

Nancy Marshall

From: CHERYL AGOSTON [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, August 18, 2012 4:05 PM
To: Nancy Marshall
Subject: Feedback to the Toronto Public Library Board

Chairman Ainslie, Secretary Marshall, Library Board Members:

Before I close the book on my lifelong relationship with the public library, I wanted to tell you why.

I just paid off a \$10.20 library fine, \$3 of which was imposed without my knowledge. Three items I'd put on hold months ago came in while I was away on summer vacation and I did not pick them up. This is how I learned of this new type of fine (\$1 for NPU items, or reserved items not picked up), and I suppose it's how most of your customers are finding out about it.

I don't suppose it occurred to you when you created this new fine -- or, more likely, you just don't care -- that people leave the country, go on vacation, land in the hospital, have family emergencies, etc. that render them indisposed, or that a person can forget they ever reserved something that took 24 months to arrive.

In a more unsavoury setting, this scenario might be labelled in far more unsavoury terms:

- Create a new category of fine (NPU), but don't broadcast it too widely so as to encourage non-compliance and the generation of charges.
- Send customers reserved items even in their absence.
- Impose the fine when they fail to pick the items up.
- Discontinue the reliance on human interaction to resolve such matters at the circulation desk -- it doesn't generate any money. Instead, (spend taxpayers' money to) shake 'em down by sending them menacing, intimidating demand letters in the mail.

The rest of the fine, \$7.20, was for nine books that were one day late. Surely that is unreasonable by any other standards than yours.

Just weeks earlier, I'd had to fend off a stubborn, officious librarian who was prepared to close down my account when I refused to pay a fine for a book I'd returned to another branch. Although I'd returned the item almost a week earlier, there was no record of it in your system -- whether human or computer, it was a library error. It took the branch manager's intervention to resolve the matter.

What I want you to know is that I'm a conscientious person, a Grade 2 teacher who has loved, respected and used the library since I was that age myself. I do my best to keep on top of due dates, and to pick up and return items promptly. I used your materials in my classroom for my students, and was the only teacher at my school who took my classes on walking trips to the public library.

Sometimes I'm a bit late not because I take the library for granted, but because I'm frantically busy and human; things sometimes slip through the cracks.

I also want you to know that I'm a single mother, struggling to put my two children through college and get them started in life.

You're suffering for money; so am I. \$10.20 could have paid for two family meals this week, or a few TTC rides, or binders for school. I cannot afford bills like this and you've scared me off. I can't play fast and loose with my money by making myself vulnerable to those who would arbitrarily pluck it from me simply because they can.

I have cancelled all my holds, and my account is clear. At home, my bookshelves are groaning under the weight of books I have yet to read. I will read them now. At work, I will use books from the school library and end the tradition of public-library visits. In your zeal to gain revenue by exacting excessive financial penalties, you are putting the library out of the reach of ordinary citizens and turning it into a perk for a privileged elite. I cannot endorse to my students and their families any organization so misguided.

Please consider my feedback, but do not distribute my contact information.

Regards,
Cheryl Agoston