

The Normalizing Effect of PJ Library

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I REMEMBER THE DAY MY JEWISH GRANDMOTHER broke the news to me that because my mom was Jewish, I too was Jewish. I cried, thinking it meant that we could no longer celebrate Christmas or Easter. As far as I had understood up until that moment, I was both Jewish and Christian. She was trying to pass along a lesson on Jewish lineage, but I missed the message.

At the time, I enjoyed the doubling up of presents that came with celebrating both winter holidays. I loved getting Easter candy and indulging in treats that were definitely not kosher for Passover. To me, that crossover of both upbringings was very much about the things I would get and had little to do with religious traditions and heritage.

Now in an interfaith marriage myself, I consider myself only Jewish, and my husband and I are raising our children in the Jewish faith. We celebrate Christian holidays with extended family and have a Christmas tree in our house at Christmastime for the sake of continuing a tradition we both had growing up, but otherwise, our children feel Jewish in a way that I did not as a child.

I have PJ Library to thank for a lot of that. Because of these books, my preschooler just recently called me *ima* (Hebrew for "mother") because she wanted to test out terminology used in one of her books. When it rains heavily outside, she relates to Noah and asks questions about the flood. She sees characters setting the table for Shabbat, and she's reminded of the rituals that we have at home, reinforcing an experience we share together as a family.



PJ Library gets her excited about being Jewish and about sharing her Jewish knowledge and traditions with friends and family who do not share the same background. She goes to a secular preschool and during Passover, she told her teacher that she couldn't have the school-provided snack. Instead, she was excited to share matzah and applesauce with her friends, talking about how Jewish people do not eat *chametz* during Passover. Her school practices letter association by eating their way through the alphabet. Because she had talked so much about her love for challah her teacher asked if we would bake one for C week that she could share with her classmates. I wonder how confused her friends were when they learned a new sound that the letter C can make!

I'm so thankful for the normalizing effect PJ Library has on our children's Jewish experience. It is so important to me that my children feel proud of who they are. I want them to go out into the world sharing bits of their traditions with people who don't have any experience with them. If they talk about the beauty in our traditions, while spreading *ahava* (love in Hebrew) and shalom, maybe, just maybe, they can grow up in a more tolerant world. Thank you, PJ Library, for the many gifts you've given to my family, including the gift of hope for a world filled with love and peace.

C is for
Challah

