

Elisabeth Schifrin

I had never really considered how lucky I am to have been born and raised in a town with a vibrant public library. Before I could even talk, I listened to Raffi CD's my parents borrowed from the Montclair Public Library. I remember when I was in preschool, I would scan the shelves in the back for my next animated story on VHS, asking myself to what adventure I wanted to treat my imagination next. Then, while waiting for my brother to pick a "big kid" book, I would curl up in those diamond-shaped window nooks to curiously watch the pedestrians down below. When my mother came to tell me that we were leaving, I would climb down reluctantly, already looking forward to the next visit.

In first grade, I was finally of the right age to participate in the library's summer reading program. I eagerly challenged my young, developing mind to read longer and more advanced chapter books that summer, all the while learning without realizing it. In second and third grade, car rides were filled with the tales of Odysseus and Ezperanza, the audiotapes from the library enriching dinner time conversation with reactions and predictions regarding the books' events. The earlier part of my childhood is brimming with the fondest of memories of the library. As I entered adolescence, however, visits to the library grew less and less frequent until there were none at all.

Upon entering middle school, required reading assignments soured my and my peers' love of reading. Combine that loss with the preteen desire to be cool, which (surprise!) did not include hanging out at the local library, and suddenly the library was the last place I or any of my friends wanted to be. It wasn't a bad place, it was just forgotten in the movement towards uptown as the popular place to spend Friday afternoons.

These were the lost years of learning. I look back now on this time and wish I could tell my thirteen-year-old, Facebook-stalking, hair-straightening self that my time would much better be spent getting lost in the rabbit hole with Alice or getting into trouble with Ponyboy than sitting for way too long in Starbucks gossiping. Though I still enjoyed novels like *The Hunger Games series* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*, I damaged the

connection I had with my childhood sanctuary, the library, and as a result, I undernourished my imagination.

Over the past two years, studying for AP Examinations and SAT's, muddling through homework, and my current task, college applications, have taken over most if not all of my free time. With my to-do list growing ever longer, I have needed the perfect study environment to allow me to focus in relative silence and submerge my mind into the depths of my work. I tried working in every room in my house, in cafés, and in parks until I found myself back bathed in the familiar yellow lighting of the Montclair Public Library.

Re-entering this community bubble of people, old and young, all trying to expand upon their knowledge reignited the pleasure I experienced as a young child that only a library can bring. When I walk through an all-access museum of documented thoughts before locating at one of the many carrels to become the author of my own, I gain motivation to succeed and inspiration to think and ponder my academic pursuits. Now it is my goal to spend a few hours at the Montclair Public Library at least three times a week. A trip there is a time of guaranteed productivity in a place that feels like home.