



Jean Harris: A Career That Has Made a Difference

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About fourteen years ago I had the pleasure of meeting a very pleasant young woman who had just been hired as the teacher-librarian at Prince Charles School in Brantford. Being a parent volunteer, and having worked under a very dedicated, enthusiastic and talented teacher-librarian for over ten years previously, I wondered how this person could possibly *fill her shoes*. However, my fears were soon allayed.

This teacher-librarian set out to make her mark on the educational lives of the three hundred and fifty plus students who attended the school. She always greeted them at the door with a welcoming smile and invited them to come in, unless they tumbled noisily in, and then they were invited to go out and enter properly. She consistently reinforced, in many ways, the value of reading and research, books and libraries.

It was a pleasure working in the library while she taught children. The younger classes would go into the cozy story corner and there she would sit in her rocker and read them some of the wonderful stories from the many books in the primary section, inviting them to join in with stories that had a repetitious rhyme. This delighted the children and they participated eagerly, learning to love what reading had to offer them. I used to like to watch their faces as she read a story by Robert Munsch or Phoebe Gillman. Perhaps, in some homes, no one reads to the children, so this event

is a very pleasurable experience. Other times they would get to choose their own book and they felt so "grown up" as they walked back to their classroom, with the teacher-librarian waving goodbye to them. Others dropped in for assistance with a research project and she showed infinite patience as she helped them to determine where such information might be found. Entire classes of junior or intermediate students would come to learn about research, as a part of a unit developed by this teacher-librarian and a staff member. During these times, the students not only learned how to find information on their topic, but also how to make jot notes, use correct sentence structure, grammar, and spelling and how to write a report. The students were enabled to produce finished products of which they could be proud. Many days you would find her in the computer section encouraging students to learn computer skills in order to gain access to the wealth of information to be found on CD Roms and on the Internet. Children of all ages were often found seeking her out to discuss a book they had read and discuss its contents with her.

You would also find her working after school, and on the weekends to keep up with the enormous workload as she marked students' papers, read book reports, prepared new books for processing, bought new books, looked up study material for staff members, made sure displays of books for special days and holidays were available for staff and on and on. She also had a number of parent volunteers and student helpers whom she instructed and monitored as they helped to keep the resources available for staff and students.

I am certain that she has had an impact on the lives of many students. This was very evident at the recent 50th Anniversary and Reunion of the school when a number of former students dropped by to say hello. She was interested in each one of them and what they had done since leaving Prince Charles. Jean Harris is one of the finest teacher-librarians I have ever met and had the privilege of working with. She will be greatly missed by students and parents. ■ ■ ■