

With dusk coming earlier as we move toward the fall equinox, there is more time to sit in a cozy corner with a good book. The cooler temperatures make this activity even more appealing. Keeping a sufficient quantity of new reading material on hand is sometimes a challenge for us, because we don't jump into the pickup on a whim and go to town.

I'll admit to buying a book once in a while, and bookstores are dangerous territory for me. I try to avoid spending much time in them beyond some specific errand that takes me there—usually, I am looking for a gift book for some occasion. And on line, Amazon has provided me with access to books I very specifically want or need, and I succumb to the availability of this resource from time to time.

But most of my reading material comes from one of the public services I enjoy and prize most—that of our local libraries. I have library cards for three area libraries, but most of the books I read come from the library in the nearby village or from the larger center in the small city that is 20 kilometers from the farm.

To check out a book from the Tustin Library, I write my assigned number on the card that fits into the little envelope inside the cover of the book. The librarian stamps the due date on the card and keeps it in a file. She also stamps the same date on the inside of the book. So, I know when it needs to return to the library.

The Cadillac-Wexford County Library recently instituted a new system making the due date cards no longer necessary. Instead, when I check out books, I receive a printout slip like a cash register receipt that lists the title, author, and due date of each book, audio book, or DVD I have borrowed that day. Although I must say that I usually lose these slips rather soon after I have my books at home, since I frequently find them useful for bookmarks that disappear without trace after a day or two.

But, the most interesting feature of these checkout slips is the final entry at the end of the list of books I have borrowed that day. After my latest visit to the Cadillac Library, this is what I read on the slip of paper: "Wow! Today, you saved \$303.69. In 2019, you have saved \$3752."

Probably, I have completely read at least 75 per cent of books to which this statistic refers. The other 25 percent I borrowed to find specific information, not needing to read the whole book, or these were books I found I did not want to read after beginning them. And, it is also true that I didn't really "save \$3752," because if I could only have read these books by buying them, most of them would not have been purchased. Still, it is impressive that we have this wonderful resource at our disposal all over this country in libraries large and small.

Even our small library in the local village provides me with book after book, week after week, year after year. And because choice is not unlimited, I have found myself drawn to new authors or subjects I might not have encountered at the larger library, where there is a more extensive selection of books. In addition, this small library is a valuable source of material needed for researching family and local history. Much of this information is in the

form of original sources—the laminated copies of the weekly newspapers that served the community from the 1890s to the mid 1940s.

When we think of all the services we receive without paying a specific fee each time we use them, libraries must be high on the list. For myself, our area libraries are my main sources of entertainment, education, and community connection. They are resources whose absence or high cost of retaining would be hard to accept. They are a necessary part of a culture that prizes knowledge. We hope we can remain that kind of society in an age where major decisions are tweeted instead of contemplated.