



## THOUGHTS FROM THE TUB

### Gentle Rant about Passing around the Falsehood that Libraries Work Against Writers

by Carolyn Howard-Johnson  
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How To Do it Frugally series of books for authors

*Note from the Tub: This article caught our attention because, from time to time, we hear from authors that they do not want to give away their books. Carolyn is speaking to the idea of donating to libraries, but the rationale (and holes in the argument about lost opportunities) applies just as much to literacy groups. We hope you take Carolyn's advice so that children have lots of choices when they go to the library! [end note]*

This thing that authors keep talking about! That people take books out of the library rather than buying one thus depriving an author of his or her royalty. That libraries won't buy books but ask for donations from their local authors. That therefore, libraries are the big ogres of the publishing industry. Don't you believe it!

In general this reasoning doesn't hold water:

- People who borrow from libraries often can't afford (or don't think they can) to buy books and wouldn't buy a specific book in a bookstore in any case. They'd borrow, choose something else to read or buy something for a dime at a garage sale.
- That 10-15% royalty an author fears "losing" on any single borrowed book is more than made up for with opportunities offered authors by most libraries.
- People who borrow from libraries may be the ones who talk the most to other readers (they do hang out at libraries with other readers, after all!).
- Many libraries are on stricter budgets than ever before. They're not just taking advantage of authors.
- Because of changes in the publishing industry, some communities have more writers than they can keep up with in terms of acquisitions. So, how many of those writers will support the library's efforts if they do buy copies. Many authors will do nothing to let their readers know copies are available at libraries because so many of us have the attitude that a single sale is better than a single person reading a book.

I guess I don't have much patience with authors who would prefer to get their 15% royalty (not huge, mind you! Often less than a dollar) rather than gain a new reader. A new reader who likes your book might tell another reader and he or she still another. Some will buy. Some will borrow. Either way, it's exposure for your book.

So when a library asks for a donated copy, for heaven's sake, give them one. Give them TWO. And a poster! And ask them to put one of them on display with that poster for a little while. Everyone wins including the borrowers!

I'm going to be tough here. This whole library attitude among authors is not only lousy reasoning, it's a great big whine. Did you ever notice that hardly anyone ever mentions that when this happens, it also denies publishers of their profit? That libraries have budget woes of their own?

That sometimes an author's biggest fan may not be the one who buys books but one who borrows from a library because they just read so darn many books?

Here's the thing. Let's not pass around the bad news about libraries (nobody's perfect!). Let's, instead, partner with them. To paraphrase a president, ask not what your library can do for you, ask what you can do for your library. That is a partnership that will take you a long way.

*This article originally appeared in Carolyn Howard-Johnson's newsletter Sharing with Writers. It has been reprinted with permission of the author. Any use of this material, in part or in total, must include appropriate citations.*

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To read more of Carolyn's work and learn about the Author Coalition, visit these web sites. Be sure to leave a note and let Carolyn know you heard about her in the Reading Tub®.

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