

D.T. Max

We knew about the library of course. We had heard about it before we got here. We have two kids, ages 5 and 3 when we first moved to Montclair, 10 and 8 now. Growing. The festive children's section on the third floor at 50 South Fullerton Avenue was one of the first places we went. The fish-tank, the papier mache animals, the little boys gathered around the Harry Potter shelf and the ramp up to the picture books. Went there, did that, on arrival. The kids loved it, and since the kids loved it, so did we.

Montclair is a town of children. We stand still while they move—children hugging, children learning, children testing limits, children demanding ice cream after school. But this story is about an adult. The *New Yorker*, where I am a writer, offers its staff an office but it never made sense to me to commute an hour and half roundtrip to a desk. Surely there were desks in Montclair.

Though a writer for twenty years I'd never written in a library. I'd researched in them, especially the New York Public Library. Great institution to be sure. I'd gather up my booty of new information, leave Patience and Fortitude (the stone lions at the entrance) behind, and head home. But writing in one? There was always just the wrong amount of distraction. In the midst of mostly-quiet, chatter carries.

Instead I'd go to bakeries. For my first book, where other writers thank their local library, I thanked St. Elmo's and Firehook, where I devoured pastry after pastry. So in Montclair my first "office" was at Chamagudao, the fabulous tea parlor with its bamboo floor and rows of brass containers on Glenridge Avenue. But it closed in 2010.

And my second "office" was at Panera's on Bloomfield Avenue, spanking new when we arrived in Montclair in 2008 but soon too popular for my purposes. It became like writing on the IRT. I left it too. Now I was stuck. Stuck halfway through my work on *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*, a biography on the novelist David Foster Wallace that was fast becoming overdue with a publisher asking for it.

I should add that Montclair is a town of writers too, but I never figured out where the others did their writing. Maybe they all wrote in those sun-drenched top floors you see along Midland and Park or maybe they went to New York or maybe they white-knuckled it in their own homes, with the baby crying and the PSEG man knocking on the door.

Anyway, one day I wandered back to South Fullerton with my book-bag and no children, compelled by gravity in both senses. I can no longer remember how I found the area on the second floor, the space reserved for quiet work, but I know I spent my first day there trying to write and, to my amazement, wrote. I didn't believe it would last. But I came back and worked again the next day. I kept waiting for the silence to fragment. But, whoosh, whenever two patrons assumed the conversational position at our tables, chairs pointed inward, a sentinel of quiet arrived, separating the garrulous, intervening with the loquacious (surprising how many people come to a library to talk). Soon I grew to expect the librarians' miraculous interventions, especially in the

afternoon when students would settle down convinced there was no better way to get their homework done than to not do it. My protectors did their job graciously and persistently. And the pages came.

And came (special shout out to Grace Grund and the Terra Tea and Free Trade Café on the first floor, for fulfilling the pastry need). A draft of the book done, I came back with the copyedited manuscript, then the galleys. This fall the publisher practically had to pry the manuscript out of my hand as I sat there, the sun pouring through the southern windows onto my pages, bliss on my face, basking in that rarest of modern commodities, silence.

---DT Max is an author and staff writer for The New Yorker

Copyright D.T. Max 2012