

The Librarian

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You think you know yourself, your students, your colleagues...but do you?

I loved to read. I loved numbers. I loved books. I was not all that fond of people. I dreamed of becoming a librarian.

As a child, libraries always provided the best possible escape. In the summer, when the endless boiling humid days stacked one upon another, I positioned myself on the library steps waiting for the lock to click. Praise the Lord. The cold rush of air greeted my perspiration, cooling every fiber in my body.

The library was the antithesis of home.

Home was an upstairs apartment cluttered with my brother's dirty sports toys and my sister's mangled dolls. Arthur explained how a good mitt needed to be conditioned with sweat and dirt, while little Natalie ripped the heads off her Barbie's, grabbed the cat by his tail, and honed her skills as a serial killer. Perhaps Arthur knew how to produce a good baseball prop, but without question he knew how to turn little Natalie into a screaming ninny. Grabbing her by her scrawny ankles, he would position her head over the toilet allowing her long hair to swim in the water while he flushed the commode repeatedly. No matter how frequently he did this I was still amazed by the volume of the voice my sister's tiny frame could produce. What is the statistical likelihood that two serial killers could come from the same family?

Thank Jesus, my Mother believed as a middle child I deserved a little alone time away from my siblings in training for incarceration. She argued that my serving as an audience for their bizarre activities only encouraged them to new heights. Before anyone could give this hypothesis more consideration, I established the practice of library day. I was permitted one library day a week. The night before, I selected my clothes. Nothing too tight or revealing would do. Waking early, I raced to the library securing the top step closest to the entry even if that meant elbowing a homeless person aside. This retreat was important to me too.

Library day passed too quickly as I basked in the exquisite abundance of books, quiet clientele, and perfectly calibrated temperatures. When the announcement came that the library would be closing in ten minutes, I fought the urge to cry, throw my body on the carpet, and kick scream until I was allowed to stay the night or be thrown in jail.

In my adolescent mind, jail was preferable to returning home to the soon to be felons. Of course, being the middle child, I gathered my belongings, smiled at and thanked the librarians as I went sadly on my way.

Now that my siblings are grown with families of their own, I realize that my recollections of them may well be too harsh. My brother has been happily married for decades to the same woman and works in a sporting goods store where he sells handmade fishing flies, perfectly conditioned catchers' mitts, and swim goggles. My sister little Natalie did indeed have very good lungs. She currently is traveling around Europe singing the lead role in whatever opera she chooses.

Neither my sister nor my brother has been incarcerated, but sometimes it's the quiet ones that you have to keep an eye on. Every family should produce at least one serial killer.

Yes, I became a librarian. I still love to read. I still love numbers. I still love books. But now I like people, especially adolescent girls that stay until closing time. I find myself giving them an extra smile and encouraging them to come back tomorrow.