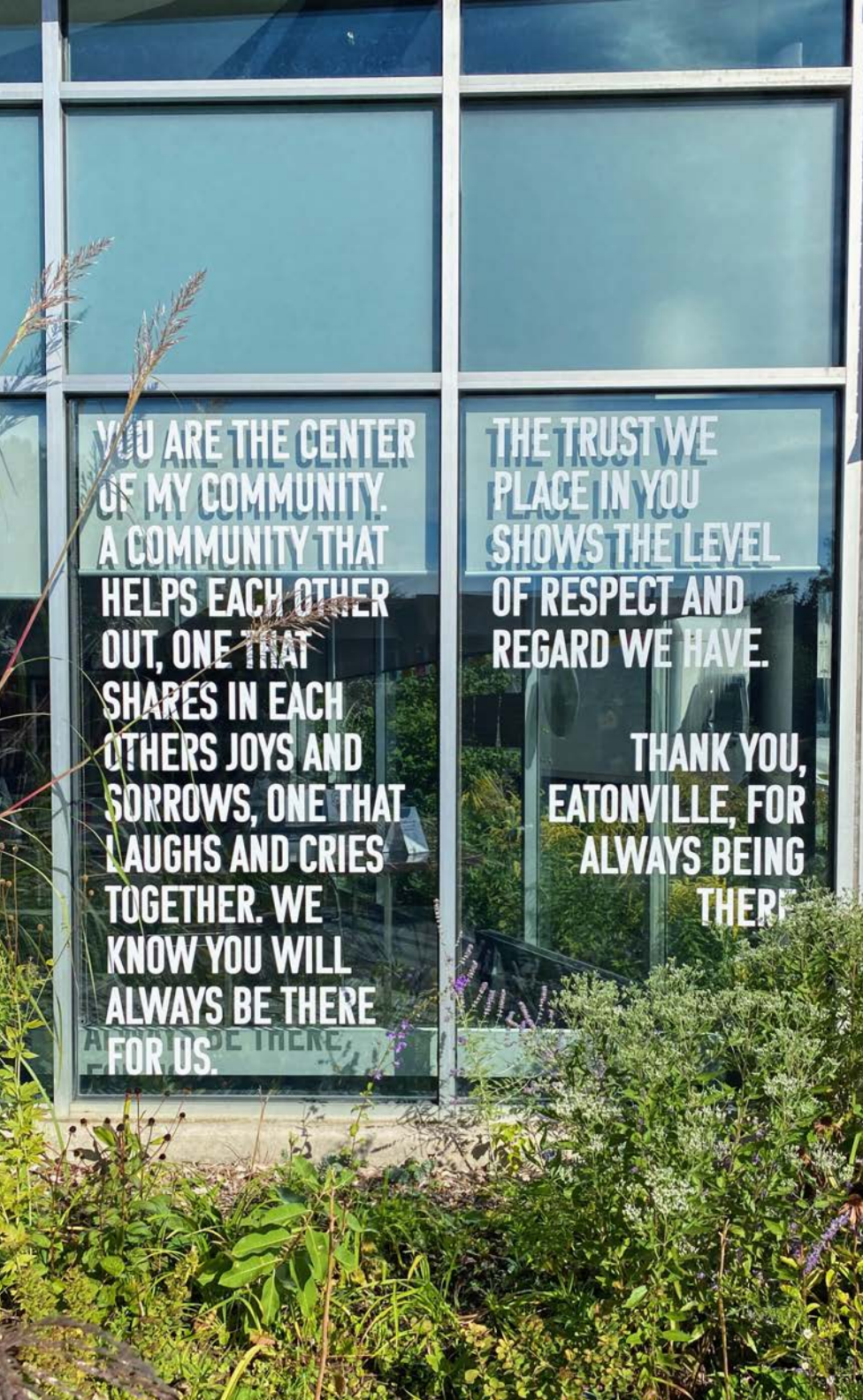


Letters to the
EATONVILLE
Library

Edited by Hiba Abdallah

*Letters to the
Eatonville Library*



Life of a Library

by Hiba Abdallah

As an artist I have spent my career working in a vast number of communities, cities, and spaces with many different people. I am curious about what makes a place, and maybe more specifically, what make a place worth saving. I am often invited into spaces that I typically would not be allowed in: water sanitation plants, city planning meetings, restaurant kitchens, long term care homes, and hospitals to name a few. All these places have provided a deeper understanding of how different social structures are built, how they fail, and potentials for how they can change.

