William Petrie Graduate Student Library Scholarship 2019 Recipient

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Award-winning Essay

I started my Master's program in Community Development in the School of Public Administration this May. "How could I have used UVic Libraries in a meaningful way during this short time?" you might ask! Well, while as a distance student, I have relied heavily on the online resources at UVic libraries during the last three weeks, here I want to focus on what McPherson Library in particular did for me before I even became a UVic student.

My husband and I moved to Victoria from Iran in December 2012, when he started his graduate program at UVic's English Department. An English graduate myself, I had just started my ESL teaching career in Tehran four years earlier. Accompanying my husband to Canada, suddenly left me in a professional, academic, and even social vacuum, where I lost all contact with my previous life as an English graduate and an ESL teacher. Of course, I still had my family, made a few new friends, and made attempts to launch a new career in this new country; however, as it is the case for many immigrants, the first years proved to be very challenging to find a new community where I could feel the same sense of belonging and purpose I had when I was in Iran.

Everything started to change from the day my husband suggested I go to the library with him, where was now working, to spend some time away from home and doing some job research. At first, I was not even sure I could enter the library as a non-student. In Iran, we were always asked to show student ID cards even before entering campus, let alone buildings and libraries. I do not forget the moment I walked through the main doors of McPherson library, cringing at the thought of being called out, and instead making eye contact with a lady at the loan desk who smiled at me. The first day, I used the kiosk computers to get access to the Internet and apply for

some jobs. I kept coming back to the kiosks a few more times, until I saw a picture of David Day holding a "community member" card in one of the TVs installed in the library. I talked to the loan desk and got a community member library card by just presenting an ID.

It might sound trivial to others, but that card and the subsequent visits to the library as a "community member" was all I needed to feel a sense of belonging again. I started to focus my library research time on exploring different UVic programs rather than blind job applications that I never heard back from. By that time, I had volunteered at several charitable organizations and started working at a non-profit. This encouraged me to do more research on programs in this field, and I finally chose the Master of Community Development. It is interesting that my new-found passion in helping other marginalized and underprivileged groups through the power of community development started with me being included as a "community member" in the library and having access to its resources. After about 7 years of immigrating to Canada, I found my way back to school through the library.