

This is the first of a six-part series of essays written on behalf of the Montclair Public Library Foundation. Read previous essays in the Chapter Series link at <http://montclairplf.org/>.

Peter Coyl

Loving your Library

Like most Library lovers, my love affair with the Library started when I was a child. My parents couldn't afford to keep buying books for me because I read them too fast. They took me to the Library to get my own Library card and that was the start of a relationship that continues today.

Maybe your love affair started by going to children's story times with a parent, or seeing a favorite Librarian doing a craft, or visiting a bookmobile every week. Perhaps it started later in life: doing homework after school, or researching a paper in college. Whatever the case, most everyone has used the Library during their life.

It would have been hard to imagine when the Montclair Free Public Library was started almost 125 years ago that the services offered today would be so different. Now a Library is more than books: we have CDs, DVDs, internet, streaming media, electronic books, databases, and so much more. But people still use the library for the same purpose: to educate, entertain, and improve themselves.

Perhaps this is why I love Libraries so much. We offer something for everyone. Whether you want to learn something: how to knit, speak French, or figure out what makes popcorn pop, we can help. If you want a book or CD to help you escape from reality, we can find something you'll like. If you want to get a better handle on your household budget, or figure out what college might be best for you, ask us and we can show you where to find what you are looking for.

I love Libraries not just because of what we do, but that we do it for everyone. We don't judge what people are asking or why. We don't care where you are from or if you speak with an accent. We don't prejudge based on your hair, or clothes, or makeup. We only care that you need something and we do our best to help.

I love that Libraries keep up with the times. Sure, sometimes I am wistful for the Library of old: card catalogs with drawers of index cards, matronly-bunned women sternly shushing loud voices, due dates firmly stamped inside each book. Just as how we provide information has changed, people use Libraries differently. We still offer quiet spaces to study, but Libraries have evolved to be about collaboration, community, and connection. It's these evolutions and changes that have helped us stay relevant and useful to the society we serve.

Very few institutions in America are as democratic as the Public Library —anyone can enter our doors and use our services. In nationwide surveys, Libraries consistently rank as one of the community services with a highly favorable reputation. They are a draw for people moving to a new town and their value is something that is undisputed. Despite this fact, not everyone uses their library. Nationwide, only around 20% of Americans have a Library card.

Montclair, however, bucks that trend. Nearly 80% of residents have a Library card and, of Municipal libraries statewide, our usage is one of the highest. Montclair's love affair with its Library is something that is unusual, very special, and something to be proud of.

We recognize this special relationship Montclairians have with their Library. It is evident in the community participation in events at the library, with the high involvement with the Adult School, excellent attendance at our author events, and with the enthusiastic response to our children's summer lunch initiative.

As you think about your Library and what makes you love it, I hope that you'll consider a gift to our annual appeal. Your generosity will help us continue our mission to educate, entertain, and improve our entire community, no matter who they are or where they are from.

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Peter Coyl is the Director of the Montclair Public Library. He is an active member in regional, state, and national library organizations.

Tax-deductible donations to the Montclair Public Library Foundation's annual fund drive, now underway, may be made at <http://montclairplf.org/> or by mail to 50 South Fullerton Avenue, Montclair, NJ, 07042.