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My Library Card: A Very Valuable Possession

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on DECEMBER 9, 2013

The other day I was reflecting on some of my most valuable possessions. My library card was pretty high on my list.

My library card is not much to look at. It's a thin reddish-orange, plastic-coated card—the same size as my credit card. On the front of the card are listed the phone numbers of all the branch libraries in Geauga County. On the back is a kind of oath under which I signed my name many years ago. It says, "I accept responsibility for all use of this card, including any fines or fees." Amen to that!

My library card is very valuable to me because *books* are very valuable to me. When I was growing up on our farm, we didn't have many books. The few we had, though, I read over and over again. I remember reading a thick book of illustrated fairy tales. The wolf in "The Three Little Pigs" and the troll in "Billy Goat Gruff" scared me to death. We had a book with Bible stories in it too. I remember mostly the frightening stories and pictures: Noah's ark and the great flood plus Abraham with the knife in his upraised hand ready to slay little Isaac. Thank God the angel stopped him just in time. Other images from these books brought me comfort and joy: the Princess dancing with her Prince, Jesus carrying the lost lamb on his shoulders.

The first library I ever saw was at James A. Garfield Elementary School. It was very, very small, yet I remember gleefully checking out books on a regular basis. The fact that you could borrow a book FOR FREE and even TAKE IT HOME almost blew me away. I wondered: Whoever came up with such a great idea?

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.



Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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This little girl is not me, but she looks like me when I was young—except I had bangs.

I spent many happy hours in the library at Regina High School too. And I found the old library at Notre Dame College particularly fascinating. I loved the semi-darkness, the slightly musty smell, the ancient dark tables, the two elderly nuns who worked there in silence all day, and all the nooks and cubby holes where I could hide out and read and read and read, losing all sense of the passage of

time.

I love my library card because of what it opens for me: “the temple of learning”—as the journalist Carl Rowan called it. Every time we open a book, we set ourselves within that sacred temple. And our learning never stops. In fact I hope I die with a book on the nightstand next to my bed! The writer Anne Lamott said that in a library you can find “miracles and truth.” I have found both in the libraries I have used. I’ve found the miracle of human existence, the marvels of the natural world, the mystery of goodness and evil, the miracle of faith, the truth of incredible people, and the marvel of love.



Of course, these days the internet brings the library right into our homes. I, for example, do much of my research on line. But I still regularly visit my local library carrying a list of books I’d like to read before I depart this earthly life. As the old proverb says, “So many books, so little time...” As I get older, though, I always recall what Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine writer, said: “I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.” Amen to that too! In fact, his words remind me: I must tell a friend to be sure I’m buried with my library card in my pocket!

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Mary December 9, 2013 at 9:16 am



Yes, I love libraries, and I am fortunate enough to work at one!
Today's blog reminds me what is extra-special about what I do every day.
Thank you, Melannie.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:29 pm



Dear Mary, I'm so glad we've heard from someone who actually works in a library! Yes, what you do is "extra special." Thank you--and thank you for writing! Melannie

REPLY

mary james December 9, 2013 at 9:40 am



Oh absolutely! I love libraries. I love books. As soon as I was allowed to ride my bike to the library--about two miles away--I would be there often. I have always had wonderful librarian to help me. The West Park Branch was my "home" away from home. Attending St. John College, we would often walk down to the Main Branch and found another wonderful librarian--Ms. Clark. Teaching at St. Peter Canton the class and I visited the County library weekly since it was right in our back yard--the former home and yard of Pres. William McKinley.
Thanks for the wonderful reminders

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:28 pm



Dear James, You bring up another beautiful aspect of libraries: the wonderful people who work in them! I always find them most helpful when I'm looking for something. Thanks for reminding us of them! Melannie

REPLY

Julie December 9, 2013 at 10:21 am



I could identify with your love for books and libraries. I have access to our monastery's library, our college library, but I still often go to the public library for more books!! I agree, So much to read and learn about, and so little time! Thanks, Melanie!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:26 pm



Dear Julie, How fortunate you are to have access to three libraries! That's wonderful! Thanks for sharing! Melannie

REPLY

Jean Shott December 9, 2013 at 10:33 am



Growing up on Prince, Peggy and I would walk to the library every week in the summer, getting our "allowed" three books to enjoy the following week. It is one of my fondest memories. These days, my Nook is always at hand, and the "specials" open my mind to a wide variety of books I'd probably not think to look for in the library.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:25 pm



Dear Jean, I can just picture you and Peggy walking to that library every week. Cherish the memory. And it's good sometimes to read a book we didn't plan on reading. I'm sure the "specials" help you to do that. Thanks for writing, Jean! Cousin Dolly

REPLY

Chris Keil December 9, 2013 at 10:36 am



When the boys were little I volunteered in the library and loved it! I even thought that once I was retired..(like THAT'S going to happen) and I didn't need to work for money I would LOVE to work in a library.

