

Students benefit from bibliophile's passion

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Belinda Louie's husband doesn't give her many gifts, but he's creative about the ones he does give.

His last big present came when she was pregnant with their son, who's now 19 and a college junior.

Belinda Louie, an education professor at the University of Washington Tacoma, liked reading academic journals back then. So Douglas Louie went to the library and bought more than 100 back issues of his wife's favorite journals on language so she could read them all while she was on bed rest.



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LUI KIT WONG/THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Belinda Louie in her natural habitat: the children's books section of the University of Washington Tacoma library. Louie, a professor of education at the university, has given her name to a recent endowment of \$25,000, donated by her husband, Douglas.

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This year, for the anniversary of their 1981 marriage, he gave a \$25,000 donation to the children's literature collection at the UWT library. The endowment, in her name, adds to the collection Belinda Louie demanded and adores – the one that is both her job and her hobby.

It will help her show her students who are learning to be teachers how to love books and learn from books, and how to help their future students do the same.

The couple also promised to donate 5,000 books to the campus' 1,500-book collection, and commissioned a piece of brightly colored artwork that hangs near books about boys and girls visiting ponds, about curious monkeys and about young sorcerers.

Half of the new books are already on the shelves, boosting the volumes to 4,000.

"We believe the children in Tacoma should have teachers who love books," Belinda Louie said.

Douglas Louie, a family practice doctor and a pastor, said he wanted to give his wife a gift that would benefit a lot of people.

"There are a lot of things that we have," he said. "Other than daily necessities, those things are not so important to us. What's important is to help people in the future."

The book collection, ranging from picture books for preschoolers to high school-level literature, mostly serves education students. The students use the books to develop

strategies about how to teach with them. They take them into classrooms to teach students with them. And sometimes they just read them, Belinda Louie said.

Students have to know children's books to know how to teach children with the books, she said. If they're looking for a book about a pond, they have to know what books are out there about ponds.

Since the UWT is a public institution, anyone is free to go in and read the kids books. To check them out, people must have a connection to the university.

Betsy Wilson, the University of Washington's dean of libraries, said the donation will allow the university to build the campus' collection much quicker than it would otherwise.

"It's an amazing gift," Wilson said. "As time goes on and we are all gone and forgotten about, this endowment will go on."

The way endowments work is the school gets to spend about 5 percent of the gift each year. The rest of the money is invested in the stock market, so it can keep growing. Wilson said one 1989 UW library endowment has doubled in value.

"Endowments really allow you to do things there's no state funding or tuition for," she said. "I've always said endowments took us from being a very good library to being a great library."

As public funding has gotten tighter, universities depend more on endowments.

As of June 2006, the University of Washington had a total of 2,248 endowments worth more than \$1.68 billion for its campuses in Seattle, Tacoma and Bothell. The Belinda Y. Louie endowment is the first dedicated to the UWT's library and one of more than 50 endowments serving the University of Washington libraries, Wilson said.

When Belinda Louie came to the UWT in 1992, the campus library didn't have a children's book collection.

"None," she said. "How can it be in education that we don't have books for children?"

Belinda Louie worked with the librarian to start the Tacoma collection five years ago by getting three private grants to buy award-winning children's books. Then, she said, she convinced the university that books that hadn't won awards would be good to have, too.

"I don't want teachers to use books," Belinda Louie said. "I want them to love books. Books will get offended if you use them without loving them."

She said if people read books out of love, rather than for a test, they'll learn more. They'll remember more. They'll broaden themselves.

Even on a sabbatical, Belinda Louie spends plenty of time at the UWT in her “book closet” – a long room filled with nearly 100 boxes of books she’s using for research or getting ready to add to the collection.

The mother of two teenagers – a son and a daughter who are both students at the UW – is considered an expert on children’s literature. She won a national award last year for her research of Korean American literature.

In the book closet on a recent day, she randomly picked a book out of a cardboard box. It was “The Boy Who Looked Like Lincoln” by “The Simpsons” writer Mike Reiss.

“My name is Benjy,” she reads. “I’m 8 years old. I look a lot like Abe Lincoln.” “See,” Louie said with a laugh, pointing to the illustration, “that’s funny. I like that. I like books!”