

THE NEW CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

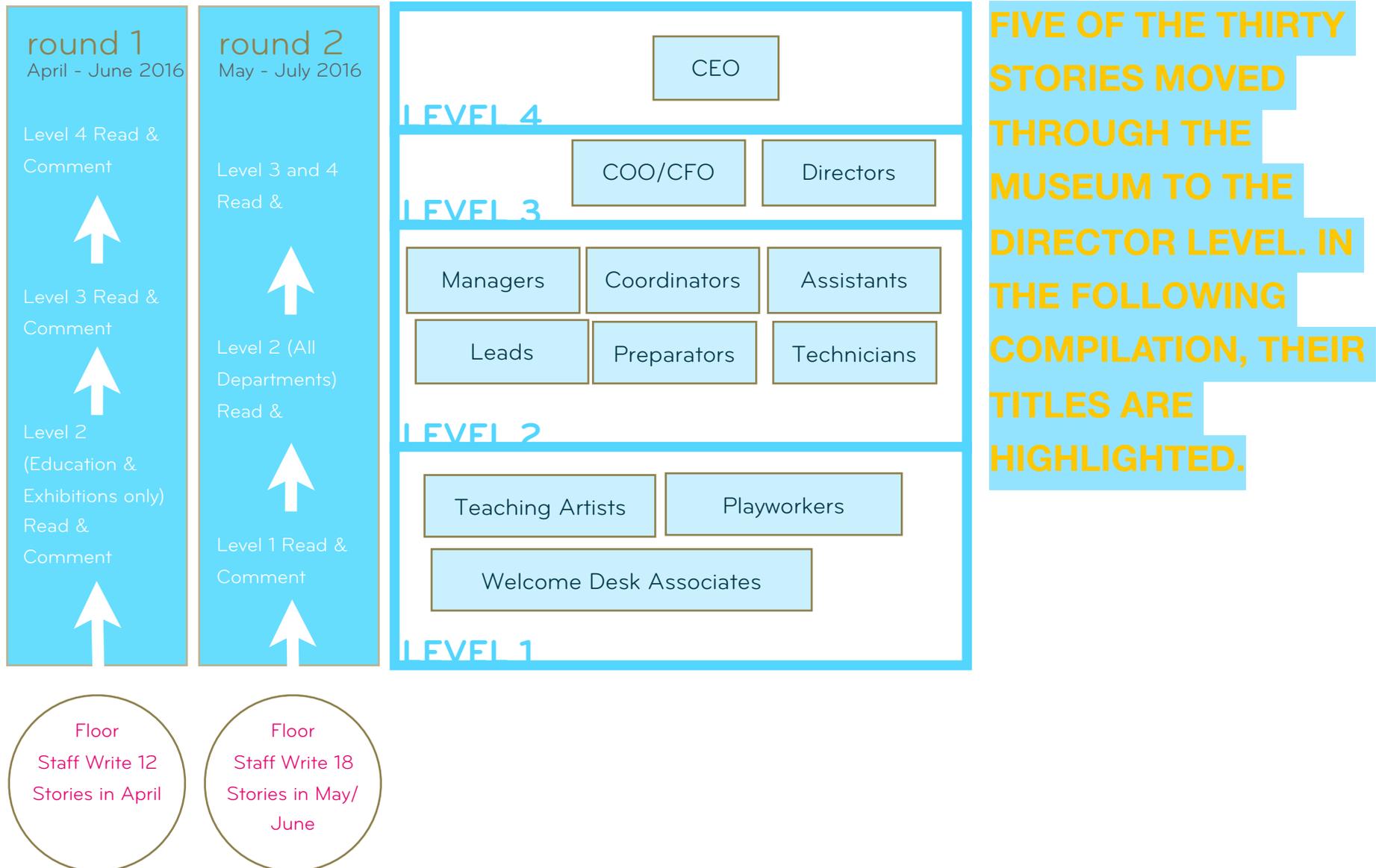
stories

An organization can be seen as a collection of stories: stories shared in kitchens, on coffee-walks, or in-between meetings. However, stories are social, and a story told at a downstairs kitchen frequented by floor staff may not make its way to an upstairs kitchen frequented by office staff. How might we better share stories among levels? How might it change our understanding of who we are?



an experiment in storytelling

In early 2016, floor staff-- people who work directly with Museum visitors-- recorded 30 stories of moments they found to be "significant." These stories were collected and distributed to staff who work at the Museum. At each level of review, readers selected a certain number of stories they found "most significant." Five of the thirty stories were selected through at least the director level. Stories and comments were shared anonymously.



ANDI, THE PEN & THE BLOCKS

Child and parent visit the museum every Friday morning. Andi (name has been changed) is a shy 18 month old and Gerald (name has been changed) a kind, caring parent. I say hi to Andi every Friday, and am usually met with a vacant, contemplative stare. When we stare at each other for a minute or more, Andi starts to look at his feet or hide behind Gerald.

This Friday morning, [COWORKER] talks with Gerald while me and Andi stare at each other. I am sitting on the ground next to the block table. Andi, Gerald and [COWORKER] stand near Rain House. Gerald continues to get Andi to talk to me, but he's not into it. We continue to stare at each other for another 5 – 10 minutes. Andi stares at me and then his shoes, me and then his shoes, over and over. He almost smirks sometimes, too.

