

# THE PAWLING HUMAN LIBRARY

by Catherine Riedel

On Tuesday, February 19, 2019, I walked into the Pawling Middle School in Pawling, NY to participate in their Annual Human Library. What is a Human Library? It is a program where readers come to a venue and check out human “books” that they can read. The idea is that people from all aspects of life and from all corners of the community can meet together to form connections and to learn from each other. After meeting Brian Avery, Director of the Pawling Public Library, at the Westchester Library Association Mid-Winter Conference, and hearing him speak on a panel regarding the Human Library in Pawling, I was inspired to volunteer to be a book. Here I was entering the school and wondering if what I had to say was interesting, relevant, and of meaning to others?

There must have been over 60 books on such topics as “Traveling on a Teacher’s Income,” “Creating Permanent Memories Through Personal Book Making,” and “How an Exploration of Family Became a Passion for European History.” I began the day as a reader in two sessions where I heard the book’s stories and was able to ask questions. There were 4 readers to one book in each of my groups.

I ended the day with four sessions as a book. Four? There were actually people who registered to read me? Each of my reading sessions were full with four readers to my one book. The title of my book was “Revolving Doors - Growing up in a Home with Mental Illness. It was equal parts rewarding to share my story and to hear other’s stories and input.

We ended the day in a break out with all participants and feedback opportunities on what was specifically learned, how the event could be improved, and how lives might be impacted by what was shared. A Human Library event is a dynamic way to underscore the importance of sharing our personal narratives and how this sharing creates intellectual and emotional connections in the community. A Human Library also underscores how important sharing information is which is our jobs as Librarians. And ultimately, a Human Library celebrates community and the importance of Libraries as center of the community.