Surely I am not the first, nor am I likely to be the last, person to be enthralled with my local library. This happened at an early age for me. I have fond memories of Mrs. McCombs, my first grade-school librarian, who brought books to life for me. Even today, I can close my eyes and see her animated face as she read to us. I hear the excitement, fear, curiosity or joy in her voice as she related a story. She made the characters so real that I wanted to befriend the underdog and thrash the villain.

Mrs. McCombs was also the person who provided me with the treasure map that allowed me to navigate through that marvelous warehouse of adventures, for she taught me to use the card catalog. I would feel the stiff cardboard as my fingers did the walking through subjects, authors and titles until one caught my eye and ignited my imagination. I wandered through the book stacks, running my fingers over the book spines and discovered a new, unexpected treasure.

As I got older, I used the library to gather information for research papers. What an adventure that was! I would begin with one hypothesis, only to find that someone decades before me and light years ahead of me had already disproved my theory. More reading; more research; more digging; more adventure.

Then the day came when I stumbled into a “new library.” I marched into the library to begin work on a research paper, only to find that the first research I had to do was to locate the card catalog. This indispensible tool had been discarded and replaced by a computer screen and keyboard. I might as well have been in the papyrus-laden shelves of an ancient Egyptian library! I can laugh about it today, but it was quite traumatic at the time. The library of my youth had changed forever. However, I soon realized that I still was enthralled with the library. It still satisfied my cravings for fascinating reading material; it was still a terrific resource for my research; and it still kindled my sense of adventure.

The libraries of today are far different from the card-catalog venues of my youth. The goal of both collegiate and community libraries has remained the same: to be places where people can freely access and share information. Today’s libraries offer resources, programs and services undreamed of in ancient times... or even a few decades ago. Who could have imagined a public library where people flock to check their email, renew their passport, learn basic sign language; where one can purchase a book from the used bookstore or check out the latest DVD or audio book? What prophet could have foretold that the public library would house entities such as the Autism Resource Center and the Duke Street Business Center? And what scholar from days of yore could
have envisioned a college library where the gallery is used for art exhibits with grand openings featuring string trios?

But wait! Due to advances in information technology, the library of the future will yet again be transformed. Libraries will have unrestricted access to information in many different formats and from an untold variety of sources. Digitization and electronic media will replace books. Reference materials will be even more accessible regardless of whether one is physically located in the library or transmitting information from one’s iPod, iPad or laptop. Libraries will reconfigure space so that human discourse and learning can be enhanced.

Higher education institutions are addressing the changing nature of libraries as we have discovered that they are no longer merely physical structures that serve as the repository of information; more importantly, they are becoming the central hub of learning and human interaction on our campuses. Community libraries must wrestle with these changes as well.

A recent *Washington Post* article on libraries noted, “The idea of settling into a comfy chair for a long read will, of course, survive for some people, but will seem archaic to others. Libraries will have to react both as a conservator of the greatest human traditions, pointing the way for an electronically-minded generation to see what's different and unique about books, and as a leader in finding ways to turn essentially solitary online existences into activities that involve direct human contact. That's a powerful role that libraries played in the socialization and Americanization of past generations of immigrants, and it's a role that libraries must embrace in new ways.”

So how do we help our children enter this brave, new world? We begin by introducing them to the library at an early age. We support programs that provide opportunities for them to fall in love with reading such as the Mother Goose, Toddler, Preschool and Family story times at our public libraries, whether that reading takes place from a traditional book or an electronic alternative such as a Kindle or Nook. We share with them our own sense of adventure in discovering the resources available at the library. Then we commit ourselves to the preservation of this grand institution... in its new form!

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