[COWORKER] and Gerald walk to the block table and sit down near me, Andi stands. He is nervous. I notice Andi look at pen, which is on the carpet near the blocks, so I look at it, too. We take turns looking at the pen. After about 3 minutes of this play, he starts to point at the pen and then look at me. I point, too. Then, Gerald and Andi begin to walk away, but Andi stops, looks back and points at the pen. The two walk back to the block table and sit down near me and start building. Andi looks at the pen. I place a block near him, he looks at the blocks, me, the block. He picks it up! He begins to speak but I cannot understand him. We start building together and then I see him smile (for the

first time!). His demeanor changes; he seems more at ease. We bang blocks together and against the table. I mimic him. Gerald smiles and plays on his own. Is he relieved Andi is finally playing with someone other than him? We play for another five minutes before I get a call on walkie and have to leave. It is nice to know I will see them again.

This story is significant because I watched Andi open up and engage with me in play. Although our play was subtle and quiet, I believe it had a big impact on Andi and Gerald. Gerald smiled as Andi and I stacked blocks together. Earlier, he had expressed his concern for Andi's shyness and now he got to see him open up! The pen is also significant about this story. The pen got Andi and I playing together! What power! If it weren't for the pen, I am not sure we would have played with the blocks together. Playing with Andi required patience.

Level 2 Comments

► We don't often think of using an object to communicate. This is a very subtle form of communication: it's like "I notice what you're noticing." This story was significant in part because of the significance it had for the father. It seems like he saw his child make a break-through, and he recognizes that it was because of the patience and caring of this staff member. But it was significant for our group as well because it triggered a number of stories from us. One member of our group told a story about being in the elevator with a caregiver and child. The child seemed initially a bit shy about the staff person who had entered the

elevator with them— at first he hid behind his caregiver's legs. But as the staff member (non-verbally) started to notice things alongside the child, the child started to loosen up. It's not that they were best buddies by the end of this short elevator ride, but they had made a connection. There are many ways to interact with children that do not require words.

► I have a nephew who has autism and it can be difficult to connect to him. Moments of connection (even with kids who are not on the spectrum) are very powerful and wonderful things! This story appeals to my own experiences and it was good to know the storyteller had that special moment.

THE INTERNET IS DOWN! I REPEAT: THE INTERNET IS DOWN!

It is Monday morning and the internet is unexpectedly down in the administrative offices. A coworker from another department and I take this opportunity to leave our computers and go out on the floor so I can tell her a little about how the Museum Guides/Playworkers do observations of visitors. We observe a few play cycles in Wobbleland, watching families from behind the dividing wall-- a slightly older boy (maybe 5, but maybe a tall 4) is sending tons of play cues-- mostly tag-based, perhaps trying to initiate a chase-- to kids who are about 3 and 4. They are not responding to the play cues! They notice what he is doing, but do not chase him. The boy eventually takes a giant tomato slice from the kids and runs away with it-- but even then the kids do not chase him. I explain to [COWORKER] that these repeated play cues that are NOT returned-- at least in the way the boy hopes they might be returned-- could lead to what we call dysplay, when mounting frustration causes the boy to act out perhaps aggressively. A playworker observing this might just note this and then think about the environment and how the environment contributes to this (here, the dysplay may be emerging from the fact that this is an area for children 4 and under, and this boy is either older or perhaps more physically developed, which, in either case, may be

causing the younger children to "read" him as a big kid).

We watch this for a while and then move on to the block area. We sit on the ground with a playworker, who is sitting in the corner by the railing observing the interactions at the block table and writing notes in her black book. The coworker and I talk with the playworker for a bit--the playworker shares what she is thinking about and talks about some of the things she is noticing.

This story feels significant because it felt like such a shared, unexpected learning experience. Our coworkers are genuinely and wholeheartedly invested in this place, and the fact that this coworker took this unexpected non-computer moment to go out to learn more about our visitors says a lot! She was really excited to learn more about how the Museum Guides/Playworkers do what they do. She seemed genuinely interested, beyond even just her role as an external communicator of what we practice.

Experiences like this remind me of how we are a small but mighty group of staff, and that together we can make pretty amazing things happen-- but those amazing things are the culmination of so many little moments like this.

Level 2 Comments

► We think it's very important for admin staff to spend time on the floor engaging with or simply observing our visitors. This story shows how much our staff truly care and shows that many of us are interested in learning more about everything that happens here. These moments remind us of how magical the New Children's Museum is.

Level 3 Comments

► What caught my attention about this story is how the different practices at the museum are being shared across departments. With my office located away from the main administration area, I am often in the dark about what is going on, what is on the staff's mind, how everyone is feeling in terms of their work, etc. I so appreciate the sharing and the seeking that this story embodies. Without understanding one another's work, it is difficult to create a cohesive organization.

► I connected with this one because being in corporate America for 30 years combined with the digital revolution, there seems to be little value on idle /down time. This idle time/down time is carelessly dismissed and categorized as "lost productivity." Additionally, the many automations of the digital revolution put increased emphasis on "speed." When combined, intolerance for "lost productivity" and "need for speed" seems to result in "things being missed," "false assumptions," "jumping to conclusions," "missed opportunity," "misunderstanding" and more. The story is powerful because it reminds you that taking time to notice what you are noticing provides more clarity to what is actually happening. Many people looking at IPHONE messages, working on the internet would not have the time to notice that this child was having a challenge getting the attention of others. This might be a an opportunity for a parent, MG or another child to reach-out and provide "liff" to the situation. At a minimum, it is an awareness and sensitivity about a situation that occurred so confidence and self-esteem for that child can be bolstered.