Now my library card gets me books on my e-reader too! I love my e-reader! I have over 300 books at my finger tips at any time to read when I'm in the mood. For instance I've had a book about Nelson Mandela that I decided to start reading in view of his death. Love the information and stories!

Thanks Sr. Melannie. Are you staying warm? It's been below freezing here in Texas and all the roads and parking lots are ice skating rinks.....what fun!!!!

Take care. Merry Christmas!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:23 pm



Dear Chris, Wow! Over 300 books on your e-reader. That's amazing!

Volunteering in a library sounds like a worthwhile goal to me!...And I saw on the news how Texas was being hit by that storm. Right now you're having worse weather than we are. Take care! Melannie

REPLY

Karen December 9, 2013 at 10:37 am



I credit my parents for instilling a love of reading at an early age. I too remember the fairy tales (my mother's family came from Germany and those German fairy tales were particularly gruesome – and memorable as a result). We too had children's books about the Good Shepherd and the sermon on the Mount. I can still picture the cover with a blond-good-looking Jesus carrying a little lamb. Both of my favorite books from my childhood came from my Grandmother. One is the book of German fairy tales, and the other is a prayer book she gave me for my First Communion. It was so beautiful with gold trim on the pages I treated it like an icon.

When I like a book, I tend to read it over and over. My copies of GWTW and all my James Michener's are dog-eared. I think because I like having them around so much, I am not a frequent library visitor. I buy or get as gifts books on my wish list and I enjoy seeing them on the shelf. Just looking at the spine reminds me of the story within.

I too am converting to reading books electronically, which gets points for

convenience, but it just isn't the same as having the book in your lap. Case in point: When I look at my Bible, it has multiple bookmarks, highlites, writings & reflections tucked inside. Bits & pieces of stuff from past retreats. Its not just a book - its a keepsake box. How could Kindle do that?

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:12 pm



Dear Karen, Yes, some of those fairy tales are pretty gruesome...And I agree that it's a joy just to see books on a shelf. And I loved what you said about your Bible—how it has become a “keepsake box.” That’s so true! Thank you for sharing! Melannie

REPLY

Mary Schneider December 9, 2013 at 11:01 am



Another library lover here.... When I was a pre-teen in the mid 1940s, I found all of my aunt's books from nursing school (which my mother was storing for her) and read them all, some frightening but all interesting. We also had available at home Bobbsey Twins, Nancy Drew, and many books of Saints. I remember my Dad, not usually a reader of anything more than the daily newspaper, reading a book by Cornelia Otis Skinner (I think the title was When Our Hearts Were Young and Gay), with tears of laughter, I was certain that reading was the best thing ever. I was right then and still love to read. Thanks for sharing your love of books with all of us. I now live in walking distance to a great library and am a very frequent visitor there.

Mary S

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:08 pm



Dear Mary, The titles you list are familiar to me too. And I loved the example of your Dad laughing out loud while reading. You and I are both so lucky to be within walking distance of our libraries! Thanks for taking the time to write, Mary! Melannie

REPLY

Peggy Svoboda December 9, 2013 at 11:43 am



I've always loved to read, and visiting libraries has always been a wonderful way to find new things to explore. I can learn about places I'll be visiting on my travels or enjoy a good novel. I have embraced technology, though, so my iPad is full of books that I've downloaded. I still like browsing in the library and pick up books on CD to listen to while I'm driving.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:05 pm



Dear Peggy, Your travels around the world and your vast reading have enriched you in countless ways. I don't have a Kindle or iPad (yet!) but, like you, I do enjoy listening to books as I drive. On a recent drive to Pittsburgh, I listened to "Killing Lincoln" by Bill O'Reilly. It made the trip so short! I had to finish the book the next few days at home....Thanks for writing, Peggy! Dolly

