



I Love My Librarian!

2008 Award

Nominations for Elaine McIlroy

Director
Wellfleet Public Library
Wellfleet, Massachusetts

Nominator:

Phyllis Ewen
Wellfleet, Massachusetts

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Elaine McElroy personally for about five years, since my husband and I bought a home in Wellfleet. However, as a summer renter there for many years before, I was frequently at the library and knew her. We became personally acquainted when I wanted to organize a project in the community. Elaine connected me to the people I needed to get it off the ground and has been a major support throughout the effort.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one.

Elaine McElroy helped me set up a program to encourage summer residents to donate left-over food to the local Food Pantry. As she is well-integrated into the life of the community, she was able to connect me to the right people and has continued to support the program. She responded to a group of us who wanted to hold a memorial for a friend who had passed away. She provided assistance for an art show that I held in their exhibition space and encouraged visitors to see it. She expedites all requests be they for books, information, contact, communication.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

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4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Elaine has kept the collection up to date, varied, and deep. McElroy inspires a devoted staff and makes sure the year-round and summer residents of Wellfleet welcome in the library. This is no simple task as the population that uses the library is diverse and demanding. Recognizing the need to involve more youth in the library she has recently developed a space for teen agers, with computers, audio books, and a space to hang out and visit. She keeps an active intellectual and cultural program all year and during the bleakest days of winter, it is a thriving center of community life. A wireless network is available in the library and on the porch. She is spearheading a project to make the library more 'green' and is raising money for solar panels, etc.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

The library, under Elaine McElroy's direction, is a cultural center in a town with a diverse and, in some ways, a divided population. During most of the year, Wellfleet is a small town of 3,500 people while in the summer it swells to 17,000 Elaine Many of the year-round residents are close to the poverty line, while some summer residents are quite wealthy. The library has over 900 events during the course of a year: lectures, concerts, art exhibits, knitting groups, poetry readings, yoga classes, French clubs, and more.

Nominator:

Harriet Korim

Wellfleet, Massachusetts

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I've known Elaine since 1983, when I first walked into the library and asked for an inspiring book. Elaine led me to the story of an all-women ascent of Annapurna. That day I embarked on a great reading adventure and an important friendship. Elaine has created a library in its own way as full of magic and challenge as that Himalayan peak.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one.

Answering a request for Cape Cod folklore, Elaine handed me Elizabeth Reynard's *The Narrow Land*, then out-of-print, which I read around our campfire to a young Broadway-playwright-to-be, Gip Hoppe, who turned one of Reynard's stories into his first play. Another Reynard story informed Barry Clifford's successful search for the wreck of the pirate ship *Whydah* off the coast of South Wellfleet. Clifford rewarded us with a tour of the first treasures his crew retrieved from the wreck. Who knows how many hundreds of voyages of discovery in myriad realms Elaine helped launch?

Over the years Elaine has helped put me and my family in touch with whatever information, institutions or individuals we needed, to answer personal, educational and creative challenges. She calmly and confidently showed me how to use my first search engine-- and I was a raving Luddite! Elaine is a natural teacher and a rare leader who knows not only how to inspire but how to empower and delegate. Her crew of staff and volunteers reflect those abilities.

McIlroy and her crew has guided a few generations (some of us kicking and screaming!) into the thrilling research potential of the internet, and she has done it like she does everything-- with such ease, honesty and good humor that NOTHING seems too daunting, even to technophobes.

She has a similar effect in her support and encouragement of young and old artists, teachers, scholars, community organizers and cultural programmers: She makes it clear the library belongs to us.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

I never received a college degree. The library is my free university. It is also a safe harbor, a neighborhood cafe, a meditation hall, a village

movie house, a laboratory; a place to both lose and find myself, a place to share and to absorb the universals of our lives, both the tiny and the vast.

Elaine has given us the key to the library: she has enabled me and countless others to perform, show artwork, curate exhibitions; to practice--yoga, piano and random acts of connection; to teach, study and create community.

This little library, as much as any I've experienced --including Harvard's Widener or the extraordinary new library in Seattle-- is a place that radiates a sense of encouragement and infinite possibility. It is a place to weather whatever storms come our way; it is the heart of our town.

My mother Judith was a self-educated immigrant, a gifted storyteller who loved books and came to love Elaine and feel at home in this Library. After Judith died, we gave the library money for a bench in her memory, and imagined it outside under a tree. But Elaine-- who chose the wonderfully curved bench, with as much care as she attends to millions of details --encouraged us to leave it inside, facing the desk, between the copy machine and the water cooler, a place where people need a place to rest, to read, to meet, to share stories.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

As much as anyone, Elaine McIlroy built this library, guiding the political and architectural process of recycling an old village candle factory into a first-class library. She supervised the move from the tiny one-room library tucked above Town Hall offices into an airy, welcoming space, as scores of citizens transferred the books almost bucket-brigade style into their new home.

Elaine's kids spent a lot of their early childhood in the 'liberry' and may be partly responsible for inspiring an especially colorful and comfortable children's space, with kinetic art, borrow-able giant stuffed animals, a trunk full of costumes, beanbag and rocking chairs and a Toddler Town side by side with a great collection and state-of-the-art research potential for kids. The space and the consistent, imaginative kids' programming provide a sanctuary and vessel of discovery for generations of Wellfleet kids and visitors from all over the world.

The library (with the help of a grant procured by the youth librarian, like all the superior staff, hired and inspired by Elaine) has carved out a dynamic new space for young adults, without disrupting the cozy reading lounge,

quiet carrels, stacks, computer area, or large and small meeting rooms. For a fairly small building, the diversity and range of environments and programming is really extraordinary.

