

StoryCorps Interview at the Brooklyn Public Library

"You see that spark that you've put in this child?"

Richelet Jean speaks with librarian Hasina Islam and his 7-year-old daughter, Abby, about Hasina's impact on Abby's learning, curiosity, and sense of connection to Brooklyn Public Library.

Richelet Jean: Abigail was three years old, and I was taking care of her a lot during the day at the time and I had no idea where to bring her. And my lovely wife Nathalie said to go to our local library. That was a beginning of a rejuvenation of my relationship with the library from when I was younger... and also a good place to hang out with the kid during the day.

Hasina Islam: What program did you attend?

RJ: I attended the "Ready, Set, Kindergarten" program. And with the other kids, she sat there, and I remember she was nervous sitting in the back and she saw you, and you welcomed yourself to her...and, surprisingly, she took to you immediately.

HI: I remember her being this very shy, beautiful girl that just opened up and is just so bright and wonderful and I just got to see her transition. And I think that's basically where our relationship began.

Abigail (No last name given): And I never called her by the correct name. *(Laughs.)*

RJ: Why do you call Hasina, Shazida?

A: Because I like it.

RJ: There you go.

HI: And that's ok. I just let Abigail call me whatever she's comfortable with. Do you want to tell us about the book that you wrote about me?

A: I thought of making my own book, and I didn't know what the theme was going to be, and then I remembered when she brought me the superhero book. So then, I decided to make her a superhero.

HI: And what was it called – do you remember the title?

A: "Shazida: The Super Librarian"

RJ: See?

HI: And that was a very special gift, and that meant a lot to me – so, thank you....
[Richelet,] would you say the library made a difference in your life?

RJ: Yes. As I was growing up, and I was around her age, it had a great effect on me because I was lucky enough to have a library pretty much across the street from me, so that was my hang out spot after-school – you know, my parents worked – so the library was always something that was a constant in my life. It was something that I gravitated toward.

And I think that's where I got my love and appreciation of books from... and it was great that because of my child, I was able to rekindle that love of the library and everything that it represented at the time, and going back and realizing how I was able to incorporate it into my daily life, and it ignited a spark in my daughter for reading, which I don't think she would have gotten just from, you know, school or pre-K or television. It was something specific, and something tangible.

The "Ready, Set, Kindergarten" program, I think, was critical to her progression... and even now, I can see it – how it helped her as a student now. She's in second grade now – she's 7 years old. She's been excelling and doing very well. She reads all the time. She reads three or four books at the same time.

A: You can never read every single book in the whole world. *(Everyone laughs.)*

HI: Absolutely! You can try!

A: Unless you've been alive for 2,000 years! *(Everyone laughs.)*

RJ: That's true. [Hasina,] you see what you've started? You see that spark that you've put in this child?

HI: *(Laughs.)*

RJ: That's what I mean. [Abigail,] does she always give you good books?

A: Yes.

RJ: Does she make you feel it was your library?

A: Yes.

RJ: Does she do her job well?

A: Yes. She deserves to be a Master Librarian!

HI: Aw, thank you.

RJ: See that's what I'm talking about. You made my child feel like you were there specifically for her.

HI: Thank you. And you're very welcome. It's my job.

