

May 16, 2016

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

The first thing people usually remark on when they visit my house is the large number of bookcases. We have four of them in the living room, three double width ones in the family room, and additional ones in each bedroom. The sad thing is that, in spite of all that space, the shelves are full and my desk is also covered in piles of books. And, quite frankly, these days I do most of my book buying and reading on my Nook e-reader. That's partly because I have a certain fear that I will be caught somewhere without immediate access to the book or genre that I'm in the mood to read and partly because I can adjust the size of the print on the page. That second reason seems to become more important as I get older.

I usually have between four and six books going at a time, not including those that I'm using to study for and build my sermons. Books I have underway right now include a history book, a trivia collection, a philosophical treatise, a biography, and a hard fantasy novel. There's also a Biblical commentary by someone I disagree with in many regards and I've just finished a classic 1930s mystery novel. On top of all that, I receive and read a number of magazines, including Games World of Puzzles, the new issue of which arrived early last week and is waiting for me to sit and start working through it later tonight.

Why am I sharing all this with you? Because I believe that reading is important. It helps open the doors of your mind to ideas and creativity and it increases your knowledge and awareness of the community around you. Reading is a key component to education and education is the gateway to better opportunities and a greater chance of avoiding or escaping the trap of poverty. Everyone deserves a chance to be successful, but in Humboldt County 25% of adults are illiterate. And when those adults have children, they pass on their reading struggles as surely as they pass on their genes (statistics from Humboldt Literacy Project).

I have a son who will be entering kindergarten next fall. At a parents' orientation meeting one well-intentioned father stood to ask if they should start reading to their child now that she is five. Yes, please! You're about four and a half years late, but starting now is better than not at all!

If you are a parent, please read to your children from the day they grow ears until they won't let you anymore because they are too busy reading for themselves. If you struggle with reading, don't worry about that. Practice is what helps you get better and seeing you practice helps your children know how important it is. Just set aside 15 minutes a day and read to them. It will make a tremendous difference in their lives and in yours.

If you don't have children, set aside those 15 minutes to read something for yourself. The benefits of reading don't end when you leave school – they continue on right to your very last breath.

You don't even need to buy books, thanks to our wonderful system of libraries throughout Northern California. Each branch has tens of thousands of great books available for you or your child to borrow or to read there.

However you decide to get your reading in, you won't regret the time or effort you make to do it. You might even find yourself doing it for fun. If you need a suggestion for what to read, let me know. I'll be happy to help.

This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment.