

## **Sheila's Story**

Sheila Harvey Tanzer didn't always know she had a story to tell. In fact, she didn't know it for most of her life. When she finally realized it was a story that only she could tell, she relied on an old friend to help her write it: the Howe Library.

Sheila had always loved stories. She loved living in the moment of stories and appreciated the wisdom of experience that they bore. That experience, based either in fact or fiction, was a tradition as old as history itself. Sheila knew that one could learn from history and do a better job of living for it. Her love of stories led her to love libraries too, and in her family, she discovered, libraries had a history of changing lives.

Can a library really change a life? For Sheila, the answer felt like it was part of her DNA. It began with her grandfather, William Shea, who grew up in the late 19th century near the shores of Lake Superior on the Wisconsin frontier. Education was hard to come by, but William was diligent and loved learning; Sheila imagines he taught himself from McGuffey Readers.

The young "Badger" also had the good fortune to have a mentor with a private library that he allowed William to use, and the protégé devoured all the books he could. The opportunity to glean an education from a collection of books fortuitously located on the Canadian border proved to be a springboard for William Shea. He went on to become a lawyer and, eventually, the president of the state bar association.

Fast-forward several generations, and Sheila found herself in Hanover with four young children and a husband on the faculty at Dartmouth College. Having always found good companionship in books, and as a new resident in the community, she began to take her children with her to the Howe Library, then on West Wheelock Street. There she introduced them to the wonders of storytelling – the adventure, the romance, the wisdom – that she had discovered in her own reading.

Sheila remembers one of her daughters, Elizabeth, as having "read every volume in the fairy tale section" of the Howe. Elizabeth Harvey's love of literature led her to major in English at Smith College and then to earn her doctorate at Johns Hopkins University. She now sits on the graduate faculty at the University of Toronto where

her research interests stretch from William Shakespeare to early modern literature and from the medical humanities to literary theory and gender studies.

If the love of storytelling was part of the genetic makeup of this family, how was the tradition carried forward from William Shea to his great-granddaughter Elizabeth Harvey? That task would fall mainly to Sheila herself. Her father, Edmund, grew up to become a lawyer, just as his father had done, but Edmund's journey took him to Harvard University for his training. There he became friends with a fellow student named Marion Rushton. When Marion invited Edmund to his home in Alabama to meet his family, he also introduced him to a "southern belle" named Dorothy Thigpen.

Unlikely as it seemed, Edmund and Dorothy, coming from very different backgrounds, discovered that they shared many of the same values. World War I was well underway when they met, and when America entered the war, Edmund enlisted and was sent to France. He and Dorothy began a lengthy correspondence that developed into a courtship. By the time Edmund returned stateside, he and Dorothy believed they were destined to be together.

The story of their courtship was oral history in the Shea household until late in Edmund's life when he shared with his daughter, Sheila, the letters he had written to Dorothy decades earlier, which she had saved. Some years later, Sheila's sister found a box in her own basement that contained the corresponding letters that Edmund had written to Dorothy. Now Sheila knew she had a whole story that she could tell.

In writing this remarkable story of her parents' budding romance, *Mingled Souls*, which she published in 2016, Sheila relied upon the support of the librarians at the Howe Library whom she had come to know over the years. In particular, Sheila received great assistance from Mary Hardy to whom she would turn for historical background. Whenever Sheila asked Mary for help, the librarian would always find a text or paper that had the answer. They were two lovers of stories who worked together to write the story of two improbable lovers.

Today Sheila resides in her home in Hanover surrounded by the books she and her family have accumulated over the years. They provide great companionship while she waits out the restrictions of the pandemic, but she longs for the day when she

may return to the friendly stacks of the Howe Library and regale in all of the stories that they hold.