GRANDMA- GRANDDAUGHTER PLAY DATE

Grandma and I start talking a bit. This is their first time at the Museum. Grandma was born and raised in San Diego but has never been here before either. [Girl] is in preschool four days a week, so Mondays are their Grandma-Granddaughter “date” days. They usually go to the central library and spend the whole morning in the kids’ area. But today she decided to try this place out. I welcome her, and tell her I’m so glad she’s here. She says that they have been on Upper for two whole hours! She tells [girl]: “we haven’t seen anything else! We have to get lunch soon-- don’t you want to see downstairs?” She turns to me and says “I don’t really care if we see everything, but I don’t want her to feel like she missed out.” I tell her that she might consider a membership-- she says “We’ll see, we’ll see.” I sense that maybe there is some hesitation here-- is she not sold on the museum yet? Is money an issue? I’m a bit sensitive to the challenges fixed-income grandparents might have, so I decide to go out on a limb, and say “It seems like you are having a really special time together, and I don’t want you to have to rush! If you’ll hang out here for a few minutes, I’ll be right back with a surprise.” I come back with two guest passes-- “Use these on your next ‘date’ here. I’d love to see you.” She appears very grateful, and says she will certainly use these.

She has been retired for a few years now, and says she really enjoys these “dates” with her granddaughter.

Grandparents seem to inhabit the Museum in a slightly different way than parents. They seem to see it as a special time for them to spend with their grandchild-- and it usually seems like it is usually a 1:1 experience, a grandparent with a young child. From my observations, grandparents give their grandchildren a bit more freedom in the Museum, both in the sense of range (the grandparents are usually watching, but seem comfortable doing this from a distance) and in how the children direct their own experience (if a child wants to stay longer in a space, I find that grandparents allow it). Is it because grandparents are more comfortable with time? Is it because they are tired and like to find a good place to sit, and don’t have as much need to be active?

Level 2 Comments

- ▶ This reminded me of the time I spent with my grandma when I was young. She would watch me after school when my parents had work. She couldn’t afford to take me a lot of places, so most often we were at her house— watching “Murder She Wrote,” or an old show she loved. I will never forget that time!
- ▶ When we talked about it, we thought it was significant because it highlighted a unique audience for the Museum – grandparents. The story also spoke to the way in which some grandparents may view their visit to the Museum as a significant event – cherished time and a special outing with their grandchild.

WHAT'S YOUR SCHEDULE?

I walk into the cafe and smile at two kids (a boy and a girl) sitting with two adults at a lunch table. The adults tell me who they are (their names and that they are the grandparents) and that they visited last week for the first time and the kids loved the place so much they got a membership. Today, they had the option of going anywhere they wanted in San Diego-- apparently they have passes/memberships to the Zoo, the Natural History Museum etc-- but the only place they wanted to come to was here. I ask them about the spy game, and it comes out that yes, they have been initiated. The boy asks me all kinds of interesting questions about the game. I share the spy code with them, and the girl-- who goes by Agent Ginger, and who also happens to have very red hair-- says she had noticed the symbols around the building. She draws one for me from memory-- it is the symbol for W (and I am so impressed by the fact that she remembers it from memory!) I tell them I have to leave to go to my meeting, but that they should check out locker #66 if they have not yet done so.

In the MG debrief meeting at the end of the day, it comes out that, when the family had come last week, they had had quite an experience with COWORKER 1-- spy stuff. COWORKER 1 says that the boy, at the end of the day, had actually asked what her schedule was so they could come back when she was here! Today, he had also asked if the lead spies-- the Museum Guides-- had meetings,

and then asked if the "younger spies" (like him) had meetings too. COWORKER 1 and COWORKER 2 said that, um, yes, they do, and that they just needed to find the other spies. Apparently, Agent Ginger and Agent McCool (the boy's spy name, which has since changed) gathered other spies together and had some kind of meeting that COWORKER 1 and 2 were not privy to. Agent McCool had apparently started off by being really attached to the staff and always wanting them to give him missions, but by the end of day two, actually said "I feel confident now to find the Tiger Shark [on his own]."

It is certainly significant that the family has come back just three or four days after their last visit, and it is significant that the grandparents are flexible and allow the kids to make these choices, but I think it is particularly significant that the kids developed such a relationship/bond with COWORKER 1. They are coming back to the Museum not just because they think the spaces of the Museum are cool, but that they think our staff is cool (McCool, to be exact). At the end, when McCool says he feels "confident" to do something on his own, it says to me that he feels supported by our staff but also is feeling a greater sense of comfort in and ownership of the space.

Level 2 Comments

- ▶ That quote! "I feel confident now..." is exactly what we hope for. I also appreciate how kids feel ownership over the Museum/Spy Game-- it's theirs, not ours.
- ▶ We found this story significant because the children were connecting not just with a space, but also with a person. We feel our employees are as

valuable as our studios and installations. It used to be that there were just "rock stars" who worked in the Studios department-- there were great people that kids would come back to the Museum again and again specifically to see. The Museum Guides were perhaps seen by visitors as security guards, at best, This story felt significant because it seemed to show that visitors are also invested in the Museum Guide team. The position has become more affective than just effective. And with Museum Guides, they meet visitors by chance-- unlike in a scheduled program, where a staff member has a period of time where they get to lead a group. It seems extra special when a Museum Guide makes a connection with a visitor.

