

Once Upon a Loud Librarian



Mr. Johnson has been the librarian at the Takoma Branch Library for as long as I can remember. He is your typical librarian, only much stricter. The Takoma Branch Library is so quiet that you can hear a pin drop because Mr. Johnson doesn't let anyone make noise, not even in the kids' section. If you're wearing sneakers, you've got to be careful not to let your sneakers squeak on the floor or you'll get a very stern warning look (more of a hateful glare, really) from Mr. Johnson, whose ears, I'm certain, are more sensitive than an elephant's. I'm not sure what he'd do to you if they keep squeaking because no one I know has ever tried to find out. To tell you the truth, Takoma Branch Library sometimes makes me so anxious that I'm afraid to move or sneeze.

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One day, Mr. Johnson announced that he was retiring and that Takoma Branch Library had hired a new librarian called Mrs. Watkins to take his place. When I asked him about Mrs. Watkins, Mr. Johnson just pursed his lips, narrowed his eyes, and remained silent. I'd say that he looked even less pleased than usual.



I went to the library on Mrs. Watkins's first day and immediately noticed a change. The library looked the same, but the difference was an audible one. I hear people talking and I was so shocked that I couldn't help following my ears to the source of the noise—it was a woman who was standing next to the librarian's desk talking to a man.

She was LOUD and I was worried that she'd get in a lot of trouble with the new librarian.

"Excuse me," I whispered, "you're talking very loudly and I don't want you to get in trouble with the new librarian."

The woman smiled at me and said, "I *am* the new librarian and I don't plan to get myself into any trouble, but thank you."

"I'm confused," I stammered.

"Learning is a loud business, honey," she proclaimed. "You'll see—we're going to make some changes around here. Learning and reading can be silent affairs, but they're much more fun if they aren't!"

And just like that, things begin to change at Takoma Branch Library. I first noticed it in the kids' section—mostly, I noticed that the kids are making a bit of noise. Then one day, I heard screeching and roaring. It was Mrs. Watkins reading a book during storybook hour and she was acting out the parts of the book. The little kids were eating it up—they were screeching and roaring along with her!

This is going to scare people away, I thought, who wants to come to a loud library? Well, it turns out that I was wrong.

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Next time I went to the library, there was a lot of noise in the adult section. Mrs. Watkins was leading a book group. I'm not sure what that is, exactly, but I saw a lot of adults sitting in a circle. They were all holding the same book and arguing. Only, they didn't look mad at each other. They looked excited and happy.

The next time I went to the library, it was packed. There were still quiet corners. But mostly I heard noise and conversations. In the big kids' section, Mrs. Watkins had set up an experiment. She said that she read about this experiment in a book and had to try it out. First she read us the book. It was pretty cool. It was about making a rocket out of a soda bottle. She let a few of us help her. Soon, we had everything set up. We started the rocket and it flew to the ceiling. Everybody cheered and whooped with joy. But no one cheered or whooped louder than Mrs. Watkins. That is when I understood what she meant. You can learn quietly. But reading and learning is much more fun when you can make noise!

