

FROM OUR READERS

What PJ Library Means to Me

By **Natasha Zwick**

PROUD PJ LIBRARY PARENT



Before I even became pregnant, PJ Library was on my radar. A friend had mentioned it during a lunch where we were sharing stories about IVF. I was a mid-30s professional woman, eager to have a family with whom to share my life, my heritage, and my values. I had found a wonderful Jewish anonymous donor and was ready to raise a child who would be happy, healthy, confident, and actively, passionately Jewish.

When I became pregnant, I put a note on my calendar for six months after the baby's due date to contact our local chapter. I'm an English teacher who loves to read, and I knew my baby girl would, too. I began reading and singing to her when she was in utero, and we began with picture books as I rocked her to sleep once she was born. When the PJ library books started arriving, I loved how they seemed to reflect so much of what I was feeling and doing. The concepts of tikkun olam, as told in *Tikkun Olam*, *Ted*, or the beauty of Shabbat, as the Fine twins demonstrate in *One Fine Shabbat*, are as familiar to her as more mainstream *Good Night, Moon*, *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* or *Jamberry*.

Now, at age three, my Briella likes the stories that make me teary with emotion, namely *Chik Chak Shabbat* and *Grandma Rose's Magic*, both of which show the outpouring of love that results from basic goodness, generosity, and kindness. She hands them to me again and again, savoring the build up to the surprising twist at the end that never fails to touch me, and through these books, my daughter is learning the power of goodness and also the power of books.

She has begun making up stories of her own and telling them with drama similar to that which we are reading. She has characters as improbable as Moti the Mitzvah Mouse quietly doing good things, and Avi the Ambulance saving the day despite his tender age. She's learning more about Israel from her dinosaur friend who wails when he returns home ("why does he cry, Mommy?"), and she has an intuitive understanding of humor in a Jewish context, laughing when Avi takes a bath, when Bubbe and her grandson dance while they bake challah, when Noah's grandson is not the only visitor to his bed on a stormy night on the ark, and when the whole family shares one chair on Passover because they're a little short on seating arrangements.

My mom and dad (Bobbie and Barry) taught me to love being Jewish. At day school, our home values were reinforced. Briella, too, loves her Jewish pre-school experience, wants every day to be Shabbat, and sings songs in Hebrew with a passion that makes me so happy. Though my dad never got to meet her in this world, my mom assures me regularly that he lives in his granddaughter, named for him, and her passion for her heritage is an essential part of that.

As my brother, Uncle Alex, and my mom could attest, seeing her Jewish world in her books gives Briella a confidence in herself and in her community that only PJ Library could provide. For that love, for that confidence, and for that consistency, I am incredibly grateful.

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