

This is the fourth 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/>.

Falling in love... one book at a time

Kristin Duszak

“Love Your Library” series

I knew the Montclair Public Library was *my* place the minute I saw in one of its shelves a small poster of Ryan Gosling —with a backpack, and a novel under his arm—, looking like he was late for a very important date, but still had found the time for a crucial public announcement service. It was mid-2013; the actor’s image might have been borrowed from a movie or a candid shot from a glossy magazine. The provenance didn’t matter to me. What caught my eye was that the librarians had added the following caption: “Hey, girl: Start a summer romance... with a book”.

I appreciated not only the content, but also the tone. I remember I laughed, took a photo of it, posted it on my wall, and “checked in” at the library, on Facebook. A couple of minutes before, I had “checked in” in real life. And I had crossed the threshold with one purpose: to do just what Gosling recommended. Regardless of the season, I’m always looking for a new book to start a romance with. That poster, and the mischievous minds behind it, spoke directly to me. They had managed to sum up, *with a picture and nine words*, some of the qualities that I value the most in modern libraries; virtues that MPL, in particular, embodies with gusto: the possibility of (falling in love with) reading, as well as the opportunity to receive free access to information. These attributes were combined and presented with a cheeky, clever, youthful approach. It was also endearing to see that a library, a pillar of democracy, knew that it did not need to take itself so seriously at all times.

Making me, and *anyone*, feel welcomed is something that the MPL has gone out of its way to do. And it does it by sending the message regularly and in a variety of *vehicles*: from the book bike (a literal vehicle), to Yoga on the Plaza, to the Open Book Open Mind series...

MPL felt like home since I moved to Montclair, six years ago. But, truth be told, my romance with books and libraries precedes Montclair (sorry, guys!). Almost a decade ago, when I moved to a tiny town in Texas, I had a library card at my new (very small) library before I had friends. And I continued to spend a lot of time there, even after I found some friends. And before that: I can still smell the scent and evoke the image of my hometown library and see, clear as day, the corner that held *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*, and *Southern Fried Rat and Other Gruesome Tales*. (Yes, the latter is a real book... and, if it interests you, guess where you can borrow it.)

MPL has been instrumental to me, personally and professionally. It helped me relearn French at the Adult School so that I could go as a chaperone with a group of students on an immersion trip to France. And, two years ago, while a colleague was on medical leave, I offered to cover 2 sections of Environmental Science. I am a marine biologist who’s made a career in education... as an administrator, not in front of the classroom. The Montclair Public Library gave me a quiet and inspiring place to prepare (for) my classes.

Beyond the obvious escapism into books, the library’s walls have felt like a sanctuary during times when I’ve been seeking comfort. And beyond comfort, it has brought joy, to the

point of tears. I cried when I first found out that Isabel Allende was coming to Montclair. Her stories have meant so much to me, and just being in the same room with her, sharing her energy, was so powerful and inspiring.

As soon as I finish Allende's *In the Midst of Winter*, I'll make sure to stop by the library. I can sense it: a new book—a new romance!—awaits me inside.

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