As one of the Ontario Culture Days Creatives in Residence, I began thinking about a community space that is very important to me: the library. As someone who has grown up as a book lover, I have often thought of libraries as being the epicentre of imagination and knowledge. As time and technology have advanced, people's relationship to books and reading has changed significantly. Whether you prefer to read digitally or don't read books much at all, it has made me wonder what role libraries play in everyday civic life. I started this residency with this question in mind and was introduced to a complex and layered understanding of the ongoing importance of libraries.

Eatonville

I've had the pleasure of speaking with two librarians at the Toronto Public Library Eatonville branch in Etobicoke, Ontario: Vivien Canning and Monica Rai. Both have worked as librarians for many

years. What was evident from our initial conversation is that their job entails far more than I could have ever imagined. Community members use the library for everything from youth programming to taxes, and none of it would be possible without the libraries and dedicated staff. After a few Zoom calls, it was finally safe for me to do a site visit and get a glimpse inside their world.

Upon arrival, I was immediately struck by how many books were packed and ready to be picked up. Monica referred to this as “grab and go” bags, which are curated by the library staff and assembled according to age group. With the pandemic making it impossible to visit the library, the staff have found many creative ways to stay connected to the neighbourhood. Indicative of the librarians’ connection to the community, engagement and communication has not decreased at all over the last year and a half. Community members will call in to chat with staff often. It feels as though the librarians have taken on the role of community counsel and support in a very deep and meaningful way.

We finished the tour with a walk around the building from the outside. Even there, I saw how the staff have found creative solutions to stay connected to the community. There was chalk set up for children to use to draw on the sidewalk, as well as this large print out of a story that children can read as they walk around the building.

I left the meeting with Monica and Vivien inspired by their roles as librarians. They are part literary experts, part therapists, part teachers, part advocates. Something that stood out was when they shared that Eatonville is oftentimes that first place people go to as new immigrants in the community. For me, that solidified that the role of the library is critical and holds spaces for all members of the community.

The result of my time in residence is this book: *Letters to the Eatonville Library*. It is a publication that compiles letters from the community, celebrating the Eatonville library as a beacon for gath-

ering and learning.

I hope that this book captures the feeling of Eatonville—a place that has woven the community’s needs into the fibres of its very being.

The Letters

Dear Eatonville,

What the Eatonville library means to me: an endless parade of fun, friends and the opportunity to always be learning something new and meeting new people.

Dear Eatonville,

For me, you are the heart of Etobicoke. A place that is safe. A place where questions can be asked, without the fear of looking stupid or made to feel inadequate in any way. A place where I can get away, spend sometime and just forget about the outside world, but at the same time, you are also the center of my community. A community that helps each other out, one that shares in each others joys and sorrows, one that laughs and cries together; we know you will always be there for us. From a helping hand, whether it is something as simple as printing out a document or downloading an eBook, to assistance with much more personal matters, such as applying for a CPP retirement, the trust we place in you shows the level of respect and regard we have. Thank you, Eatonville, for always being there, and going above and beyond to help.

Dear Eatonville,

You were the hang out spot when I was a child, and the money making spot for me now that I'm an adult. You serve as a community hub for people of all backgrounds and ages. It warms my heart when I see the useful service you provide to the public being taken advantage of. Because of the team you've curated the staff here happily serve the community and work hard to make sure this library is up and running.

Thank you for giving us a space to learn and grow!

Dear Eatonville,

I really enjoy working with the wonderful staff. I like being able to help customers with their questions and requests. It is always nice when a customer comes back to let us know that what we did for them really helped them out.

