

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Stories change people. Since the dawn of humanity, we've told stories to help explain natural phenomena, cushion the harshness of death, and band together in tribes. Often, stories are used to divide people. But they can also be used to unite through deeper understanding, and this is the aim of the human library program. People become "books" and can be "checked out" for one-on-one meetings with readers who are curious.

The Human Library Organization is international in scale, operating in over 80 countries. The project began in 2000 in Copenhagen, Denmark as a way to reduce prejudice and empower people to share their stories. According to their website, "The Human Library or "Menneskebiblioteket" as it is called in Danish, was developed in Copenhagen in the spring of 2000 as a project for Roskilde Festival by Ronni Abergel and his brother Dany and colleagues Asma Mouna and Christoffer Erichsen. The original event was open eight hours a day for four days straight and featured over fifty different titles." During this first event, over one thousand readers checked out human books!

One of their mottos is, "Unjudge Someone." By meeting a human book in person for a brief chat, readers can ask questions and challenge their assumptions. Both parties often end up learning a lot about the other! Human books are a diverse lot, with people from all walks of life participating to share their stories of an interesting hobby, an identity, or how they overcame a certain challenge. People with disabilities, refugees, minorities, leaders, single mothers, entrepreneurs, and fringe dwellers are commonly read human books. Many different religions and family structures have been represented, enabling readers to learn about the beliefs and lifestyles of those very different from themselves. Sometimes the story is sad, other times, uplifting, and occasionally even instructive – you might learn a new skill! Visit the Human Library Organization at their website, www.HumanLibrary.org.

The Fayetteville Public Library is having another human library event featuring about 20 different book titles on Saturday, September 8, 2018 from 1 to 4 pm. According to their website, "This is a program designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge prejudices through dialogue. A program where real people are on loan to readers. A place where difficult questions are expected, appreciated, and answered." For more information on upcoming human library titles and to learn how to check out a human book, visit: www.faylib.org/human-library. Even if you're not a human book or a reader of one, remember that your own story is important, too, whether you share it or not. All our stories together make up the world – past, present, and future – and united, we can make that world better.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist living in an off-grid tiny house on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer tips to those wanting to make a difference at www.MakeRipples.org.