Meet Our New Library Director: Erin Shea Dummeyer

What is your favorite book?

I think my favorite book is *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed. It’s about a girl who lost her mother when she was young. She mentions lots of poetry and books in her memoir. I just thought it was a beautiful book. I loved reading about her reflections of her mother.

Why did you decide to become a librarian?

When I was in college I wrote a senior thesis and in the process I had to use parts of the library that I didn’t even know existed, such as books on reserve and microfiche, and I couldn’t believe how much the library offered! So later when I applied to library school I thought I was going to be an academic librarian. Then I got an unpaid internship with the NY Public Library. I was able to walk around that great building with the lion statues before it opened in the morning. I had an incredible mentor there who encouraged me to teach an adult technology course. It was a formative experience. I knew after that internship I wanted to work in public libraries.

What person or event had the most influence on you becoming a Librarian?

My mentor at the NY Public Library. I remember her telling me that to host an intern you needed to work more, not less. She set up meetings for me based on my own interests, such as the curator for the cookbooks, the curator for the maps. I was doing a little work for her but really mostly learning from her.

What is your favorite thing about libraries?

I know that often the reason people want to work in libraries is because of books. But I really love working with people. I’m really excited to get back into a small town library and get to know the community.

What attracted you to the MTL?

What I love about the MTL is first of all it’s a small town. I’m originally from Wilton. When I was a teenager I worked for a florist and would deliver flowers to many addresses in Redding. And I also love the history of the MTL. There is something about the fact that Mark Twain started this library with his own collection not only for the community but also to honor his daughter, Jean. I think there is something really beautiful about a public library serving as a symbol of a father’s love for his child. I watch my husband read to our young daughter and I think Mark Twain would approve.

What do you believe the role of a library is in our communities today?

I believe the library should face outward and what I mean by that is that rather than stay within the four walls of the building the Director and staff should establish and nurture relationships with local nonprofit groups, town leaders, and educators. After all, the library is for the
community. For example, an issue in CT now is zoning reform. You wouldn’t think the library could help with that but maybe the library can host a forum or program on that and bring people together to discuss an issue in the community. The Wire Mill is another good example right here in Redding. How can the library play a role in helping the community through issues that are specific to them?

**Where do you see as the biggest potential for libraries today?**

This day and age seems to be changing constantly. I think creating a neutral place to discuss civic issues. It’s been a very difficult year and a half, and it’s really brought to light the fact that we need to make a lot of changes and there needs to be a lot of healing in the world and the library can be part of that. I still think books are an important part of the library but also the library can be a place to discuss topics, a place to turn to for working through that.

**What accomplishment are you most proud of in your role as a librarian so far?**

I am very proud every time one of our young library shelvers comes and tells me they are thinking about going to library school. Whenever that happens I say we’ve done something right! I am also so proud of how my team (at the Ferguson Library) – and it seems like the MTL team as well – has bonded together in a way that I could not have imagined, to respond to and work through the challenges of the pandemic. I’m very proud and impressed with what the MTL has done during the pandemic. I think at public libraries – especially ones that stayed open at all during the pandemic – people really went above and beyond to make that happen and bring much needed information and services and programs to all those who must have been feeling so isolated.

**What challenges have you faced as a librarian and how has that shaped how you approach libraries and how they operate?**

COVID. Before we closed (at my former library) we had just started to talk about cross training staff. What I mean by that is teaching various tasks to everyone no matter what their specific title or role. Customer service is so important. Once COVID hit, we ended up cross training by necessity. We all figured out how to do curbside and offer something we had never done before. By rising to the challenge, my staff, we all loved cross training. I was worried about people getting bogged down in their job description, but they were actually so glad to know how to do different things, like sign someone up for a library card yourself instead of having to pass the patron to someone else. Part of the hesitation with cross training is that people want to be properly trained. So the pandemic actually worked to our advantage in approaching cross training. We realized that not only could we pivot quickly and adeptly, but cross training was something staff needed and ultimately wanted.

**What kind of community did you grow up in and how did that prepare you to be a librarian?**
I grew up in Wilton going to Rancho Alegre in Georgetown! So, I am very familiar with Redding. You could ride bikes where I lived. It was bucolic. When I was a teenager, I don’t think that I really appreciated it. My folks still live in the house I grew up in. It was a town where you would go to the 4th of July fireworks to see and be seen. I went to Wilton library constantly, especially throughout high school, but back then it was not because I wanted to be a librarian, I just wanted an excuse to get out of school! I remember the library was a place that was always so welcoming. You would walk in and they would greet you and offer to help you. When I was younger, my mom would take us there all the time. Back then the children couldn’t go into the adult section and I was a rule follower, so I was afraid to go get her when I was ready to leave so would ask one of the librarians to get her for me.

What do you want the Redding Community to know about you?

I am one of those rare extroverted librarians. And I am just looking forward to meeting everyone and getting to know the community. I think I’m also going to become one of those dorky Twainiacs who is obsessed with everything Mark Twain. I’m already reading up on and learning everything I can about him.

What do you want to know about the Redding Community that you may not know?

I would love to know what they like most about their library. And right now, how the library can best serve them, particularly in a post COVID world.

What do you do when you are not being a Librarian?

I am one of those activity moms who likes to fill the day with lots of activities. I have a two year old daughter, so spending time with my daughter. My husband is very outdoorsy. I like to say I’m semi-outdoorsy compared to him. We like to go hiking and I’m excited about all the open space in Redding.

What is your favorite...

Food:  Guacamole
Color:  Blue
Word:  Flabbergasted
Movie:  Pride and Prejudice (the Keira Knightley version)
Podcast:  Death, Sex & Money with Anna Sale on WNYC