McIlroy has made Rosetta Stone and other Internet learning and search tools accessible to library patrons via the computer area, wi-fi and the library website.

This summer, more than twenty years after the library move, Elaine McIlroy has creatively overseen successful fundraising of tens of thousands of dollars for installing solar panels on the Library roof to light our way into a sustainable future.

This little library, as much as any I've experienced --including Harvard's Widener or the extraordinary new library in Seattle-- is a place that radiates a sense of encouragement and infinite possibility.

Wellfleet Library is a place where we really do circulate our greatest riches and weather whatever storms come our way. The library Elaine McIlroy created is the real heart of the town.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

The library is THE place year-round to meet, to hear "world-class" live music and lectures, as well as a place for developing artists, writers and performers to share their work and hone their craft. It is also a place to register for free workshops, classes and reading groups. It is the place we choose to gather, to plan, petition and strategize, to mourn and to celebrate. When we created an all-ages rain-snow-or-shine community Walk to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday, the place we walk TO is the library, even if it can hardly hold all the walkers.

Wellfleet has long been an extraordinary town, but the library provides a magic mirror that frames and reflects the town and enables us to see the town clearly, but also to see the best in ourselves and each other.

ALL OF THIS is because Elaine McIlroy knows "angels can fly because they take themselves lightly." She is the extraordinary person who, without fanfare or self-importance, manages to be totally present for each of us, no matter how awkward, inexperienced or uneducated; no matter how accomplished or sophisticated; no matter how charming or disagreeable; to care about us, to listen to us, to guide us with gentle but certain instincts just where we need to go to continue growing and learning—or simply go about our business. She knows more about the citizens of and

visitors to her town, young and old, than anyone I've ever met-- and she knows how to bring them together, under one -- soon to be solar—roof.

Nominator:

Barbara Prazak
Wellfleet, Massachusetts

1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

I have known Elaine for 18 years. We met through the Wellfleet Public Library. As a young mother at that time, the library was the only place in town welcoming to children. This was especially important in the winter! Cape Cod is a fabulous home, but Wellfleet can be so isolating in the winter.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one.

The library here is the main cultural center for this town in the summer, but especially in the winter! The library staff made my kids feel special, known, and welcomed all year long. There is no whispering, but loud friendly greetings when kids or grown ups burst in. Elaine sets the welcoming tone for the rest of the staff. She also made sure that children's services include 'toddler town': a weekly meeting of parents and their toddlers. The toddlers can crawl and explore the various jungle gyms, scooters and toys, and more importantly, the parents can get to know each other, and make life long friends, as I did. As my kids grew older, she was always quick to be encouraging to them, giving my son endless book suggestions, giving my daughter the ability to have 2 sleepovers for her birthdays~and that is no small thing when you are turning 15: to have a library for 10 friends to explore. Elaine in her serene way, allowed both my kids to feel trust and a sense of belonging. She's established the 'Claire Simmons Book Award' at Nauset High School, which my Dan, aged 18, proudly won as he graduated from High School in May 2008. He was encouraged in his reading by Elaine, and was recognized by this award which was presented, not to the smartest kid in the town, but to the one who was recognized as having investment in his local library~~he was so proud to get it and winning it says a lot about the tenor of the library~to value everyone, and to bestow a prize on a young man who is not the best student, but who loves to read was so wonderful.

3. How has the library, and the nominee, improved the quality of your life?

Elaine has fostered a community spirit at this library. Wellfleet is a place where many interesting people come to visit, or to retire. I have participated in talks by Paul Farmer,MD, about his work in Haiti, talks by Pulitzer prize winners, by relief workers from Hurricane Katrina, the Republic of Georgia, poetry fests celebrating 'Favorite Poems',and so many others that have really enriched my knowledge of the world around me. In my

work as a primary care physician at a federally qualified community health center in Wellfleet (a dying breed) she has also been tremendously effective in helping us promote 'Reach out and Read' to our pediatric population, even helping us pick out titles! She lets our staff use the library free of charge for meetings, which is invaluable as our clinic is like a homemade apple pie~crumbling on the outside but full of terrific ingredients! I could go on and on, but Elaine McIlroy has made the Wellfleet Public Library the cultural heart of Wellfleet. We are so lucky to have her. Please consider her most highly for this award! Thanks.

4. How does the nominee make the library a better place? Please be specific.

Elaine sets the tone for the library. Her staff is welcoming, busy, active and encouraging. She has allowed the Children's Librarian to create not only 'Toddler Town' as mentioned, but a whole 'teen space' with regular teen input. She's created beauty in the library with plants, flowers, interesting books, incredible programming: speakers/music/film series. If you want to know about an article on the town warrant, or a new land grant, all the specifics will be highlighted as soon as you walk into the library. Do you want to have a meeting? Book club? Language class? homework help? Just sign up.

5. How has the librarian made a difference in the community?

Wellfleet, on Cape Cod, is a unique place, serving a layered community: in the winter, 3000 residents, oystermen, fishermen, and yearrounders. 100 families in the Elementary School. In the summer 30,000 people show up, summer residents and tourists to visit our beaches and ponds. Two communities, each loving the library. Winter programs to keep local kids and townspeople interested in learning, mining a wealth of speakers year round, making everyone, even grumpy tourists on a rainy July day feel welcome and special. Not an easy task. Elaine is a local treasure, and is totally responsible for the energy, love, and creative force that this library gives our community, year round. Please consider her most highly. Consider coming and seeing it for yourself. She's transformed a former candle factory into the life blood of this town!