REPLY

Patricia M December 9, 2013 at 3:23 pm



I am with you concerning the intrigue of a library. I, too, have so many e-books, but the library holds something special for me. I am so pleased that my 5 year old grandson absolutely loves visiting the library. I did not have such an opportunity when I was a child. I hope his enthusiasm continues.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 9, 2013 at 4:00 pm



Dear Pat, You're a good Grandmother for taking your grandson to the library. Your enthusiasm is obviously rubbing off on him. That's wonderful!
Melannie

REPLY

Annie December 9, 2013 at 9:04 pm



Just imagine heaven's library! And you won't even need a card (in case you get buried without one). 😊

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 10, 2013 at 6:22 am

You're right, Annie. Since there's no time in heaven, how can a book be late? Melannie



REPLY

Cathy December 9, 2013 at 9:30 pm

Hello, Sister Melanie,

Libraries have always been special to me ever since childhood. But I never would have dreamed back then that I would meet my future husband at a library, but that is exactly what happened! I was employed as a library clerk just out of college. My husband to be was soon employed as a librarian at the same library. Well, it wasn't long before we were dating and married now for 27 years. So, as you can see, libraries hold a special place in my heart and memories. Especially that one!
Cathy



REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 10, 2013 at 6:24 am

What a great story, Cathy! I can certainly see why libraries hold a special place in your heart! Sr. Melannie



REPLY

Elaine Tomasch Neri December 10, 2013 at 12:27 pm

Sr. Melannie, thank you for your "wisdom" regarding books and libraries. From birth until the present, my daughter has been encouraged to read. Although she is now 28 years old, we recall the many nights we were "required" to read 3 books per night before she would go to sleep. And if fatigue would encourage us to try to abbreviate the selection, she would remind us that there were more words on the page than we were including. This occurred when she was not yet 4 years old. Today, there is a room dedicated in our home to a den, which has shelves and shelves of books which contain a wealth of mystery, and stories of all types. Our living room contains shelves of leather bound classics. So books and their content have become and remain endearing to us, and although technology is available, nothing replaces the book which shows the "signs" of being read over and over



again. Thank you for your recognition of library cards . . .we have opted to create a library of our own, with the invisible card of love and appreciation.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 10, 2013 at 3:15 pm



Dear Elaine, How nice to hear from you! I loved your description of reading 3 books per night to your daughter every night. That's real love! And how nice to have a room with all those books—plus a place for the leather bound books. Thanks so much for sharing your love for libraries and books with us! Melannie

REPLY

Susan December 10, 2013 at 1:02 pm



Dear Sr. Melanie,
Sorry that I'm not commenting on your library commentary, but three words hit me... Regina High School. I also went to Regina and later taught Home Economics there for the last two years before it closed. What year did you graduate? My year was 1971. It was very difficult for me when Regina closed. Three of my Aunts also went there. It was a good place and a you are right... a great library. God Bless you.
Susan

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 10, 2013 at 3:12 pm



Dear Susan, I graduated from Regina in 1962. I taught there from 1980-1982. Yes, I grieved when Regina closed. It's a real loss on many levels...Thank you for responding. We share a love for our Alma Mater—and her beautiful, bright library! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Deacon Larry Cummins December 14, 2013 at 12:13 pm



Sr. Melannie,

First, I have to say that I have read many of your books, recommended them to others and given them away as gifts. In early childhood up to my high school days, I never really enjoyed reading; that is until I discovered Hardy Boys Mysteries. From

then on I could not get enough to read. In fact, during the last years of high school, I actually worked as a page at the St. John College library where a vast number of book became available to me.

Today, I have my own personal library at home which has a great variety of books in it. Many of the books, though, have a focus on our faith and they are the ones that I prize most, because they have helped me travel along my journey.

I still give books away as gifts because it is for me another means of evangelization. And, once again, I thank you for the books which you have authored, many of which have found their way into my personal library. To say the least, books have become a real treasure for me.

Larry

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND December 16, 2013 at 10:47 am



Dear Larry, It's good hearing from another book lover. I bet I would enjoy browsing your personal library! Thanks again for writing. And I really appreciate your positive response to my books! Melannie

REPLY

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