Level 3 Comments

- ▶ Like my fellow directors and many in the administration area, I do not play an active role in the Spy Game so I enjoyed learning more about this practice and how it continues to evolve and engage our visitors and has become established as an important engagement activity for older children who come to visit. The story also reveals how our very important Museum Playworker team forges relationships with our visitors and that these strengthen their own group. I am now wondering how we can share this dynamic Spy Game with more people (internal and external) without breaking its code of play? I am particularly sensitive to those who are consciously or unconsciously excluded from major activities/the mainstream. I feel that the Spy Game is one of

WHAT'S YOUR SCHEDULE? (Continued)

the Museum's gems. I am hopeful and optimistic that it can be featured without losing its spirit.

▶ This story demonstrates to me that there is an entire subculture within our Museum for slightly older kids to engage with our staff as well as throughout the Museum.

▶ This story (and others like it) talk about kids who come back again and again because they are "spies" and have "spy names". They are recognized by our staff and feel important. On the flip side, they recognize the staff members – and have developed relationships with them. They know their "spy names." This is another way our Museum stands out from other places – our employees (call them museum guides, play workers, whatever) engage in a manner that does not happen at all museums. They know the kids and the kids know them. Related, the spy game subculture has addressed the common issue children's museums face – kids "age out." It's something that can engage older kids regardless of the art installations currently in display or the art workshops taking place. It's another layer.



MY SPY-TASTIC DAY

I was asked to help identify and contacting some of our "Super Members" over the age of 4, for a TV taping this coming week. New to the membership role I had very few in my arsenal of contacts so I reached out to the Welcome Desk to see if they could name any of our happy member families. They immediately thought of 'Agent Ginger.' Agent Ginger and her family just joined as members recently and have been to the Museum three times in the last week. Luckily today was one of those visits. The Welcome Desk called me immediately to tell me she was here so I made my way down to introduced myself to [two adults]. I asked if they were grandparents to Agent Ginger. They laughed and said yes. They continued to say how much her and her brother love coming here. Even though they have memberships to the Zoo and Balboa Park, they love coming here. This was their 2nd visit this week and will be back again on Monday. I went to meet Agent Ginger and here is our conversation:

"Are you Agent Ginger?"

"Yes"

"My name is [BLANK]. I work at the Museum and I have been trying to become an agent but wasn't sure how."

"If you can complete a mission, than you can become an agent."

"Great? What is my mission?"

"You have to find the cow that watches over the Museum. My brother and I found it. We were the fastest to find it. You can have 35 minutes to find it."

"Oh wow, well I am going to have to put that on my schedule so people know where I am. Can I ask questions for some clues?"

"You can ask questions and we will let you know if we can answer them."

I asked her brother: "What is your agent name? Is the cow on the main floor?"

"I am Agent Chameleon. No, the cow isn't in the Museum, he watches over the museum."

"Ok I am going to try to find it."

I immediately went to the upper level and went out to the bubble lounge, thinking the cow might be on a billboard on a hotel, or something over that way. I scoured the upper floor staring upwards looking for a sticker or something outside that resembled a cow. I asked other staff but they didn't know the mission. As soon as I turned around from Wobble Land – I found it! I

immediately ran down to tell Agent Ginger and Agent Chameleon that their clues helped me find the cow!

"Am I an agent now?" I asked.

"You found the cow! That was fast. Yes you're an agent now!" They replied.

"What is my agent name?"

"You get to pick"

"Okay, well I'll be Agent Butterfly, because I love butterflies"

"Ahhh! I love that name. It's so pretty."

"If you see me fluttering around the Museum, you can tell other agents to find me. But I am not in the Museum a lot. If you don't see me, it's because I'm in my office cocoon."

"Ok, I will look out for you next time and tell other agents to find you."

"Thank you Agent Ginger! You made my day! I will hopefully see you soon."

Then she gave me a hug. I returned to her grandparents to thank them and let them know I had such a wonderful time with Molly and Nate, aka Agent Ginger and Agent Chameleon.

I came back to my desk and added a special note for Agent Ginger from Agent Butterfly in her account for their next visit – so it will pop up when they check in at the Welcome Desk.

This story is significant to me because it embodies the experience that we strive to create for our visitors, members and staff. As an administrator I rarely get the opportunity to interact with our visitors and members on a daily basis. This rare opportunity enlightened not only my day but enriched my life by witnessing the magic that we stimulate in creative journeys for everyone. I feel blessed to have been inaugurated into the beloved spy agency and by a child member. The most significant part of the experience was being led by the children versus me as the adult providing challenges for them. They were my chief detectives providing missions for me to accomplish! I have even continued communication with Agent Ginger and Agent Chameleon with messages I have left for them during their next visit.

Level 2 Comments

► I actually named Agent Chameleon! He had told me that he kept changing his name, so I suggested Chameleon and his face lit up like a firework!

► We found this story significant because it offered a different perspective: that of someone who is not typically "on the floor." We loved the idea of finding a spy, and having a spy initiate a staff member— not the other way around! It flips the dynamic, and puts the child in the driver's seat. It shifts the control. We also liked the story because it felt like a tool we can use when approached by kids who want to play the spy game. Some of us feel a little uncomfortable coming up with spy challenges. But allowing the child to take control could allow us to overcome some of our discomfort. It gives anyone the opportunity to be a spy. We thought this was a good example of how we, as adults, can slowly become the people who aren't the experts— and it is a real example of how playwork "works."

