

HOW MY LIBRARY AFFECTS MY LIFE IN PRISON

by
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Have you ever had one of those days at work that made you want to escape to a far-off land or maybe a deserted island? Have you ever had the urge to take off and go, but never had the time or money? Do you sit at home on a rainy night, complaining because there is nothing interesting on TV and you are really bored? When was the last time you went to your local library? Do you know where it is or what it has to offer? As an inmate in the Wisconsin Correctional System and an avid, voracious reader, I use my library extensively.

My institution library has become a very substantial part of my life. I do not think I would have been able to handle stressful situations if the library was not readily accessible to me. My library is more than a place to find a book. It has become a significant friend.

I use my library for many different reasons, ranging from perusing the new issues of *GQ* and *Maxim*, to keeping updated on the current events of the outside world. I also enjoy using the library to expand my creativity and to enhance my literary knowledge by reading a large variety of the books that our library has to offer. Although our library is small, it has a vast array of materials. Whether one's interest is in westerns, sci-fi, adventure, religion, fantasy, romance, or even self-help, my library has selections for everyone.

I feel that my library puts forth a very valiant effort to help me and the rest of the inmates in this institution to expand our knowledge. It plays a very significant role in my quest to continue the development of my mind, and greatly helps me to excel in expanding my literary knowledge. But, more than simply providing dissipation for me when I become bored, the library provides a means of letting my mind elude the everyday monotony and tensions that can build up and cause a person to end up in

solitary confinement. My library is not just for me. A lot of inmates use it. Some of them come to read their local paper, to find a book on drawing techniques, or just to pick up another book.

The library not only provides current newspapers, magazines and books by a wide classification of authors and interests, but also provides a channel for our stress other than violence. It allows us, or actually assists us, in finding an alternative means of venting our frustrations. It lets our minds go beyond everyday life and venture anywhere we choose. We can visit the wreckage of the Titanic, ride the range in the old west, explore the great pyramids or soar to the vast expanse of the galaxies beyond our own. Because of the vast selections I can go somewhere different every day. I have dived deep into the ocean to observe the Titanic (*National Geographic*), delved into the fantasy world of Xanth (Piers Anthony), and followed DC detectives from Washington to London to track down a serial killer. (James Patterson).

All in all, my library has become a best friend since my incarceration. It has been there for me in my many times of need. When I am down, I can find a book that will bring happiness to my weary and tired mind. From day to day my library continues to bring great joy as well as helping to expand my literary knowledge. It allows me to escape the on-going stress and monotony of being unable to see the outside world first hand. Because my library is there for me, I can go anywhere, take any adventure, live any fantasy, or float off into the deepest reaches of the galaxy—all in the serenity of my very own mind. All I have to do is read a book. As long as the library is available to me I will continue to strive towards a limitless literary knowledge. My library has helped me find the courage and strength, not only to overcome my incarceration, but also to strive for a more honest and productive future.

Mark Knudsen is an inmate at Jackson Correctional Institution, Black River Falls, Wisconsin. He wrote his views and opinions on his institution's library in March 2000.