

Of libraries, in the age of the Internet

The Philippine Star · 9 Oct 2018 · B19 · PAULYNN SICAM

I read on Facebook last week about the Cebu City library that is open 24/7. A project of Mayor Tommy Osmeña, it was initially scoffed at by a critic as a “gimmick,” for who goes to libraries these days when everything one needs to learn can be downloaded from the Internet? Well, recent pictures taken in the library at 11 p.m. tell the story. The library is filled to capacity with students who have found the perfect place to study, research and write their reports in a clean well-lighted space with free wifi provided by the city. Kudos to Mayor Osmeña. It is inspiring to see young people hunched over their laptops and notepads imbibing knowledge, proving that a library need not be irrelevant in the age of the Internet.



I discovered the wonders of a library in high school. I was a boarder and the library was very close to the dorm. I spent a lot of time in that room curled up with book after book after lunch before the bell rang for the afternoon session, and after classes before dinner and study time. When I was in college, I spent many a Saturday afternoon at the Thomas Jefferson Library which was a short distance from our house in Sta. Mesa. It was sheer pleasure sitting among the volumes, discovering Robert Frost and Carl Sandberg, Norman Mailer and Roald Dahl, reading US magazines and periodicals, and just reveling in the written word. On some Saturdays, there would be oral readings by US Embassy personnel and their kids of children’s books, where I first got acquainted with Dr. Seuss.

It was at Tom Jeff where I watched the first King Kong movie, which terrified me, even in black and white. It was also, for me and my sister, a wonderful source of vinyl records of poetry readings, folk songs, Broadway hits and other delightful Americana.

I have not seen too many libraries since then. Once I got into journalism, my reading list evolved (or deteriorated) into academic treatises and intelligence reports on the insurgency, which were the basis for my articles. And later, my involvement in human rights and peace work further amended my reading list to dreary UN reports and the like, while at home, I had a growing pile of books that I just didn’t have the time to relish.

In this technological age, libraries must adjust or perish. Librarians must make libraries relevant to a generation with a short attention span and quick and easy access to more exciting sources of information and entertainment than books.

There is a school library in Blacktown near Sydney that does just that. My son-in-law, Ernesto “Edge” Gutierrez, Jr., is a high school teacher and college library coordinator in Nagle College, a Catholic School for Girls. As teacher-librarian, he has an edge over the standard variety li-

brarian because he is in touch with the students in the classroom which has enriched his and the students' library experience.

He wrote about it in a newsletter of SCIS (Schools Catalogue Information Service) in Australia: "What's refreshing about being a teacher-librarian is the fact that I get to converse with a lot of students during recess, lunch and after school...In one of our conversations during lunch, the students and I compared the novel *Thirteen Reasons Why* to the Netflix TV series version. Ideas poured out like rain. Some students were critical of both texts, some favored one over the other, and some liked both texts. The discussion was stimulating, as students provided examples to prove their point. It was an intellectually satisfying conversation that made everyone's day. Towards the end, somebody commented that the discussion was so good it should have been recorded.

The idea of recording the students' insights came to fruition by way of a library website run by the students themselves.

Wrote Edge, "The idea was to record their views about books they read, films they watch and songs they listen to. They wanted the website to be hip and informative as well. They wanted a venue where they could voice their thoughts and opinions and, at the same time, educate the website's readers of all ages. The students decided that the website would contain reviews of texts that students are into, with books, films and songs being the main ones. Some of the students were also encouraged to have their own blog entries on the site."

They found a free platform in Google sites that was easy to use. But how to sustain the website with regular updates? Simple. The students took charge. "They wanted to be part of something that hadn't been done before — a website filled with student content!" Although they don't get extra credit for contributing to the website, they committed to write for it regularly anyway. Launched in April this year, the site, titled "In Deed Not Word" has harvested written and oral reviews of books and music, submitted by students from the 7th to the 12th grades. According to their teacher-librarian, there is more than enough material to publish until the end of the term. "Students are clearly on-board with the library website and the school community has noticed the students' efforts. Teachers and staff are anticipating new content bi-weekly." A new feature of the website is "how to" where students are encouraged to submit their own videos on how to do anything at all because, the site says, "It's a proven fact that youth turn to their peers more than they do to adults for one very good reason... comfort. Rather than taking advice from an adult, hearing tips from your friends has a more lasting effect on a person."

At Nagle College, students rule the library website. It is impressive, and delightful. Go to <https://goo.gl/Jgci> and see for yourself.