MAKING TIME FOR TODDLER TIME

The visitor is a woman (I'll call her Mama) in her late 20s/early 30s. She is visiting the Museum on a Friday morning with her two children, a boy aged 6 months and a girl aged 3 years. I meet her while she is sitting in a green Adirondack chair near the Bubble Lounge. She is feeding her baby a bottle while her 3-year-old jumps in Missing Links (aka the "rainbow jumpie"). Mama and I chat a bit. Today is Mama and family's first visit to the Museum. When her toddler was younger, she says they used to go to the neighborhood park together in Bonita, where Mama lives with her husband and her kids. Mama said that now that her daughter is a bit older, the park is not as "exciting for her." Mama said she wanted to seek out "new things to do," and so she searched for "toddler workshops" online. The New Children's Museum's Toddler Time came up in the search, so she decided to try it out. It's important to note that Toddler Time is actually happening in the outdoor park, as Mama and I are talking. I mention this, and she says that she knows this! They arrived around 9:30am, when the Museum opened, and headed straight up to the Upper Level. They have been here since then. She thought about going downstairs to Toddler Time, but she saw that her daughter was having such a good time-- she didn't want to stop her. She also says that "I am just feeling so relaxed, I don't want to go anywhere else!" It's true-- the air is cool, a nice breeze is blowing in the open doors from the patio, and there are only about twenty

people in the gallery. I am feeling as relaxed as she is!

There is a lot going on in this story, but I felt that the fact that Mama felt relaxed-- on a personal level-- and seemed to be so attuned was pretty significant. She had found this place by searching for "toddler workshops," but she did not seem like a parent who was too focused on making sure her child was always being "productive." I think sometimes I have this stereotype that parents are taking their kids to the Museum because they want to be sure to give their kid every advantage! Maybe it's true that San Diegans are just a bit more relaxed? As I talked to Mama and baby, baby finished his bottle and then started looking all around-- staring at Globos, watching me as I made funny expressions. As I played face games with the baby, Mama and I talked a little about attunement-- how mamas and babies create connection in the early stages by looking at each other while feeding is happening. I wonder if the Museum's very relaxed environment-- Mama used the word "relaxing" in our conversation, n not me!-- makes space for this kind of attunement. Toddler could explore the jumpie on her own terms, about 20 feet away from Mama-- Mama was very attuned to Toddler's presence, with the gogogo call and response-- and Mama could also talk to another adult about all kinds of things, not just Museum stuff. And I felt relaxed too-- like I could take this time to just be in the space, making faces at a baby and having this easy conversation with someone who felt like a peer.

Level 2 Comments

► We felt this story was significant because this parent came to the Museum expecting, basically, a

free class— she came in with this idea of a specific value of the Museum experience. But then she realized that this place had a new value— that being relaxed and being in the moment is of value, of just as much value as taking home something that your child fingerpainted. We feel it is significant that both the parent and the children felt so relaxed in our space.

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER TO MUSEUM MOM

Today is [Mom's] first visit to the Museum with her kids (a baby boy, 10 weeks old, and a girl, just turned 2 years old). She bought a membership before even experiencing the Museum with her kids! She and her family live in Oceanside, and just before her baby was born, she quit her full-time job to be home with the new baby and her toddler. She expects to visit the Museum about once a month—"it's a bit far, but it's nice to come downtown every now and then."

We talk a bit more, and it emerges that this is not her first visit to the Museum. She has actually visited the Museum before, when she was a wedding photographer. She shot a wedding here in 2013. She remembers thinking that this place was really "special" and said she couldn't wait until she had kids to bring here. Now, three years later, she finally has the time to visit, and she said she is really excited to be here. She is going to try to come to Toddler time on a Friday sometime soon, and I told her that if I saw her I would look for her so I can introduce her to other members.

We never know how our actions today might have an effect on what might happen way in the future. This mom visited us before she was a mom-- as a wedding photographer! She didn't have kids then, but knew she wanted to come here with her kids when she did have kids. And now she's here, as a member, excited to meet other members and become part of this community.

It reminds me of the couple who had their wedding here when Missing Links was first on view, in 2010 or 2011, and took their wedding photos in that sculpture. Earlier this year, on the free Sesame Street day, they came back with their baby, and were so happy to see that the jumpie was back-- they took photos there as a family of three! We host so many external facility rentals each year, and, yes, they make money for the museum, but they can also be very mission oriented-- in ways that we might not understand. The Lyft driver who dropped me off at the Museum this week said-- "I love this place!" I asked her if she had kids. She said "No, but I've been to a couple charity events here-- this place is awesome."

PEEK-A-BOO TO CHASE

Johnny (fake name, age 5) and I play peek-a-boo at the sandbox window—me outside and Johnny inside. This play cycle started with me ducking under the window when I noticed Johnny looking at me. Johnny's family are alone in Sandbox; his mom talks with [my coworker] and a little one plays in the sand. After a few minutes of peek-a-boo play, Johnny starts to run up to the window every time I duck down, and laughs when I pop back up. After about five minutes, Johnny seems less interested in our play, so I walk over to Orange We... & begin to sweep. A few minutes pass, when I notice Johnny watching me from the sandbox window; I shuffle my feet behind a wall and hide. Johnny laughs. We continue play like this for a few

more minutes. Soon, Johnny begins to hide, too, & begins to chase around Orange We..., the black box, sandbox gallery & Car-a-oke. Thankfully the museum is quiet so we can move freely. When Johnny 'catches' me—i.e., I'm trapped in a corner, he says "chase me now!" so I oblige. This play continues for about 10 minutes & is a lot of fun. We are tired & take breaks. He's fast! Our play ends when Johnny asks mom if he can paint. Mom thanks me for playing with him. I feel revitalized & happy after our play!

