

The guest of the Library blog *Geros knygos* is our colleague **Magdalena Smyczek** (Poland). Magdalena is a librarian in the Youth Department of Zory Municipal Public library.

When interviewing our colleagues about books and reading, we always ask about their libraries in times of coronavirus. What is the impact of the situation with COVID-19 on Polish libraries? What activities and services are taking place in libraries in Poland during the emergency?

Libraries, as well as shopping malls, schools and cinemas, were closed at the beginning of the pandemic. All cultural institutions found themselves in a completely new situation, the challenge was to transfer their activities online. Most libraries tried to maintain contact with readers through various media, promote e-books and open access collections, share and promote digital database. Libraries, publishing houses and writers themselves organized literary meetings and even festivals. The pandemic showed the importance of the library in people's lives. It can even be said that the lockdown influenced the readership statistics. Now libraries can operate normally, albeit in a sanitary regime. Most of them have restricted access to the shelves and the books returned are quarantined.

What about the Zory Public Library? How did the period of COVID-19 emergency affect and still affects it's services? How do you reach your users during this period?

The authorities' decision to close up the library was a surprise for both, readers and librarians. Initially, we could only promote digital libraries, and also remind readers of ourselves through social media, trying to cheer up at this difficult time for everyone. We did not return to lending books until May, unfortunately free access to the shelves was still denied and returned books have been transferred for a quarantine. The epidemic forced us to cancel many important and interesting events and projects. The time of the official closing, however, was not a blissful laziness for the employees of our library. Żory Municipal Public Library is moving to a new building this year, therefore lockdown has become the time to complete library's tasks for which there has never been time in the library's rich life.

What or who inspired you to choose the profession of a librarian?

It is difficult to say what inspired me to choose my studies and then to work as a librarian. Books have always been present in my life, at home, family and surroundings. The library was also an important place, not only as a treasury of books, but also a place for relaxation and meetings. While thinking about the choice of studies, I also considered the fields of study related to the school. Ultimately, working in the children's and youth department combined both passions.

Which place in the list of your hobbies and interests does reading take?

I think I can say that reading is on one of the first places, especially since literature is at least partially present in my other interests and activities.

Who is your favourite author of all time? Your favourite book by them?

It's like telling a mother to pick her favourite baby! I like various genres of books that's why it's hard to pick one. I have a fondness for the queen of crime fiction, Agatha Christie and her character Poirot. I love the style of P.G. Wodehouse, I'm looking forward to the next novel of Jonas Jonasson. The book I like to return to is „The Screwtape Letters” by C.S. Lewis.

What are your favourite Polish authors or books of Polish authors?

My bestseller list changes frequently, currently the leaders are Andrzej Pilipiuk and Marek Krajewski.

Are you interested in the personalities of writers? Which favourite writer would you like to talk to and what one question would you definitely like to ask him/her?

I've always been intrigued by the psyche of Gillian Flynn, how her dark stories are born in her head.

Does each generation have a unique connection to the book? What do you think is your generation's approach to the book?

Literature, in its various forms, has been with us for thousands of years, and each generation has a different relationship to it. For some it was a source of knowledge, for others it was an expression of political views. My generation grew up at a time when computers and the Internet were becoming commonplace, so traditional books had a lot of competition, also in the form of electronic equivalents. Today we no longer treat them as a source of knowledge about the world, which is changing so quickly. Mostly literature is entertainment, even if it requires mental effort. We also did not limit ourselves to paper versions, combining them with audiobooks and e-books.

What do you think about self help books? Do they really help us? Do successful people read them?

I don't believe in their miraculous power, and I rarely read such books, mainly out of curiosity. I think we can treat them more as an addition, sometimes as an impulse to change or act, but not as an oracle. I also think that successful people don't have to look for confirmation in guides, they just work.

What book for summer reading would you suggest to your library visitor if one asked you for a recommendation?

I work with children and teenagers, so maybe I can recommend something just for them. I would recommend to younger readers the mysterious story of a certain scar by Paweł Beręsewicz („Tajemnica człowieka z blizną”), and to older readers (also adult fantasy fans) the Jay Kristoff series „The Nevernight Chronicle”. Both books are interesting from the very first pages, and the hidden secret will interest many readers.

Libraries are no longer only the repositories of books, but rather act as gateways to information, education, and opportunity. How do you see public libraries in, let us say, 20 or 30 years?

Libraries reflect on the challenges of the modern world, they are changing the functions and tasks of libraries. I believe the basic assumptions remain the same. Libraries have always provided information, from cuneiform tablets to digital databases, they support education and conduct cultural activities. Nowadays we simply expand our offer, going beyond the walls of a building, city and even country. I think that in the future, libraries will combine globalization, but also individualization of the offer, and readers use the resources of institutions from the other side of the world, but also meet at the local public library.

Thank you for the interesting conversation!

Photo from Magdalena Smyszek's personal archive

*Interviewed by Virginija Švedienė
virginija.svediene@pavb.lt*