augustana living library: A Living Success

The coffee and cookies have been consumed and the library has moved on to the business of the academic term in the wake of the second augustana living library. A Living Library is an initiative through which people, (called “Readers”) who want to learn about a specific topic meet people (called “Living Books”) whose perspectives, because of the experience of prejudice or a very unique life experience, embody that topic. Readers “check out” Living Books for an hour of conversation regarding that Living Book’s particular topic. Throughout the last week of September the thirteen Living Books and many check-outs of the augustana living library kept the new building hopping. Readers came, individually and with friends, to hear the stories of the Living Book volunteers, entering into dialogue about life experiences, choices and perspectives.

Jan was joined by twelve other Living Books, each of which provided Readers with an opportunity to see beyond their own stereotypes, perceptions or life experiences. Very positive feedback indicates that these conversations were meaningful to Readers and Living Books alike:

“I think it is important to learn about other people’s lives and experience. In our communities it’s the sharing of experiences that creates compassion, and a trust within communities.”

Lindsay Sims
(Reader of “Surviving the City and the Village,” Gay Man)

“...[the experience] connects you to a human soul and human eyes, enabling you to learn through a lived experience of someone else.”

Chelsea Halvorson
(Reader of “Dancing Chick-to-Chick,” Married Lesbian)

“I felt that talking about racism made me think more about all other forms of prejudices that may be encountered by other people.”

James Kariuki
(Living Book: “More Than A Color,” Experienced Racism)

“I found it empowering to look back on my life and realize that I have met or adapted to many challenging situations.”

Donna Schroeder
(Living Book: “I See,” Visually Impaired)

The second augustana living library was a success – not only due to numbers but because of the growing effect on the Augustana campus of the augustana living library motto: growing with people, growing in community, growing our world. The conversations at the heart of this endeavor create a resonance, one that nurtures life and goodness. A possible result: seeing ourselves in “the other” and doing so with compassion and understanding. The mechanism: Living Books and Readers – listening, responding, learning.

Look for the third augustana living library in the winter semester and invite your friends to take out a Living Book. Augustana Living Books are available for “checkout” to the Augustana community of students, faculty and staff as well to the general public. www.library.ualberta.ca/augustana/infolit/livinglibrary/