



# IF I RAN THE LIBRARY

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*by Jessamyn West, MLib.*



So this was an idea that Cab came up with. I talk a lot about the digital divide and Open Library and rural librarianship and Cab said "What do you \*want\* to talk about....?" and I wanted, unusually for me, to talk about big ideas. But not in a crappy "We should all be different and act like we all have a lot of money" way but in a pragmatic way. So...



*A talk, a conversation, some Q&A*

I'm going to talk for about 15-20 minutes about the big ideas I have \*in general\*. Things I think would be great for libraries from a philosophy perspective. Things I've always wanted. I've made no secret that my personal preference would be to work in the library that I lived in. Maybe someday... anyhow I'm going to talk for a while and then Cab and I will talk and then we'll have time for questions.



**!MAKERSPACES!**

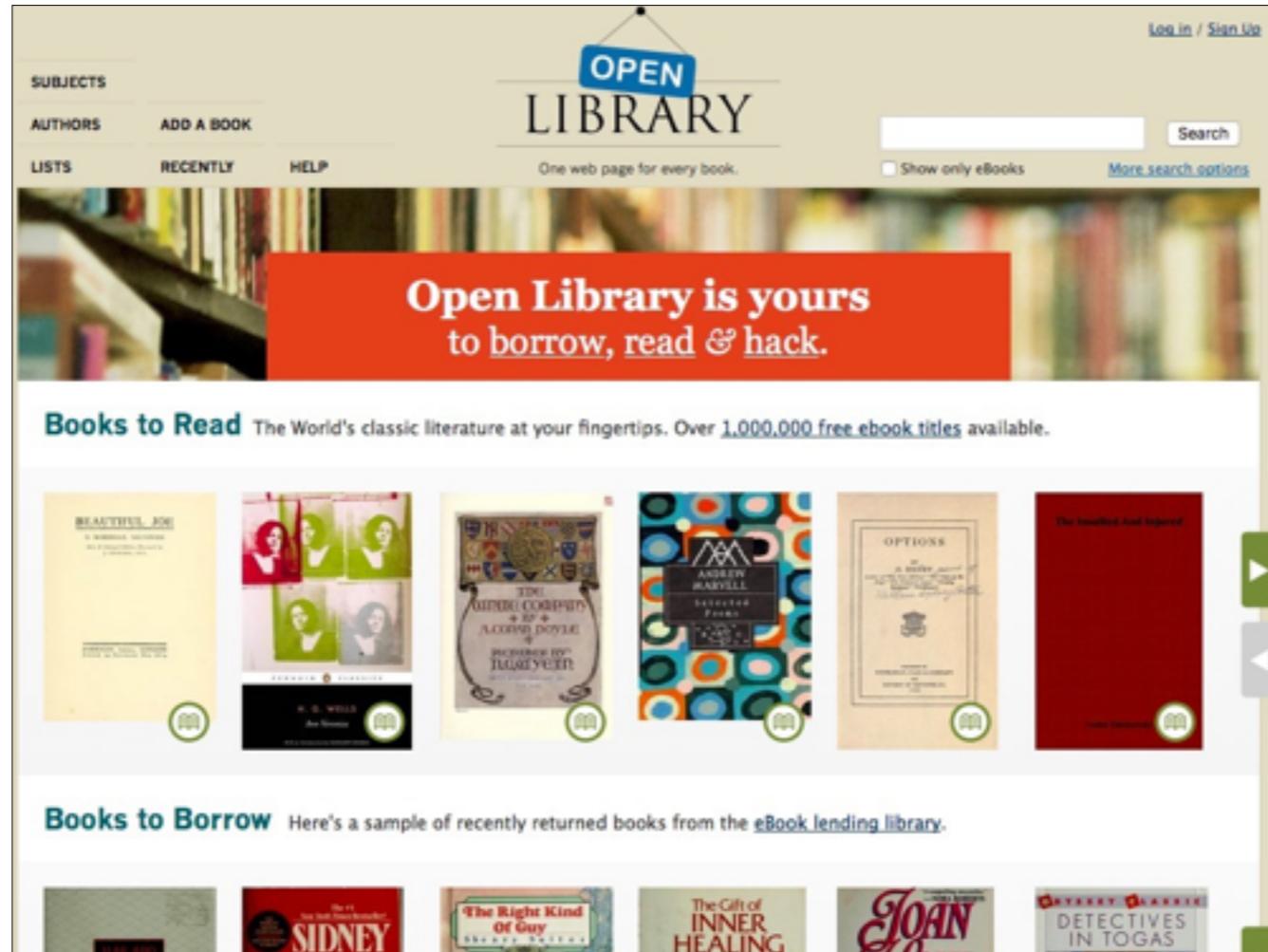
Never fear, this is the first and last time I will say Makerspaces. They are fine, but I am not talking about them. Just as an FYI.