Dear Eatonville,

Since I was a child I have loved libraries, but none as much as Eatonville. The smiling face and welcoming greeting of Vivien, Monica, Anu or Ann is usually there. But all the staff are pleasant and professional. The physical building is bright, clean and sensibly arranged. As well as the wealth of reading material, I have enjoyed classes in chair yoga, seniors' keep fit and even digital 3D printing!

I have found resource material and sat comfortably at a table to research and make notes. And I love to see the enthusiasm and joy of the children in their programs.

The staff are all eager to help. Monica has helped me, with patience and knowledge to understand and operate my cell phone and tablet. The response and competence of staff during all the challenges of Covid 19 has been phenomenal.

As a senior who has lost many friends and has mobility challenges, I am so very grateful to Eatonville in all its aspects!

Dear Eatonville,

Your space is bright and welcoming. The Eatonville staff are intelligent and kind. Together, this is a great place to learn and grow. We are essential, we are uncompromisable. Thank you for your good times and many more to come.

Dear Eatonville,

You are a wonderful branch. You have a great team. We are the best!

Dear Eatonville,

I have always loved to read and I got my first library card as a child. When my family moved to Etobicoke, Eatonville became my home branch and still is.

I can't tell you how many hours I must have spent browsing the stacks of the original building. But I know one thing—I never left empty-handed.

Thank you Eatonville.

Dear Eatonville,

Thank you for giving me the wonderful opportunities you have to provide. You are a safe place for others to visit and are called a second home to most. With the wonderful staff, you stand out to others and show how great of a library you are. Thank you for becoming my second home and for creating a public space for everyone to cherish and enjoy.

Dear Eatonville,

When I came to Eatonville to work I never imagined I'd still be going home every day saying "I love my job!"

Thank you for making the final years of my career so rewarding and worth while. You are the epitome of the word 'LIBRARY'.

Dear Eatonville,

In my heart, Eatonville library means HOME: it's my home branch, close to my home, (most important) my home run for my career. I love Eatonville. I love the friendly staff. I love the beautiful garden and interior design. I love the variety of programs. I love the great reader groups. I love the lifelong support with the abundant collection and digital resources.

Dear Eatonville,

Thank you for your service! Thank you for being located where you are, so convenient and bright and beautifully landscaped. The staff are so great and pleasant. The public are so special, they bring a smile to my face and serving my library customers has been everything to me. Working in Eatonville has been a treat!

Dear Eatonville,

Eatonville library means everything to me because I used to come here as a kid and always grab stacks of books. And now I work at Eatonville. I always told myself that I will end up working at the library and here I am!

Dear Eatonville,

I visit you probably every 2 weeks! I love browsing your recommended reads, magazines and children's books. You are a warm and friendly place to gather and I always feel happy when I visit you!

Dear Eatonville,

Welcome back! It is a pleasure seeing our patrons back inside the branch. From helping people print to helping them discover a new favourite book, its been a joy welcoming back our Eatonville community. You've all been greatly missed!

Dear Eatonville,

The library to me is like an endless collection of knowledge, continuously feeding my brain, giving me countless things to think about and reminisce upon. This has allowed me to understand a wide variety of concepts and ideas from other perspectives and be an open-minded free and powerful thinker.

Dear Eatonville,

The Eatonville Library has been a help countless times for my school projects. Coming to this library after a long day of school always puts me in a good mood. After finally getting a library card, I can now take the library with me.

Dear Eatonville,

I am glad you are in my neighbourhood. I want to thank all the staff for making me feel welcome as a new staff member and for encouraging me in my dream of becoming a librarian. Wherever I go in the future, this library will always have a special place in my heart.

Dear Eatonville,

Thank you for being a refuge of peace after a long day of work, for being a host of wonderful talks and presentations in the meeting room, and for being a place for a quick hold “pickups” or leisurely browsing sessions. I may not know what I’m seeking when I come in the door, but I always leave with exactly what I need.

