

Across Languages and Continents

FINDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PJ LIBRARY



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During a cold week in November 2002, two newlyweds started their immigration journey in search of a new community.

Seeking a better future for ourselves and our families, my husband and I packed our bags with our dreams, expectations, and newly framed *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract) and made our way to Winnipeg, Canada.

I grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in a traditional Jewish home, and synagogue was always a big part of my life. I always enjoyed services, and when I was only 2 years old, I tried to follow along in a *siddur* (prayer book) as the rabbi and cantor sang the prayers. When I was older, I joined the youth group at the synagogue and later became a youth leader. As an adult, I was inspired to continue as a Jewish education leader, and I worked for many years at a Jewish day school as a kindergarten teacher.

But not long after our wedding, my husband and I decided to start a new life in Canada.

It was a huge change, but we were welcomed by a warm and friendly Jewish community in Winnipeg. They helped us get settled and feel connected, introducing us to new families and having us over for Shabbat dinner to get to know us.

Our little family grew soon after our arrival as we welcomed our firstborn son. When he was just 3 years old, we received a letter along with our now treasured book *Something from Nothing*, inviting us to join PJ Library. And so we did!

A few years later, with a toddler and a baby, I made my way to one of the first PJ Library events, and I was hooked! As a teacher and a young mom, I felt empowered and excited, so I volunteered to plan a future program for Pesach.

I have now been working at the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg for close to 10 years. Currently I am the engagement manager and oversee the PJ Library program, which allows me to combine my love for reading and children's literature with giving back to the community that welcomed us with open arms.

My priority at the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg is making sure families feel welcomed and excited to participate. I treasure each time a PJ Library family says they further embraced Judaism, adopted a new tradition, made new friends, tried a new recipe, learned a new song, or offered to volunteer or join a committee because of our program.

I realize that my journey constantly guides the work I do and the way I connect with families. As a newcomer with a different background who spoke English as a second language, I experienced the values of community and belonging and the power of building personal connections with other families. Whether I welcome and connect with families that are new to Winnipeg, are new to the Jewish community, or have no Jewish connection other than PJ Library, I remember how meaningful it was to feel welcomed, accepted, and included.

I came to this community with my *ketubah* under my arm, few friends, and lots of dreams. My *ketubah*, made by an Argentinian artist, is a constant reminder of where I came from. I have made amazing friends, and many of my dreams have come true. I am so grateful for the community that I can now call home, and I would like to believe that I have played a small part in making our community more vibrant and engaged.

Regardless of where you come from, how you discover Judaism, or where you are in your Jewish journey, there is always a place for you.