Our play was mostly non-verbal,* but still a lot of fun! It is amazing how play can lead me to see, feel & experience places I am familiar with (the museum) in an entirely different way. Throughout our play, I used a bunch of nooks & crannies & hiding places I had never thought about engaging with in that way before. The museum transformed as our own play progressed & changed.

*** Significant because we are able to make connections & communicate without using language**

STAR WARS BIRDS PLAYING HIDE AND GO SEEK

As [COWORKER] and I were a part of an intense hide and go seek game with James (3) on upper level, I took a moment to run into Rain House to grab a couple pillows to use for our game. As soon I walked into the house I noticed Angela (6-7) who was walking around the house flapping her arms up and down like wings. She turned around, looked right at me and said "When we are in the house we are birds!" I nodded my head and immediately began to flap my wings and made birds sounds. We both continued to fly around the house until [COWORKER] and James walked in. As soon as they entered Angela informed them of the "bird rule" and [COWORKER] instantly caught on and became a bird. Jim didn't really catch on to the rule but it was okay since he was so focused on our hide and go seek/boo game. So, as we were birds, [COWORKER] and I continued to play hide and go seek while also being a part of the world that Angela was slowly creating for us to play in. It was a bit of a challenge to balance both worlds but James and Angela were entirely okay with what was going on. Minutes after being birds, Angela changed up the narrative and told us, "Okay now when you go outside of the house you need to be a Star Wars character!" She then assigned us to our characters. I was Obi Wan and [COWORKER], Princess Leah. This added a whole other element to our play and it was so interesting to see how Angela made sure to include James in the Star Wars narrative even if he wasn't entirely sure what was going on. She kept

referring to him as Darth Vader and she even gave us devices (blue blocks from the blocks table) that could be used in order to know "Darth Vader's" location and see what he used to look like when he was Anakin. Both play cycles continued and somehow blended together even when Angela added even more elements to the world she created. We started off as birds, then Star Wars characters and then somehow ended up online shopping from the tablets that Angela gave us (blue blocks from blocks table). And also keep in mind that all of these things were happening while we were hiding and reacting to James each time he ran into the house and yelled "Boo!" It took a lot of multitasking but I had a lot of fun and I think I could say the same for [COWORKER], James and Angela.

I think it's really important to acknowledge how flexible and understanding both Angela and James were in this situation. Neither of them argued with one another and said that they wanted to play their version instead or fought for our attention. Instead, both allowed each narrative to be played out and I think it was wonderful to see how Angela made sure to include James, and anyone else who walked into Rain House, in our play. She was so creative in the "pretend" worlds that she created and most importantly, she wanted to make sure that everyone go to participate.

Level 2 Comments

► We chose both "Star Wars" stories because we thought it was so significant that two staff people chose to tell slightly different perspectives on the same story! We also feel that these stories are

significant because they speak to the openness that playworkers have to unexpected dynamics. As a culture, we are often so linear. The ability of the playworkers to integrate two separate play narratives speaks to a capacity to multi-task.

DARTH VADER PLAYS HIDE AND SEEK

[Museum Guide] and I were sitting outside of the keyhole of Rainhouse when a 2 to 3 year old toddler peeked out his head from the keyhole and yelled "Boo" at us. We acted surprised and scared and laughed. He hid inside of the Rainhouse and then returned and yelled "Boo!" at us again.

It transformed into a cycle/game of hide and seek where either Iyari or I would hide and one of us would go with him to scare the other person. The game took place all over Upper Level while the jumpy was gone. It was a slow day. A 4 - 7 yr old girl noticed [Museum Guide] and I playing with the toddler and while we were in the Rainhouse she said: "When you're in the Rainhouse, you turn into a bird!" So we start making bird sounds and flapping our arms. She says that when we leave Rainhouse we become normal again. We run circles inside and outside of the house and act accordingly to her instructions. Then, the girl turned all four of us ([Museum Guide] and I, 2-3 yr old, and herself) into Star Wars characters and told us our superpowers and how to use them. We pretended to battle the 2-3 yr old who said she was Darth Vader. She handed [Museum Guide] and I blue grid blocks and told us that they were tablets. We asked what the tablets could do and she said "You can figure it out!" Then she told us that we could go shopping with the blue grids. She had us face the back side of Rainhouse and as we pushed a blue grid we could pull a piece of clothing from the house into the white gridded window. She also told us to do some (operating/

working?). She told us to push buttons on a wall. While she was directing us the toddler was pretending to sleep and wake up in one of the tires. The girl had to leave after about 45 minutes of play but the toddler kept playing with us on and off all over the museum until closing. The play began around 1:00pm.

This story shows how a simple play cue (in this case, peek-a-boo) can transform into an entire pretending scenario involving a toddler, a 4 - 7 yr old, and two adult playworkers. The two kids didn't know each other at all but they played together with us. Both the toddler and the girl decided for themselves what game/pretending scenario they wanted to do. We MGs supported without interfering. We supported their ideas and imaginations. Both parents (of each kid) said "thank you" to us as the kids left.

Level 2 Comments

► We chose both "Star Wars" stories because we thought it was so significant that two staff people chose to tell slightly different perspectives on the same story! We also feel that these stories are significant because they speak to the openness that playworkers have to unexpected dynamics. As a culture, we are often so linear. The ability of the playworkers to integrate two separate play narratives speaks to a capacity to multi-task.

