

CHAPTERS

Deschutes Public Library Newsletter

Message from Michael

October 27, 2008

The old saying “It’s amazing how quickly time passes” may be cliché, but it’s true. This year marks the 40th anniversary of my first job in a library. I am looking forward to my retirement at the end of the year, but I am also looking back on the last forty years with a tinge of nostalgia.

I have fond memories of the many evenings I spent as an entry level periodicals clerk in the basement of the Mobile Public Library. Students from the area, black and white, gathered to research school assignments. As there was no direct supervision in the basement, term papers (and my work assignments) were regularly set aside to discuss the issues of the day—civil rights and the Vietnam War. The charged discussions flowed between the two poles of optimism and cynicism. You could feel the electricity in the air in Mobile in 1969.



Library Director
Michael Gaston

The two years that I worked as the Lane County jail librarian in the 1970s were equally intense. I spent a lot of my time in the maximum security wing, assisting inmates to obtain information and reading materials. I traveled from jail cell to jail cell with my book-cart and notepad.

Those reference and readers advisory interviews were deeply personal. Nearly every inmate was in some stage of a crisis. Some were working to save a relationship; many were in mid-divorce. Some were working to salvage a life seemingly gone wrong; many were in denial and were seeking escape through literature. I often think of the inmates I worked with at the jail and wonder what became of them.

The nineteen years that I worked as a librarian on the Oregon Coast were no less engaging. I worked with a wave of retirees who migrated to Florence in the 1980s from across the nation to provide the leadership to build a new library, a new hospital, new schools, and a performing arts center. Every year the focus shifted to another challenge in the decades-long crusade to transform a sleepy small town into a vibrant community.

I also worked a regular shift at the reference desk in Florence. My idealism was refreshed by working with students who were in the early stages of discovering the world around them—and their own identity. I enjoyed walking through the stacks with my older “regulars”—discussing favorite titles and suggesting new authors.

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