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*Wallowa County Library*

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# Growing from the Heart

by *Claudia Jones*  
*Wallowa County Library*

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**M**y affinity with Oregon libraries began more than forty years ago in rural Josephine County. Raised in a family of avid readers, library outings were an important part of our weekly schedule. My mother had a passion for mystery and intrigue. While my brother and I were happily occupied in the children's room, she would head off into the stacks in search of the latest Agatha Christie or Dell Shannon. Her love of reading had a powerful influence on us as children, establishing a pattern we would follow later with our own families. Because the public library was a welcoming place, and my introduction to the world of books a happy one, I've maintained a strong connection to libraries wherever we've lived.

During the early 1970's, I worked in the circulation and reference departments at the Jackson County Library System. Cross-training opportunities in branches, periodicals and children's services provided a broad level of experience that served me well in later years as our family was an itinerant one. My husband's profession required frequent moves to small towns around Oregon and I discovered that volunteering was an excellent means of becoming involved in each new community. As soon as we finished unpacking, we'd head off in search of the local library. Offering to shelve books and provide weekly story times was a great icebreaker, and one guaranteed to make friends with staff and townspeople alike.



Claudia loads the van for a trip to the Troy branch library.

Today I am the director of a small rural library system in northeast Oregon. The variety of skills and experience I've gained from more than three decades of library work have been essential to the position I now hold. My job description includes the usual requirement for knowledge of collection development, youth services, reference, cataloging and budgeting, and I often find myself filling the roles of three people in a single morning. The challenge of "doing it all" is balanced by the unique opportunities that come from living and working in a small community.



New library bookcases built by Bob Jones, library volunteer.

I've found that there is no such thing as a typical day for the librarian of a small rural library. There are entire weeks when the phone never stops ringing, the books pile up in heaps, and it seems as if every student in the county is doing a report on the same subject. That's about the time that the computer goes down or the bathroom sink springs a leak! Because I am the only paid staff, my responsibilities extend to building and equipment maintenance too. During the winter months I shovel the snow away from the front door where it slides off the metal roof and lands in a heap. It can be a real adventure just digging the library van out from the drifts where it has been buried by the city snowplow. For major projects I call on the library's volunteer maintenance man, mechanic and carpenter... my husband Bob. Endlessly supportive and good-natured, he has built bookcases, repaired leaking faucets and installed storm windows. During last winter's cold snap when the water pipes froze solid for three days, he crawled under the building in below zero temperatures to thaw them and apply insulation. In addition to his contributions of time and energy, the gift I value the most is his recognition and support of what I do. His belief in me has strengthened me and given me the confidence to explore new possibilities.

Much of what I like best about working in rural library settings is the variety of tasks and the ingenious methods we devise to provide service. Most days I find my-

self juggling meetings and book orders with story time schedules and requests for curriculum support materials from one of the area schools. The Troy and Imnaha branch libraries, located in one-room schoolhouses in remote canyons, serve as both school and community libraries. Requests for materials about ancient civilizations or the seasons are followed by appeals for books on pruning trees or raising rabbits. Responding to requests from these remote locations is a challenge in itself. Concerned about timely delivery of materials, but constrained by a limited postage budget, the solution came in the guise of the local sanitation crew. Now our garbage truck drivers volunteer to transport boxes of books to the canyons on their regularly scheduled pick-up days.

This arrangement is due to a close association with the Child Care Resource & Referral director whose husband is one of the drivers. The library/CCR&R partnership was formed four years ago with the advent of the library's Training Wheels program. This service to daycares and preschools provides onsite story times, monthly newsletters for parents, and circulating boxes of children's materials. The success of the program is largely due to the support of local partners and additional funding from a state library grant. It's meeting challenges like these that invigorate me and remind me each day why I do what I do.

I have grown in this job in ways I never expected.



The road to Troy.

Eleven years ago, the job's most pressing needs consisted of organization, collection development and the coordination of services with local libraries. Each of these areas required a combination of skills and personal strength I could assuredly provide. The growth of library programs and outreach services in recent years has challenged and strengthened me to a much greater degree. Presentations to local agencies and service organizations have become easier. Those who know me now will have difficulty believing I was painfully shy as a child. I have learned to ask for donations to support programming, and am always gratified at the response. Further, my first grant proposal

ultimately funded the Training Wheels project. When faced with the task of describing the need for reliable transportation on remote canyon roads, I resorted to taking pictures of the roads I traveled and the ancient police car that served as my library-on-wheels. I have learned that communicating need and being passionate about a program may be as important in successful grant writing as the mechanics are. It is my belief that a strong commitment to service, knowing how to stretch dollars, and a sense of humor are vitally important. Being passionate about what I do carries me over the difficult times of budget reductions, personnel issues, long hours and short pay. Being passionate also helps me stay open to change.

I am a librarian today because of parents who first introduced me to the magic and wonder of books, and dedicated library staffs who nurtured my love for reading. This profession has provided me with opportunities for professional as well as personal growth. I have been able to pursue an interest in working with children and families, and have participated in collaborations to develop community outreach programs. Partnerships with local and state agencies have increased my awareness of current issues, and have challenged me to rethink the library's role in serving families.

I have worked with librarians from around the state and am privileged to call many of you friends. Your commitment to libraries and your willingness to lend support and encouragement has inspired me. There isn't anything else I'd rather be doing than working in Oregon libraries. ☑

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Celebrating the Week of the Young Child at Storytime.