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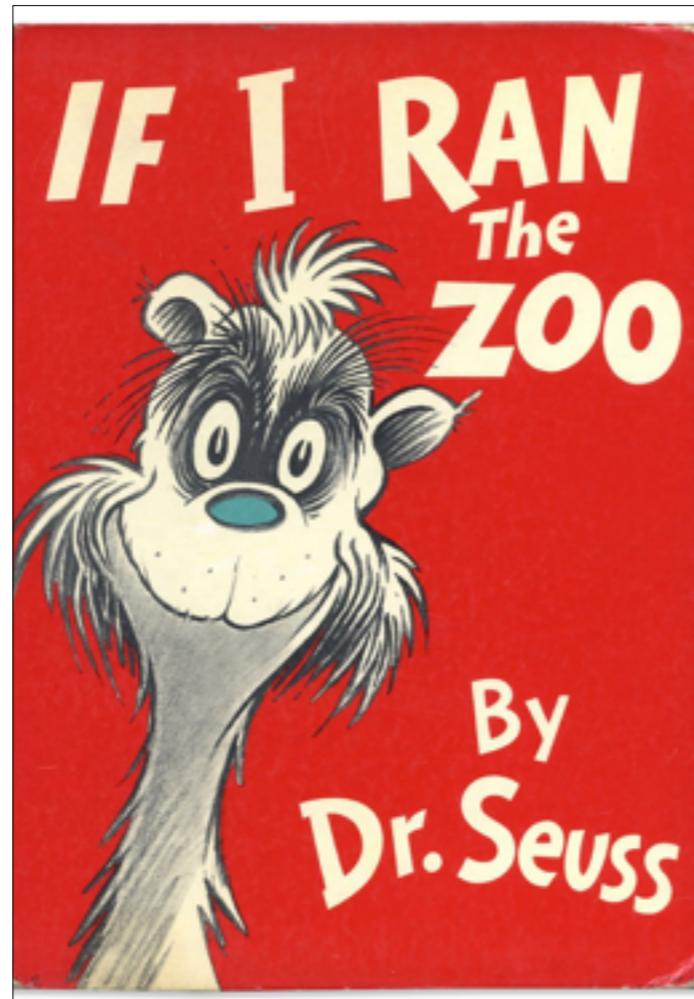
What if our libraries were large enough to hold every book? How would that change our programs and services?



I've thought that sort of thing before. I got out of graduate school in 1996 (I entered in 1993, before the graphical web) and thought a lot about freedom of information and free speech. This was one of the thought exercises we did.



And now, 20-ish years later, I work for a non-profit that is trying hard to do just that (with varying degrees of success). A page for every book. As much digital content as we can get away with. You wrote a book, it goes in the library right next to Sherlock Holmes and this Dr Seuss book where I got all these images. Legal? Mostly!



## MY OWN ZOO LIBRARY

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- Fanciful
- Unrealistic
- Impractical
- Costly
- Unsafe
- But...

(So it's been a week for this book cover, eh?) So, here are some other things I'd love to see become a reality.

And I should be very clear, I know these ideas are... all these things. And personally I love my library just the way it is, for the most part. But the world is changing, people are expecting different things from their institutions and here are some things that I'd ALSO like to see.

