

This is the third 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/>.

Patricia Abad
“Love Your Library” series

The library has been the place of so many “firsts” for our family. It’s where our daughter got her first library card, even before we closed on our house last year, new to Montclair. Along with checking out pre-schools for our son, getting my library card was top on the list. And the card for Emma was the best “Welcome to Montclair” gift we could have given her. “I’ll have my own card?” She asked. She was five, and ecstatic. Every time we go get books held for her, it is like a special treat is awaiting. And it really *is* a special treat, giving children the gift of literacy.

Emma has really started to read independently this school year. I’d like to think the 216 books we read during the Summer reading program, “Build a Better World,” had a lot to do with this. There were so many fun events taking place throughout the Summer, from the kickoff with Sciencetellers, to the Kabangou Kipouland Dance Company event on the plaza. The rhythm of drums was so contagious, I had to get up and dance. Meeting dancers from Guinea, and sharing their passion that evening was priceless. When we got home, our children were banging on everything they could find. Of course!

I think our children will never be the same after the “Cyro Baptista and Banquet of the Spirits” concert. We sat on the floor at the very front and our son was mesmerized by the many plastic lids of different sizes and colors, connected by strings. It was an instrument. Just like a series of PVC pipes and flip flops. Magical unusual instruments. I remember how I felt hearing the very first sounds that were produced, completely new to me. I have attended a fair number of concerts, but this was unique. If we closed our eyes we could almost feel the raindrops falling on our face and hear the exotic birds around us. I had visited the rainforest. It was our children’s first trip there.

When I volunteered for “The Art (Imitates Life, Imitates Art) Parade,” presented by Seed Artists, it was amazing to see kids’ faces light up when they heard that they could become anything or anyone they wanted to become. One child asked “you mean *anything*?” The energy in the room was fantastic. The program gave wings to kids’ imagination, as they became live works of art and paraded along Church St. Thanks to the program, I started developing a potential partnership between Seed Artists and Nishuane.

Last Winter, Greg Pope gave a talk on “Montclair in the Ice Age.” That night, Emma was the youngest member of the audience. She still remembers how the blue ice was dragging the rocks underneath it, from a plaster demonstration that Dr. Pope used and with which she helped him. The boulders at Anderson Park, are no longer just big rocks. They tell a story —dragged from far away, thousands of years ago. That was Emma’s first scientific lecture.

The library has been an instrumental resource in all my teaching, on diverse science topics, at Nishuane and in our community. Libraries are scarce in Uruguay, where I grew up. Having lived in the United States for 17 years, when I walk into the library, I still feel like a child in a candy shop. Except this is better than candy! It is addictive, but the good kind of addiction. If there is anything I can give back to the library, count me in! Because I feel part of this candy shop and want to spread the sweetness for many generations of literate children to come —children who have also traveled across time and space, perhaps to the Brazilian rainforest, Guinea, or Montclair in the ice age, without leaving their library.

Patricia Abad, Ph.D. is a scientist, actively engaged in getting young minds excited about science, and bringing art into their lives. She has taught enrichment science programs at Nishuane and Hillside elementary schools, and has shared her expertise with students at Buzz Aldrin Middle School, and partnered with the Montclair Society of Engineers and Montclair History Center on STEM programs. She is planning a program with the library this winter, so stay tuned!

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.