



Friends of the Jones Libraries

43 Amity Street
Amherst, Massachusetts
01002

May 2019

The following letter is from Cammie McGovern, children's book author, Sammy's award winner, co-founder of Whole Children, and Amherst resident. She addresses all of us who appreciate the Jones Library.

Dear Friend,

First, a confession. I love libraries to a degree that makes me sentimental at times. I'll wander the basement stacks of the Jones, looking for a spot to settle with my greedy pile of reading, and come upon an ESL tutor pair, heads bent together, voices low, and tears will prick my eyes. I'll reel away, weeping for reasons I don't entirely understand. That a hopeful immigrant is learning English in hushed whispers, that the tutor is an esteemed professor who once lectured to halls of 300 students. Perhaps the sight reminds me (a bit too much) of my own unmoorings, when **strangers and books and, most of all, libraries have helped me** adjust to a new setting and a lonely time.

Here's the confession though: I can (and often do) speak with wild reverence about my love for libraries in general and the Jones in particular, and I have never, outside of buying a handful of Sammy's tickets over the years, been a donor. Even worse: **It's never occurred to me to give!** In my mind, I've placed it in roughly the same category as public schools. Don't the State and the Town take care of both? Plus, don't they have some big endowment?

As it turns out, the answer to both these questions is a surprising and resounding No! State and town financial support only cover about 75% of the budget. Income from the endowment is far less than I would have thought (enough to cover a few librarians' salaries.)

Here's the truth that makes me blush with shame—the remaining (approximately) 25% of the budget—**funding for virtually all the programs we know and love** so much at the Jones, **has always come from private donations** from local residents and library lovers. I am both, and have never given! In my embarrassment, I have to wonder how many more are out there like me? People who see the essential role the Jones plays in strengthening our community? Parents who remember staggering into the Woodbury Room, weepy from the isolation of unscheduled days with an infant for an hour's reprieve with Happy Dan? Patrons who recognize the countless other marginalized groups—just as isolated, possibly more desperate—coming through the doors looking for the same?

The programs that accommodate them and enrich all our lives, are the most vulnerable to budget cuts and will be the first to go if private fundraising goes down. We will still have the books, but we won't have the countless connections we make around them; the book clubs, the Story Hours, the Community Read, the teen groups, the poetry celebrations.

It is up to all of us who remember how the Saturday February music series got us through winter, and how the summer reading programs carried us through that season as well, to ensure that these programs are sustained for future generations.

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As Ann Patchett wrote in her homage to public libraries: "Know this—if you love your library, use your library. Support libraries in your words and deeds...(D)on't forget about the members of your community who are like you but perhaps lack your resources...Make sure that in your good fortune you remember to support their quest for a better life...That's what libraries have delivered."

I offer a profound, and much belated, thanks to the donors who funded the programs that meant so much to me and my family when we were all younger (and less aware of how the funding for these things worked) and **I will now vow to do my part in ensuring they're still around for the next generation.** I hope you will, as well.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cammie McGovern". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Cammie McGovern