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West Bend Library Issue "Town Meeting"

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West Bend Library Issue "Town Meeting"

I said I'd blog about the meeting later...and, well..it's later. So here it is.

I'd like to correct the WB News' recollection of the attendance. I helped set up the chairs. There were 40 to a rack and we used four racks of chairs and had the largest middle section of bleachers pulled out. The head count (yes, we actually asked someone to do that) was **137**, which included media. The News said 50. I didn't get that, unless it was a typo.

We began the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. (I'd like to make a side note here and then we'll get on with the issue at hand.) A gentleman in the bleachers refused to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance. He sat, kept his hat on, and refused. Just one guy. And he was one of those who spoke, too....so it kinda makes you wonder...does he really believe in the freedoms that others paid the price for him to enjoy? Anyway, I better not get started on that....

We briefly explained the steps we had taken, then asked anyone 18 and under to leave for the short, 15-minute Power Point we had put together with photos of excerpts from some of the books we had discussed with the library. At first, we were met with strong opposition from some teens who had come to share their feelings at the meeting (and were more than welcomed to). Oddly, we had an adult join in the objection, though we had made it **very clear** that the materials we were showing were sexually explicit. It was **our** meeting, and we felt we would be doing the very same thing that we were asking the library **NOT** to do if we allowed the youth to remain, so we asked for ID if kids were staying. Three young men respectfully showed ID. The few that were under 18 got up angrily and stormed out. I thanked them for respecting our request, and let them know that their viewpoints were important and we would appreciate their return once the Power Point was finished. (More on this later - and it's worth the read..so keep on).

We showed the Power Point that we had prepared with my husband (VERY uncomfortably) reading some of the excerpts out loud. The youth were invited back in to the meeting and we continued on...

I read some basic "rules of etiquette" for the meeting, i.e., no personal attacks, strong opinions are fine, but no foul language, etc. Most everyone played very, very fair. It was actually very interesting and should be done more often!

First speaker up is the lady that was on the front page of the WB News today. Now, this is a head scratcher. Christina (not sure of spelling) Smithers stood and did a radio interview with us at the cancelled board meeting stating her agreement with our position. Last night, she was shouting out about homosexuality and book banning. Oh well. We agreed that everyone would get three minutes, and she got hers.

We had a "non-heterosexual" youth (his words, not mine) stand up and give a passionate dissertation on his lifestyle, what gays endure and how gay kids need books like these, so please don't ban them.

Lots more homosexual speeches.

Then lots of Bible quoters.

More homosexual speeches.

More Bible quoters.

A couple people got it right.

A pastor from a local church addressed the crowd and got it back on track as to the "real" issue at hand.

(glad someone "gets it")

A few other gentlemen dittoed the above further on in the meeting.

One lesbian woman (self-identified) said that she signed the petition in agreement, as she thought the materials in the books were much too graphic for children, and could not understand what all the ranting was about homosexuality. She was actually quite honest as to admitting that she had come prepared to defend her lifestyle, as she was "told" that this was what we were meeting about, only to find out that she actually agreed with our presentation and petition. (courageous and humble)

Two people that were **especially profound representatives of their community** were two life-long residents that spoke separately during the meeting; one was an 82-year-old gentleman, the other, an 80+ woman (not together). Each said that they had lived in West Bend all of their lives and would have never thought a discussion about materials such as these would be taking place, and how sad it made them, and how they could not understand why anyone would disagree. Not exact quotes there, but close enough.

A powerful testimony came from an **area police officer** who spoke at the end of the meeting. She testified as to the sad, difficult and terrible consequences she had seen in the lives of children who had been exposed to pornography. What was unfortunate is that the media had left half-way through the meeting (probably tired of the homosexual/Bible quote bantering, figuring that was all they were going to get). **So that is what the media reported, and that is what the media played. Too bad.**

My husband and I stood and patiently listened to each speaker. We did not comment. We did not rebut. This went on for about 2 hours or so.

When everyone had taken their turn at the mic, we took a last turn before closing the meeting.

I explained that this was **not a meeting about homosexuality, book banning or book burning**. It was about pornography, homosexual OR heterosexual, on shelves where kids had EASY access to. It was about RECLASSIFYING books and placing them in the ADULT section of the library. We gave the five requests below and explained them. We made sure that everyone was clear as to what we were going to present to the library after last night's meeting.

1. Reclassification of Youth-Targeted Pornographic Books into the adult section of the library.
2. Visual identification of explicit material with a parental advisory.
3. Restrict Library-generated Online Sexual Content.
4. Balanced Literature on Controversial Issues including homosexuality.
5. Children's Internet Protection – require the libraries to implement technology protection to protect minors from internet porn on public computers in accordance with the Children's Internet Protection Act.

Again, too bad the media did not stay. This is what took place after the meeting.

One of the youth that I mentioned above, who began the meeting with strong statements about homosexuality, in a very adult-like manner, came up to me, shook my hand and APOLOGIZED. He was very respectful and said that he had no idea that the meeting was about shifting the books with graphic sexual language in them to the adult side of the library and actually AGREED that much of the materials were probably not appropriate for children. We had quite a nice conversation actually. We talked a bit about why I had to ask him to leave for the Power Point, and he completely agreed we did the right thing. That was pretty humble, in my opinion.

Most of the crowd, from my own observation, had come to sign the petition and lend support, but not necessarily speak, as they already understood the issue and agreed.

We garnered 120 signatures. Considering there were 137 in the crowd, I'd say that is a pretty decent representation of the group that attended. Does it represent the entire WB community? Maybe. At least we offered the opportunity.

Like I said, we should do this more often. Perhaps next time, though, we could have it end with an ice cream social.

NOTE: I am sure some will be unhappy that I used the term "Bible Quoters", but my point is that there was dialogue that was OFF TOPIC going on for most of the meeting, back and forth, without ever really addressing the issue. We had asked that people present their opinion about the requests we were making, and the above persons used the mic to discuss things other than the requested opinion we were looking for. Not that anyone did something horribly wrong. It just didn't answer the question we were asking.

We closed the meeting in prayer. And everyone stayed for it.