NO SHOES, NO JUMPY

It's Member's only time on Sunday morning and I'm sitting on Upper at the wall between the Jumpy area and Rainhouse. I watch and listen as families walk up the stairs, round the corner, and discover the Jumpy isn't where they left it. Instead, the Food Truckin' cars occupy the space and many parents are quick to follow their comments about the disappointing absence of the Jumpy with hopeful and excited comments about how fun the trucks look—they seem to rebound quickly for the kids. One family in particular catches my attention.

2 boys, each between 3 and 4 years old, walk purposefully and excitedly up the stairs, clearly on a path for the Jumpy. As they hit the corner, they start making moves to take off their shoes. One of the boys is able to completely remove his shoes while walking but the other boy has to sit on a bench to finish his mission. Neither of them have realized the Jumpy is no longer there. It's not until the boy on the bench walks up to the boy at the entrance to the trucks that they both realize the Jumpy is gone. I watch as they stand there, slightly bewildered for a few moments. They don't seem to know what move to make next... until a female caregiver swoops in and encourages them to go and play with the trucks.

I am struck most by the boys' trained/somewhat instinctual behavior on their way to the Jumpy. It wasn't until they confirmed the Jumpy's absence visually—I expected them to realize it wasn't there because of the lack of the distinctive blower hum—that they realized that the thing they took their shoes off for almost instinctually wasn't there. I think this

points to the significance of our pieces and how they may inform the behavior/expectations of how the space + objects at the museum train/shape/inform repeat visitor behavior, and even more so when those expected objects are suddenly gone.

THE FLOW IS SO YUMMY

Mom and her family (wife and their four-year-old daughter) have been members of the Museum since January. Mom is an intuitive healer who offers "tune-ups for your soul." She says that people talk a lot about the mind-body connection, but they "forget the spirit part."

She says that the Museum used to be "neck and neck" with the Zoo in popularity for their family, but now the Museum is the only place they want to go. Their daughter goes to a Waldorf school, and Mom says it is sometimes hard for them to go to places where they can be themselves outside of the "Waldorf bubble" (in the way that they feel they are themselves in the Waldorf community). She says other places "like the Nat" are so "linear"-- watch this video, look at this animal. She says the Museum "lends itself to all walks of life." Since they live in San Diego, they have lots of outdoor options, she says, and when they decide to go indoors, they are very selective.

I started talking to this family on Upper Level, when I had to explain why the jumpy was gone! An hour later, I saw them on Main and asked them how they were doing, and I told him our "secret" that we are hoping to bring the jumpy back

sometime. Mom and I started talking about flow and how we decided what to put where in the Museum, which led to this really relaxing conversation on Clay Patio while her wife and daughter sat beside us and played with clay.

When asked what she thinks is most important about this place, Mom said: "You allow my kid to be a kid." She goes on, "But you also allow us to get involved," and tells the story of how her wife saw the paper the Teaching Artists were using in Tot Studio and said "I remember that paint and paper from kindergarten!"

Mom says "The flow is so yummy here -- you even appeal to our inner child."

I think this story is significant because these two Moms have been very intentional and thoughtful in deciding to bring their daughter here. This is part of their family life, and a place where they feel they can be themselves. They also see benefit for themselves as adults, not just as caregivers-- the Museum makes them feel at home, relaxed, and in the "yummy" flow. Whereas other museums are one-dimensional, Mom sees The New Children's Museum as "fifth dimensional." It's not scheduled-- do this class now. "It's never 'now I have to do clay,'" Mom says. It's "self-paced and fosters so many activities."

LIKE WATCHING AN AQUARIUM

I am walking on Upper past the Wonder Sound construction area. I see a mom who comes pretty regularly—she is a civil rights lawyer with two kids, a toddler and a five-year-old, and we have chatted a few times. I see her standing in front of Tot Studio, arms crossed and looking kind of phased-out while her son plays. Her tow-headed toddler is messing with the hinges, zippers, door stoppers, and other doo-dads, all mounted on a 4 foot tall blue painted pegboard (I call this a “feely board,” but I may have made up that title!). She is just staring at the toddler, arms still crossed. I sidle up next to her and mirror her (without thinking about it) and cross my arms and say it’s good to see her. What does she think of the Tot Studio? It’s great, she says. She says it has been a while since they’ve been there. I say I noticed! We stare at the feely board. I love this thing, I say. The mom says that it is kind of “relaxing” to watch her toddler flip the latches and generally mess around with the stuff. “It’s like watching fish, like watching an aquarium.” I say yes—it is totally like that, I totally get what she means. “I don’t know—maybe it’s because I’m tired,” she says. We talk a little about watching kids at the playground. “I like to just watch and not intervene,” she says. “But if other parents are in there intervening, I intervene.” I ask her why. She looks at me and says “I don’t know... it’s like I have to keep up with the culture of the other parents, you know? But I just want to watch.”

People usually aren’t this forthcoming with a near-stranger about how they feel! I think she was really honest with me. But it also makes me feel kind of sad... we expect so much from parents. In children’s museums, there seems like there is such a focus on trying to get parents to play with their kids. Or on getting parents to make sure their kids play nicely. But sometimes parents need a break! When do parents get to relax? Where does that pressure come from—from other parents or from the set-up of museums themselves? I love that she was just taking this moment to bliss out and watch the “kid aquarium.” And later, reflecting on this, I wonder if I interrupted her reverie. Did she think I was going to tell her to play with her kid? I think that this museum allows parents the chance to relax and veg out—not sure what it is exactly about this place, but it does feel really relaxed.

