
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everybody:

What books are you reading? Summertime always reminds me of reading books, because when I was in grade school, we had a summer reading program. We were supposed to read 10 books during the summer, and then report back on the books we had read when we got back to school. I didn't want anything of it. I would have rather been outside playing ball, riding my bike, climbing trees or swimming. I remember my mom taking me to the public library to pick out several books over the course of the summer. I liked going to the library with my mom. I remember it was always cool inside - not every place had air conditioning when I was a kid. My mom has always been an avid reader and an active library consumer. And she still is. She looks forward to the book mobile coming to the facility where she lives. My dad has been an avid reader at some stages of his life, and he will read some of the books I stick in front of him. But he has become very selective in his reading taste.

Currently I am reading a book entitled "Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness," by author Pete Earley. He has written about the well-intentioned advocates who litigated the poor conditions in the mental hospitals, that deinstitutionalized the treatment of mentally ill people. And he is making the case in his book that reform to the extreme has gone badly. His point is that the mentally ill now have the right to refuse medication or any type of restrictive requirement on treatment. Earley is a journalist and tells the story of his adult son who was declared mentally ill, and how his family was thrown into the maze of America's mental health system. He also had written several award-winning non-fiction books about crime and punishment in our society, so he applied that research ability into uncovering the big picture about what really goes on in our nation's mental health system.

I'm about three quarters of the way through the book, but it's clear to me that there needs to be more reform in this area. I hope that reform can strike a balance between public safety and appropriate treatment of these individuals, as well as their rights. I'll be glad when I finish this book, because I typically read right before bedtime and it has caused me to not get a good night's sleep because I can't put it down - it's such a good book. It's an extremely accurate account of the conundrum where prisons, jails, detention facilities, and mental health facilities are currently intersecting. A quote from the book by a big-city jail psychiatrist says, "A lot of people think someone who is mentally ill is going to get help if they are put in jail. But the truth is, we don't help many people here. We can't." If any of you are interested in this book, I highly recommend it, but expect not to sleep well. It really shows how dysfunctional our country's mental health system is.

So, if you don't have your 10 books picked out for your summer reading, get busy, and encourage your kids, your aging parents, and our OJJ kids to pick up a book. We're never too old or too young to learn. I never cease to learn new things, and isn't life amazing with how much information we have available now, as opposed to when I was visiting the Cedar Grove Library in Shreveport, LA at age 10?

Well, I'll close now, with the hope you can all get in some quality reading time this beautiful, hot summer weekend, and with my thanks for all you do, every day in every OJJ office and facility, to meet the mission.

And one more thing - Sunday is Father's Day! If you have not yet bought that card or gift, it's not too late. I hope you all will be able to remember your own father or the father figure in your life. And remember, many of our OJJ kids will be missing their fathers this Sunday, and sometimes, a staff member may be the only father figure some have. **Happy Father's Day to my dad, George Livers.** I feel so fortunate to have him as my Dad. (One of the things Dad reads avidly is What's Up, Doc?)

Sincerely,

"Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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