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This is the season when we make a special effort to pay attention to all that brings us joy and happiness. We decorate our homes and businesses with bright, shiny objects, and we gather with friends and loved ones to share food and laughter. The holidays are also a time of contemplation, renewal and commitment, when we look past the dark days of winter and make plans to take full advantage of the approaching new year.

Two articles in this newsletter will help to define the holiday for me this year. The lead article describes our Library's effort to come to the assistance of the Cameron Parish Library in Louisiana. These are the darkest days for Cameron Parish. What was once a thriving library program, one of the best of its size in Louisiana, has literally been reduced to rubble. A new library project, nearing completion, was completely destroyed. A third of the population, including the library director, lost their homes.

Contrast the devastation in Cameron Parish with the December 19th opening of the new Sisters Library. The Sisters Library is a dream come true for a small, thriving, community. I walked through on Monday and received a real jolt of holiday spirit. A group of five-year olds were sitting around a miniature table, each with an opened picture book, looking for all the world like budding scholars. Teens had already found the public access computers. A stream of long-time residents braved ice and snow to walk through the new building and celebrate with Branch Manager Peg Bermel, who has served the community for over twenty years.

Sad as it may be, I can't help but think about Peg's counterpart in Cameron Parish. These are her darkest days. Yet, when we spoke to her by phone, her sights were clearly set on the New Year. The bookmobile is up and running. One of the library buildings can be rebuilt. She recently purchased a trailer and moved from her hotel room. And many long-time residents are returning to rebuild their lives. Step-by-step, she is moving towards a brighter future.

I am very pleased that we have the bright and shiny new Sisters Library to celebrate this year. I am also grateful for the example and the lessons that we can learn from the heroic effort to rebuild the Cameron Parish Library. The two taken together will define the holidays for me this year.

I encourage one and all to celebrate the holidays by writing a check to your local Friends of the Library to support the Cameron Parish Library.



Michael Gaston