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My Love of Books: Source of Life Support

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*Wisdom is wealth, and every good book is equivalent to a wise head – the head may die, but the book may live forever.*

— Joseph Wheeler

My love of books sprang out of a lack of hearing. I was born with normal hearing but lost it partially due to a doctor’s mistake. I grew up in Bulgaria facing many challenges and switching back and forth between the world of silence and the world of sound. This event has marked my entire life and shaped my love of books.

“What can not be heard, can be read.” I started devouring books. For me, the library wasn’t a storage building filled with books — it was a bright stream of thought and spiritual nourishment. After completing my M.S. degree in Chemical Engineering in 1995, I took a position at the National Polytechnic Museum in Sofia. Rather than building machines as I was trained, I succumbed to my constant thirst for knowledge, followed my heart, and worked as a curator. One day, my boss asked me to come up with fresh ideas for new exhibits. The first place I instinctively sought for inspiration was … the library. You got it right! The museum had a small collection of books stuck in boxes, covered with dust. It was winter and due to poor funding, the storage room had broken windows and no heat. There was only one dilapidated mechanical typewriter in the entire museum. In the midst of these unpromising conditions I started opening the boxes and melted at the sight of the dusty books from unknown authors. G. Keillor’s words captured this moment in my life when he said, “Unread authors are kept in the underground crypts of libraries waiting to be rediscovered.” Sitting on the floor, immersed in solitude, I began my exploration to find the hidden treasures of the books. It was as though they brought me to life. I traveled in awe of the human mind: its excellence and its undertakings that have improved our quality of life from generation to generation. I began organizing the books thoroughly and forgot about deadlines. My boss reminded me of the responsibilities I had: to set up exhibits, not to read and organize books.

That day, my husband received a green card in the mail. Six months later, we flew to the United States where I continued to follow my dream to read books. With no English fluency and limited hearing capabilities, I called my friends, the books, to help me to get into the library school. Considering my newness to this country and its language, in retrospect I demonstrated great foresight and courage by entering the program at the University of Maryland Library School. I wanted to accomplish my dreams and upon the completion of the program, I proudly became a librarian. So, here I am … daily managing electronic information, and although homesick for print books, I look for ways to save them from the Internet monster. Why? When I began writing this essay, I searched the Internet for some ideas. Nothing happened … my mind remained blank, no inspiration, and no motivation to look further. Instinctively I returned to my friends, the print books, and suddenly through quotes I felt the inspiration penetrate my mind and continued on page 53
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my heart. Eureka! I contemplated my first encounter with printed materials. I always knew that “good books are friends who are always ready to talk to [me].” No matter how limited and unappealing my experience with books was in the times of communist Bulgaria, even then, I saw clearly my love of books as the distinctive thread linking my past, present, and future.

Editor’s Note: Published here is the winning essay of the Rachel K. Schenk Memorial Scholarship, August 2007. The Schenk Scholarship was funded for five years. 2007 was the final year. Thanks to Jack Walsdorf for his support. — KS

Endnotes

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BORN & LIVED: Sofia, Bulgaria. I currently live in Germantown, MD.
EARLY LIFE: I had a wonderful childhood switching back and forth from the large city and the rural village where my grand-parents lived. First, I read books surrounded by farm animals and later by... computers.
EDUCATION: Two Masters degree earned: Chemical Engineering from Bulgaria and Library & Information Sciences from University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA.
FIRST JOB: The National Polytechnic Museum in Bulgaria served as my initial source of inspiration to pursue a library degree later in the United States while working as a circulation technician at the Howard County Public Library, Columbia, MD.
PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Collection development in science, technology and engineering with emphasize on reference materials. At the national level, I’m involved with the work of Science & Technology Section (STS). Current research area is focused on library staff with hidden disabilities.
IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: I love to escape from the digital environment by riding a bike in the nature with the kids, and of course ... reading books.
FAVORITE BOOKS: All books written by Shirley MacLaine, American film and theatre actress.
PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: A person who doesn’t say a word and forces me to figure out what he/she wants to tell me. So, please speak, don’t stand mute!
PHILOSOPHY: Think positively and smile often. When you see a high mountain, climb it; don’t run back! Once on the top, enjoy the view!

Nedelina Tchangalova

people profile

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