped by our Clinton Challenge competitor, the North County Branch of the Hunterdon County System. The highlight was meeting Mo Ferretti, whom I already knew virtually from our many emails and Zoom meetings. She showed me around their building, which featured a 3-D printer, an impressive collection of graphic novels, and even a shelf full of yearbooks from North Hunterdon Regional High School! This was especially fun since I found my senior photo, along with one of my mom in the faculty section, who was a home economics teacher there when I was a student.

When my husband Ben and I went to Cape Cod a few years ago, we had a great time wandering around the Provincetown Public Library. The building was once the Center Methodist Episcopal Church, and the impressively tall ceiling has enough room for a scale model of the "Rose Dorothea," a famed "Indian Head" schooner.

The last time we visited our daughter in Manhattan, we spent a few hours on the rooftop terrace of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library on Fifth Avenue. Located across the street from the main New York Public Library building, it has a great view, plenty of seating, and much-needed shade on a warm summer day. This building has a typical public library collection with plenty of fiction, nonfiction, and children's books. Near the front entrance was a large table where patrons were busy working on six different jigsaw puzzles.

Last winter, I went on a scavenger hunt around Fort Myers, Florida, with my son, Henry. One of the clues took us to First Street, and as I looked ahead, I saw that across from the Fort Myers Regional Library was Joe's Record Exchange. Henry and I happily split up for half an hour while he shopped for LPs and I marveled at the library's enormous bank of public computers, browsed the stacks, and took a copy of their newsletter.

On another trip, this time to the West Coast, Henry and Ben went to the Monterey Bay Aquarium while I laced up my sneakers and walked to the Monterey Public Library. It was a long walk in the sun, so I sat for a while and flipped through their magazines as I enjoyed the air conditioning. The new facility belies the library's long history; California's first public library was established in Monterey in 1849.

It might seem silly, but one of the things I love most about visiting other libraries is seeing the same popular book titles on the shelves at other libraries. It reminds me that for all of the differences in our communities, people across the country love reading the same books. With all of the turmoil in our world these days, it's nice that no matter where you go, you can rely on a public library.