

*This is the second 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/>.*

Emma Fishman  
“Love Your Library” series

Much of my early life revolved around the Montclair Public Library. As the daughter of an avid reader, I’ve had a love affair with books my whole life. Books have never just been stories to me—they’re a part of the fabric of my very being, central to my sense of history and self-concept.

The *Alfie and Annie Rose* books by Shirley Hughes, *The Art Lesson* by Tomie dePaola, and *What Goes Around Comes Around* by Sally Ward were just some of the beloved books that made the journey from the library to our home and back again dozens of times. I loved the sound of crinkling plastic on the covers, the faded stamps that declared the book property of the MPL. My mom and I spent hours on the third floor of the library, looking through the shelves, picking out old favorites and taking a gamble on authors we hadn’t read before. On Fridays, in the days before streaming television services, my mom, brother and I would pick out videos (who else remembers VHS tapes?) to watch over the weekend. Did you know there was a 1980s television series called *Ramona* based on the books by Beverly Cleary by the same name? I did—but only because of the library.

As I got older and had less free time for pleasure reading, the library became more about my academic pursuits. My ‘library home’ relocated from Montclair all the way to college in Massachusetts.

The library at Mount Holyoke College, where I completed my undergraduate degree, became a second home to me on campus. I spent many a Sunday afternoon curled up on an armchair in the reading room, balancing my laptop on my knees, conducting research, writing papers, poring over pages of printed readings for my classes, highlighter at the ready. My friends and I took over study rooms and hunkered down to do our work, armed with cups of dining hall coffee and take away containers filled with dry cereal for sustenance.

Both libraries gave me home, and space to explore.

This past August, my relationship with the Montclair Public Library came full circle. I took a five-year-old girl I’ve known and loved since she was born, to the library. She took my hand as we boarded the elevator to the third floor, and pulled me along excitedly as we approached the children’s floor. I was hit with an acute sense of *déjà vu*—it was exactly as I had remembered it, save for some new modern amenities like a self-check out machine. We picked out a stack of books to read—some I was familiar with, and others that were new to me—and sat on the window seat where I read to her, bathed in the late summer sun, savoring the quiet and the joy of reading.

It was a precious gift for me to share the library with her that afternoon. I began to realize that a library is more than the sum of the books that line its shelves. Part of what makes a library so special is its innate versatility. For me, the library fostered my love of reading, but for someone else, it could serve an entirely different purpose. Libraries can

be whatever you need them to be, and that need does not have to be static. This kind of institutional adaptability is rarely found elsewhere; and is something that I celebrate.

*Emma Fishman is a proud graduate of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA, and a lifelong resident of Montclair. One of her favorite children's books is The Library by Sarah Stewart.*

*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.*