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To the Young Readers in the Troy Library:

Early in the 1900s an immigrant girl from a remote village of Russia came to the city of Boston. Though she lived in a dim, cramped tenement she found, a few streets away, a house of horizons. "The branch library," she wrote, "did not open until one o'clock in the afternoon. Long before the hour I was on the library steps, waiting for the doors of paradise to open." When the library closed at five she went home with a book under her arm, a book she would finish reading before the magic door opened again the next day. When she first went to the big Boston Public Library in Copley Square, Mary Antin stood on the broad steps beneath the inscription over the doorway. Public Library--Built by the People--Open to All, it read. "My palace," the immigrant girl called that great building. Years later she was a famous author, whose books were on library shelves all over America.

From my own youth I recall a library that went from one Wisconsin farmhouse to another in a horse-drawn wagon. Six times a year the wagon came, leaving a box of books that would be exchanged two months later. It was always a special day when the book-wagon came and the box was set inside our kitchen door. Under the hinged lid fifty or sixty books: What would we find there? What people and places, what laughter and sadness, what wonder and excitement had come in that creaking wagon?

A library is a quiet place. "Quiet, please" reads a sign on the wall, and the books are silent on the shelves. But in the

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silence there is a murmur of voices waiting to be heard. Certain shells are said to hold the sound of the sea. That book box echoed with the life of many times and places. As I raised the lid I could almost hear the hoofbeats of the headless horseman in Sleepy Hollow, the whistle of steamboats on the Mississippi, the clanking of a prisoner's chains in the Castle of Chillon, the march of Roman legions, the laughter of Robin Hood's merry men in Sherwood Forest.

Outside the library windows is the life of a place like Troy, Michigan, but reading takes one to distant times and far-off places. I remember a one-room library in a little town near timberline in the Colorado Rockies. The books were simply organized--History on one wall, Science on another, Fiction on a third, and Poetry and Travel framing a window that looked onto the snowy peaks. It was a small room with far horizons.

*Walter Haverhurst*

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