

4/23/12

Newspapers

April 23, 2012

This is Jill Duffy with Community Comment

I had a dear friend, Joan, who passed away two years ago. She lived in Bayside in an old farmhouse originally built sometime in the 1870's. As the decades passed, and plumbing and electricity became available, the house was expanded from a couple of rooms to a 4 bedroom home with a library, sitting room, kitchen, pantry and an attic.

Now Joan was a voracious reader, and had an enviable library that was incredibly subject rich. Art, history, politics, science fiction, classic and contemporary literature, religion – her intellectual life of 80 plus years was displayed in multiple rooms, and shelves upon shelves of books. Over the years Joan had to cut back on various items, simply because it was a matter of affording things. Eventually she stopped receiving the newspaper, and during one of my visits, I asked if she missed knowing what was happening in the world.

She laughed, took me by the hand and led me upstairs into the attic room. She opened the door. The attic hadn't changed much since originally constructed, and the redwood flooring was bare, but the redwood planks of the wall were covered in old yellowing newspapers from the early 1900's. She opened her arms and said, 'When I want to know what is going on in the world, I only need come in here and read the stories on the front page – because while the names have changed, the stories in large remain the same.' Sure enough, we walked around the room reading of the latest crime, political scandals, public work projects, royalty romance and conflict and

war. News reporters at that time took great delight in writing vivid stories guaranteed to have their readers talking for days after the paper edition.

I was reminded of this the other day when I found myself in town, having completed my errands, completed some reading and work in a local coffee shop, tired of this spring's continuous rain and wondering how to entertain myself until my son had finished with his school day. I found myself walking up the stairs of the HSU library to the Humboldt Room.

I wasn't looking for anything in particular, so much as wanting to have my eye and attention captivated by something of interest. I spoke with Edie Butler, who provided me a digital and physical tour of the room, and then she turned me loose. For several hours I found myself, Alice in Wonderland, immersed in the history, stories, events and people of Humboldt. I found myself captivated with bygone newspapers such as the Humboldt Journal, the Humboldt Democrat, Humboldt Standard, The Humboldt Progressive of 1910 and the Rank and File reporter of the 1970's. And then there are the collections. Rudolph Becking, Tim McKay, Don Clausen's congressional papers, Redwood National Park, stories of communities that are now just signs on the road. And photographs. So the next time you are wanting to explore the world of Humboldt on a rainy day – stop by the Humboldt Room. We have quite an amazing story to read.

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