# OPEN 24/7

*Serve more people  
more of the time*



Especially in rural areas, libraries can only be open sometimes. This makes sense. In even ruraler areas, where I am, some libraries are just open all the time. That is, the location of the key is an open secret and people can go get a book or leave a book or just sit inside. My library isn't open when I'd like to be going to my library but I accept that this is what I deal with for working weird hours. But what about us? Nearly every library in Vermont is closed on Sunday. And major holidays. My town library will open for programming even when it's normally closed. I've seen some libraries that have a public part that's open more and a public part that's open less (sort of like those little post offices). They paid for the building, let them use it, all the time.

# SHARE ALL THE DIGITAL CONTENT

*Push the content envelope*



Working for Open Library has changed my mind about the risks in testing the copyright system. And I learned about it from Boston Public [story]. And at my library when I work there and someone tells me they can't finish the 20 CD book on CD in the two week period I say two things 1. Take it as long as you want, we don't have fines and we'll tell you if we need it 2. Here's how to rip to CD. Or if people want to watch a TV show where the last season isn't on DVD yet \*cough\* Game of Thrones \*cough\* I might tell them there is a way to do that. I AM NOT THE COPYRIGHT POLICE and people have to make their own choices about where they want to fall there. We've been sharing in copyright books at Open Library for maybe 5+ years and we're still going. We've had some takedown requests but we are still going.

# SERVE ALL THE PEOPLE

*Even the ones who think they  
don't like the library.*



The big thing about outreach as opposed to programming is that you figure out who is not coming in to the library and, usually, figure out how to get them there. I feel like this needs to go a step further and we need to figure out how to serve everyone even if they are not coming to the library. You know who doesn't have library cards in my neighborhood? Men, especially ones who have wives with cards, and maybe even kids with cards. They don't read much they is no programming directed towards them and ... that's it. Serving the people who hate the library needs to be part of what the library does. It's tough, serving the hardest to serve is sort of thankless, but it should be part of what we do. Give a library card to all new people in town. Give a library card to everyone in town! Why wouldn't you want a library card?



# OUTSIDE THE BOOK BOX

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*Leave the building.  
Change the formats.*

I used to get sort of peeved at Little Free Libraries "They're not libraries!" but at some level people like them and they've got a book angle so let's talk about them. And let's talk about seed libraries and lending ukuleles or whatever people want. Bike repair club. Learning to use a fitbit. The old story is about how if you ask people what sort of car they want they'd change the color or something minor, but if you ask them how they'd like to get to work, you'd get a lot better ideas about how to organize transportation. We should figure out what people's information needs are and meet them.

# EVERYONE FEELS LIKE THE LIBRARY IS THEIRS

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*Talk the talk of  
"this is your stuff"*



We say we're just holding on to items for people as public stewards but then why do we charge them if they hang on to them longer. My ideal library exists in all the living rooms in town and we have computers to help us keep track of where the things are. Inclusion is a bigger deal than just no fines. Thinking about things like access, really good access, to all the materials including the website (Justice Dept - twitter ALT tags) and bathrooms that are for whoever wants to use them. Sometimes you can't do much with your building but you can do a LOT with signing on to access and inclusion initiatives that other people are doing. We don't think about it so much but it's a big deal when the library gets behind something

# ADVOCATE FOR THE WORLD YOU WANT TO SEE & BUILD

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A promotional graphic for the NYC Commission on Human Rights. It features a woman, Aisha, from the Bronx, wearing a white button-down shirt. The background is a blue-tinted image of a suspension bridge. The text includes the NYC Commission on Human Rights logo, the slogan 'LOOK PAST PINK AND BLUE', the message 'IN NYC, YOU CAN USE THE RESTROOM CONSISTENT WITH WHO YOU ARE.', the hashtag #BeYouNYC, the website NYC.gov/HumanRights, and social media icons for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with the handle @NYCCHR.

Aisha,  
The Bronx

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When Bill De Blasio tweeted this from his account, it meant more than just "hey people should get to use the bathroom that they prefer" it also meant "Hey the Mayor BUYS IN to the laws of the city" and that's its own important thing

# WHY?

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- It's important to have dreams.
- It's important to understand the real world we live in.
- It's important to think about ways we get from one to the other... and back.



# ON TO THE CONVERSATION ...

