

Sharon Mills

An interview by Karen Smulevitch

TL interviews Sharon Mills, a curriculum leader at George S. Henry in the Toronto District School Board. Sharon is a long-time teacher-librarian and is greatly admired and respected by her colleagues across many boards.

TL: How did you get involved in school libraries in the first place?

SM: My passion for reading began as a child in the small town of Peterborough, Ontario. My parents, newcomers to Canada, recognized the value of reading and encouraged regular visits to public and school libraries as a means of reinforcing the importance of education. I recall my impatience to be allowed into the “grown up section” of the Public Library, which in the ‘50s still had strict age rules in effect! I began my career in education in 1973 as a teacher of business education. I took a break from teaching for a few years when my own children were young and then re-entered the profession at my current school, George S. Henry Academy in the former North York Board of Education. I became a frequent user of the school library with my classes, and was tremendously impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm displayed by the library staff. Always on the lookout for potential staff, and knowing that her retirement was not too far away, the head of library encouraged me to take my Library Part 1, which was being offered as an intersession course. After just a few classes I was hooked. I knew right away that I wanted to redirect my teaching toward the biggest classroom in the school and to serve a wider population of students and staff.

TL: For how long have you been involved in libraries, and in what capacities?

SM: During the mid-‘90s, I gradually moved from

having one library period on my timetable into a full-time library position. I was fortunate to work for two Library Heads (Anne Howlett, and our own Esther Rosenfeld) who took the time to mentor and instruct, modeling their best practices for me to build upon. I reaped the benefits of the days when two teacher-librarians per period were the norm, instead of the current struggle to keep libraries staffed and open all day. In 1997, I became Head of the George S. Henry Library. Since then, my job title has changed from program head, to program team leader, to curriculum leader, as our amalgamated Toronto District School Board created and redefined new positions of responsibility. My job description has also changed. I am now responsible for a much wider portfolio that includes technology applications and numerous school-wide initiatives. The positive benefit of these additional responsibilities is that they provide me with an even greater view into the whole school, and the opportunity to strongly (and shamelessly!) advocate for the library within the school leadership team.

TL: Tell us about any outstanding moments for you in your career.

SM: Many outstanding moments occur when students return after graduation with an unexpected

