



Margret Aldrich, author: *The Little Free Library Book* (4/15/2015)

5 Reasons To Love Little Free Libraries

When my husband and I planted a Little Free Library – a community book exchange – in front of our Minneapolis bungalow, the response from the neighborhood was immediate, and immediately positive.

The miniature library started getting visitors within the first five minutes it was open for business. Neighbors stopped by to drop off a favorite book; kids came to find a good bedtime story; cars pulled over to check it out. Even after the honeymoon period wore off, visitors kept coming to trade books – like they'd taken the post office's oath – through snow, rain, sun, and more snow. (This is Minnesota, after all.)

There are [25,000 Little Free Libraries around the world](#), and many have similar stories of community engagement. But just what is it about Little Free Libraries that inspire friendlier, stronger neighborhoods? I keep a small notebook in our Library so visitors can share notes, and one day, I posed the question: Why do you think Little Free Libraries strike a chord with people?

One visitor had a simple, but astute, response: "They're just so human," she wrote.

For this answer and more, I'm head over heels for the global, grassroots Little Free Library movement. Here are my top five reasons why:

1. I mean... the books.

My love of Little Free Libraries was inevitable. When I was a kid, I didn't play doctor -- I played librarian. (Is that revealing too much?) And forget the adventures of firefighters and astronauts: I wanted to pretend to stamp the inside covers of books.

As an adult, I worked with words in lots of ways -- first as a book editor, then as an editor at Utne Reader, and now as the author of [The Little Free Library Book](#) -- but I still had librarian dreams. Don't get me wrong: By no means can Little Free Libraries be compared to public libraries, which are irreplaceable (irreplaceable!) centers of knowledge and innovative community programming. But in a literally small way, my Little Free Library lets me play librarian again -- tending to books and peeking at what people are reading.

When I was working on *The Little Free Library Book*, I asked rockstar Seattle librarian [Nancy Pearl](#) -- author of *Book Lust* and Little Free Library patron--what draws her to Little Free Libraries. One of the joys, she said, is simply seeing what books are there. The inventory is completely unprescribed and continually changing.

Here are a few of the books in my Little Free Library right now, for example: *The Original Illustrated Sherlock Holmes*, *The Kite Runner*, *Sake Pure + Simple*, *Square Foot Gardening*, *Bernie Magruder and the Disappearing Bodies*, and *Babar and His Family*. Chances are, the next time I look inside, these gems will have been replaced

by another wonderful hodgepodge.

2. Neighborhood connections.

Little Free Library owners -- known as "stewards" -- are building stronger, more connected neighborhoods in amazing ways. Some host block parties to celebrate the grand opening of their Little Free Libraries. Others



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organize biking or walking tours of Little Free Libraries in their areas.

This is my Little Free Library (Courtesy of Margret Aldrich)

And yet others share more than books. In the Twin Cities, for example, Melanie Peterson-Nafziger and Meleah Maynard include seed exchanges in their LFLs, so gardeners can exchange vegetable, herb, and flower seeds.

"People gather around Little Free Libraries to talk and share books, and now seeds," Maynard told me. "At a time when we're all busy and racing around, I feel like it creates a sense of belonging to a neighborhood.... It makes me happy to share that."

3. The global reach.

Little Free Libraries not only stand in all fifty of the United States, they can

be found in nearly eighty other countries -- from Ghana to Italy to Japan.

In Ukraine, Evgenia Pirog helped establish more than one hundred Little Free Libraries, some of which feature books made by local children. Last month, the [first Little Free Library in Mumbai](#) was established by the 12-year-old daughter of popular Indian TV actor Rohit Roy.



There are more than one hundred Little Free Libraries in Ukraine. (Courtesy of Evgenia Pirog)

You can explore Little Free Library locations on the organization's [world map](#) -- or find one to visit the next time you're overseas.

4. Unabashed creativity.

Have you ever seen two Little Free Libraries that look exactly alike? There are robots and boats, owls and apples, castles and log cabins. Beehives. Rocketships. Snails.



Melanie Peterson-Nafziger

This Little Free Library has a seed exchange, as well as a book exchange, inside. (Courtesy of Melanie Peterson-Nafziger)

Check out the photos of ever-eclectic Little Free Libraries on [Pinterest](#), [Instagram](#), and [Flickr](#), and you'll see what I mean. (Just do it when you have time to lose an hour or two to the internet ether -- trust me.)

5. Digital detoxing.

There's something about trading paper books in a wooden box that feels wonderfully analog in an exceedingly digital world.

Even Mark Zuckerberg can appreciate this low-tech practice. Earlier this year, the Facebook founder announced he's challenging himself to [read one book every other week](#). And some of his reading material may come from a Little Free Library: Facebook headquarters is now home to [a beautifully modern LFL](#), made from a renovated telephone booth.

Guess what just landed at Facebook Headquarters? This super cool #littlefreelibrary
Thanks @jinerous for sharing! #books #freelittlelibrary #littlelibrary

A photo posted by Little Free Library ® (@littlefreelibrary) on Jan 8, 2015 at 12:24pm PST

Rather than being an anti-technology movement, however, Little Free Library is all about balance. The organization recognizes that low-tech book trading and community building can happen in tandem with high-tech social media sharing and digital connections.

Case(s) in point: Conservative estimates from the Little Free Library organization say that more than 35 million physical books were traded in Little Libraries last year. At the same time, hundreds of stewards started their Little Free Libraries after learning about them on the internet.

As someone who is too-often tied to an electronic screen, however, one of the things I love most about Little Free Libraries is their small-but-mighty contribution to a global [digital detox](#). Instead of walking down the sidewalk staring at a smartphone, Little Free Libraries encourage people to pause, flip through book pages, talk to a neighbor, and feel a human connection.

Last week, I added to this digital-free camaraderie by dropping off a few copies of *The Little Free Library Book* in a handful of Little Free Libraries around my neighborhood. I was excited to think about who might discover the books -- and where they could travel next.



Inside each book, I left a note asking readers to keep the spirit of Little Free Libraries going by donating the book to another LFL they came across. Who knows? I thought, maybe someone taking a trip to New Zealand, Portugal, or the Philippines would drop off the book in a local Little Free Library.

Of course, I didn't leave technology out of it completely: I also asked readers to email or tweet me to share where in the world the books end up.