



Looking back over the last 10 years since our first Container Library & Learning Centre: Story 1

The First Library Almost Didn't Happen

It's mid 2014 and I quit my job in preparation for the big shipment which was planned for June 2015. Some of decisions back then were rather questionable and the only explanation for the irrational behaviour I can give is, my heart led the way.

I could have decided to bring a suitcase full of books to Kenya. I could have paid for extra luggage. I could have asked the airlines for charitable support. But I didn't. Instead I decided to buy a huge 40ft shipping container and ship that full of books to Kenya.

At this point I know nothing about shipping. I am completely oblivious of the rules and regulations surrounding shipping. Completely unaware of how to convert a container into, well, anything really. I have no clue how much is all this going to cost. But why exactly would I allow something like a lack of knowledge stop me?

Miraculously I found someone who knew about shipping and who had someone wanted to ship to Kenya too. It was an amazing stroke of luck. But the problem remained; I didn't have any money. My inheritance that I used to start Just be a Child was all but gone and I estimated that I will need £10,000 to make this happen.

The shipping partner paid their half, so all I needed was £5k. But the time was ticking. To help get some money together I decided to take on a part time job in the local Novotel and put all the money I made into the Kenya-pot so I could fly out and oversee the conversion and I tried to raise the remaining money elsewhere. Two weeks before the container was set to sail I was still short of pretty much £5,000.

My last shift in Novotel. Five days later I was due to fly to Kenya ahead of the container which we were sending from Nottingham of all places (we are located in Stevenage, so over two hours drive). That is it. The time was up. Tomorrow I am going to cancel the project. I was sad, but I still had a shift to end. I was behind the bar, gearing up for the close when two people come in. There goes my early end, I thought, but put on a brave smile and asked what the two would like to drink.

I can't remember what they ordered. All I remember is that one of them introduce himself as Rob and asked if I were the one trying to raise money to ship a container full of books to Kenya. "Funny you should ask, I am just preparing to cancel. I didn't raise the

money I need and the container should be sailing on Wednesday.” I explain with the saddest smile on my face.

“Oh, that is a shame. How much do you need?” the lady, Joanne, asks. “Five thousand” I reply.

“That is not that much! I give you 2.5 and Rob will give you 2.5 and that is it, you are there.” she says with a smile. I stutter and think I misheard, so I check “thousand?” “Yeah” they both agreed. “But there is a catch” Rob says. “Aha” I wait for his reply wearily. “You must come and join us for breakfast tomorrow morning.” I should point out that they both had something to celebrate and I was worried that they might not remember the following morning.

In the morning, I got into my jeans and a T-shirt and head over to a different venue for this well anticipated breakfast. I was jumping in anticipation, keeping at bay excitement one second and worry the next. When I opened the doors I was greeted with hundreds of people. Suited and booted and all with name tags. Needless to say I did not expect crowds. Then I saw Rob who was taking centre stage. He introduced Joanne who was the main speaker for the day. She just won Female Business Person of the year. Incredible.

All I have to do is stay hidden in a corner and wait for this to be over. But oh no, I too had a name tag ready and a seat was set aside for me at a table. Then Rob tells everyone about their incredible act of kindness, asks me to stand up and tell everyone about JBAC. Every eye is on me at this point and when I am done talking they all clap. And all I can think about is why are they clapping for me, they should be clapping for Rob and Joanne. At the end of the delicious breakfast I am presented with two cheques, which I cash in 30 minutes later.

Till this day, I am extremely grateful to both of them for their amazing gift and for the incredible trust they have shown to a complete stranger. And because of them, further seven Container Libraries and Learning Centres were built.