

One of my earliest memories of growing up in Montclair was the eagerness and anticipation of getting my own library card. I am the youngest of three, so I watched in awe and envy at my siblings as they got their library cards and brought home books to devour. Way back in the 1960s, in order to get a library card, you had to be able to spell your name. So it was with excitement and some trepidation that this five year old Kindergartner walked into the South Fullerton branch ready to wow them with my skill and knowledge. I got through the first name with ease. However, I am not sure if it was nerves or what, but as I stumbled with the complete and accurate spelling of my last name, the librarian took pity on me and I became the proud owner of what I like to call, my first credit card to knowledge.

Soon the library would become more than just a source of information, knowledge and adventure. It would be an “after school” program for a latchkey kid walking home from Hillside school. In high school, it became a place, dare I say it, to meet girls. But whether it was grammar school hijinks, or high school flirtations, there were two common themes. First was the kind, caring concern of the librarians who provided a safe space, with sympathy and understanding. The second theme was, that in spite of ourselves, we managed to use the time to conduct research, finish homework and read a book or two in the process.

As I progressed in my career as a teacher, I found the library to be a valuable teaching tool. I would meet students at the library when I assigned a paper or project that needed research. Again, the librarians were more than willing to assist the budding scholars in their search for knowledge and understanding. And my guess is that for this generation of scholars, the library also served as a place to meet friends and suitors.

When I became a parent, the library was invaluable in opening up my children to the same wonders of the world of learning and reading that I had as a child. I watched with joy and delight as they devoured books and absorbed all the library had to offer. I also liked that it served as an ersatz babysitter during story time and other activities for children. For struggling new parents, the hour of respite was well received.

In today’s digitally connected, social media world, the library is even more important. With so many people tied to their devices, it is good to have the library, that familiar standard bearer of stability, learning and adventure. Though I am far removed from the days when I roamed the Montclair Public Library as an adolescent and teen, I continue to see people, young and old, use its resources. And I can also report that, like when I was a kid, it still provides that all-important social outlet as well.

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