Dear Eatonville,

I remember coming here as a kid in the summer and reading the Anne series by LM Montgomery, which remains one of my favourite book series today. Although the author passed away a long time ago, I know she would be thrilled to know a little girl was reading her books in a library as any author probably would.

Thank you for being a free and safe space to come to whenever I wanted (except for Sundays in the summer ;)).

Dear Eatonville,

The Eatonville Library means so much to me. The books, of course, are foremost. It was wonderful to attend a few of your most helpful computer courses. It is so helpful to be able to use the printer and computers. The staff is friendly and most helpful!

Dear Eatonville,

You are vital to me and the community I live in. Its not just the books, the magazines, the movies, the music and DVD's. It's the friendly service and the always friendly greeting that identifies us as a person you like and remember.

Thank you for the always friendly service.

Dear Eatonville,

When my husband passed away it was a great deal for me to come to the library and find books that would help my grief.

Thank you for being there for me.

Dear Eatonville,

I hope this branch stays open. Let Ford know that this community center belongs to the people of Etobicoke. The staff of Eatonville are vital to the well being of our community. This staff is great for their welcoming service. We need them now and into the future.

Dear Eatonville,

The library is the only place where I meet others in the community. I love the books and the welcoming atmosphere. It is a place to come to relax, enjoy and learn. If I could, I'd give all my tax dollars to the library.

Dear Eatonville,

I feel very lucky to be living so close to the Eatonville library. It has helped me and my young boys to be more knowledgeable and informed about various aspects, be it sports, games, history, science. I also appreciate access to printers when needed.

I know the team at Eatonville are very passionate and always helpful! THANK YOU!

Dear Eatonville,

For 10 years I have made Canada my home and you have been that place where, regardless of ups and downs, I first felt I could belong. Thank you for being there for me and my famiy. Gracias.

Dear Eatonville,

Thank you for being a life saver during this pandemic. You have been a bright light during a very dark time. xo!

Dear Eatonville,

The library has been a lifeline. You kept the books flowing with good service and great spirit. Thank you so much!

Dear Eatonville,

You mean everything to me! The staff are lovely, kind and helpful. I miss spending time here attending classes with others, seeing neighbours smiling and enjoying our own community center. Thank you so much.

Dear Eatonville,

You have helped me get through the difficult Covid times.

The staff is very friendly and helpful. I am so thankful that I have Eatonville near me.

Thank you.

Dear Eatonville,

As a lifelong bibliophile, I would be bereft without the library system—particularly in these trying times (I am currently reading a book a day). Not only do books provide a huge variety of information and entertainment, but libraries offer a myriad of other services to the entire community.

The usually very helpful online system makes it excellent for the current environment. A better use for our tax dollars would be hard to time.

At this branch, the staff are very good and have been doing a great job under very difficult conditions. I look forward to getting things back to the new normal—whatever that may look like. Thanks a lot to all.

Dear Eatonville,

I have been an Eatonville library user for 30 years – as long as I’ve been alive. Like my family, you have seen me evolve from reading Franklin to Nancy Drew to Dostoevsky’s classics. The time you closed for renovations in 2000 felt like an eternity for me but I was thrilled to see you re-open, just as precious as before. Over my lifetime, I’ve participated in the many programs you have offered: as a child, the Summer Reading Club, dutifully collecting stickers over the summer months to put on my poster; as a teen, giving back as a Leading to Reading tutor; and finally, as an adult, anticipating monthly book club meetings led by the masterful Vivien (whom I will greatly miss in her well-deserved retirement!) You are an extension of my home. As you continue to watch me grow, I look forward to introducing you to the next generation of Franklin readers, while you remain an ageless pillar of the community.

Hiba Abdallah is an artist and educator who frequently works with others. Her practice explores the structural legacies and futures of cities by researching the intersections of collaboration and disagreement as productive frameworks for reimagining public agency.

She received her BFA from the University of Windsor in 2012 and her MFA from the University of Guelph in 2017. She currently lived and works as an uninvited guest on the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, the Wendat, the Seneca and most recently, the Mississauga's of the Credit River.

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