Level 2 Comments

- ▶ This story is reflective of the dual emphasis we put on child and parent experience. The museum facilitates significant parent-child interaction, but it also allows adults and children to explore on their own, a flexibility that allows for diverse experiences. The fact that the mom felt comfortable opening up to the staff member displays how inviting NCM’s atmosphere is.
- ▶ We thought this story was significant because we feel it communicates that this parent got into an almost zen-like state watching her child. That zen-like space allowed her to be so relaxed that she could open up to a staff person about personal things, like her feelings about the social

norms of parenting. We wonder: would she open up with these kinds of thoughts to other parents? Or was she able to do this to a Museum employee, because of some other comfort? This story triggered a conversation about the many other caregivers and children we see on a weekly (sometimes daily!) basis. We talked about two Brazilian sisters—twins—who come very regularly. Even though many of us in our sub-group are somewhat shy, we share the Museum space so much that we say hello to the sisters when we see them outside on the Museum, on the street. One of us told the story about how, during the last exhibition install, this person walked across the bridge out the front door, covered in sweat from working. One of the sisters knew exactly what this staff member was working on, and made a point of saying “It’s looking good!” There is something about our relaxed Museum that perhaps makes it easier for strangers to make strong, long-lasting connections.

- ▶ This is a nice reminder of the different modes of parenting—parents can be involved and learn about their kids by just watching. They don’t have to actively play all the time!

POUVEZ-VOUS TRADUIRE CECI?

I am cleaning Reconnecting to HOME when I hear people speaking (adult and two boys, ages 6 and 9) in French. I know French so I am excited. Where are they visiting from? Are they bilingual? I observe the family throughout the museum. The older boy seems bored; he sits by himself and vacantly looks around the museum while brother and caretaker play together. I decide to initiate him into the spy game, but am nervous because my French is rusty and am afraid of getting rejected. I take five minutes to write him a note in French, which reads: "Bonjour. Je m'appelle Agent [NAME]. Je suis un espion pour le musee. Pouvez-vous traduire ceci? There is something hidden in Locker 66." I pass him the note when he walks by and then walk off because I am too nervous to sit still. About five minutes later, I see him and his caretaker with a spy notebook from Locker 66. I smile, but am still nervous to approach them. After some hesitation, I make myself visible and tug on my ear. They slowly walk up to me and I ask them if they can speak English, they both nod. Caretaker (grandma) tells me she was impressed to see French in the museum. I send Agent Julien on his first mission in English. While he is gone, grandma tells me she is from Quebec and that her grandsons are enrolled in a French school in San Diego. She urges me to practice speaking French with Julien ("you must practice!"), so I do. We complete missions in French and English; he helps me when I forget words in French. Agent Julien is quiet and passive; he helps me with missions

without saying much. I worry if he is really into being a spy or if he is trying to please the adult 'authority'. I let him know that he can stop being a spy anytime he wants; he nods. Later, grandma tells me that Agent Julien is absolutely thrilled to be a spy. That he plans to tell all his friends about the experience and that he may want to come back because of it (the family only comes to the museum about once a year). Julien, brother and Grandma leave around 1 o'clock for lunch. Grandma says, "he doesn't want to leave, but we have to eat!"

A lot of things are significant about this story. At first, I was afraid to approach Agent Julien because I was afraid of being rejected, but because I approached him anyways, I got to practice my French and play with Julien all morning. This day (Agent Julien and his family) had a big impact on me. I was able to get over my fear, practice French and meet a family who was willing to help and encourage me to be my best.

This story is also significant because it seemed to have a big impact on Agent Julien and his grandma. Although it was hard for me to tell what Agent Julien thought of the spy agency, his grandma informed me he was thrilled to experience the museum with an entirely new lens. We never know how much our actions impact others, especially when they are shy to express their thoughts and feelings. Lastly, grandma was excited to see Agent Julien participate in the spy agency and help me with my French.

We all helped each other, but it didn't feel forced. It felt natural. I was grateful for the experience.

Level 2 Comments

► Sometimes we fall into a pattern of acting in the hopes of eliciting a specific response. The narrator of this story took a risk in initiating an interaction where he/she faced rejection. The kid's response of being "quiet and passive" would indeed look like rejection, coming from an adult, but in fact, Julien was thrilled by the game. It's a good reminder that these risks are worthwhile even when they don't appear so on the surface. It's also a good reminder that kids don't always understand how to communicate their appreciation but that they're likely feeling it.

► I like the mutual benefits that existed for the visitor and the Museum Guide!

► We thought this story was significant, in particular, because of how insightful the playworker was in realizing that visitors have an impact on us as much as we have impact on them. There are times when our gratitude for the experiences we have in the course of our work here at the Museum feels as "natural" as the gratitude our visitors have for being here. It feels mutual. The playworker was also able to show a certain vulnerability in being willing to try to speak French. In a way, she was showing great empathy for the experience of non-English speakers in our Museum; by using her French, she was able to show how committed she was to connecting with this family, both to help them navigate the Museum as well as to learn about a new person.

► This story reminds us that kids have the same social anxieties that grown-ups do. If it's nerve-racking for a professional playworker to get involved, think about those shy kids!

POUVEZ-VOUS TRADUIRE CECI? (Continued)

Level 3 Comments

► This story demonstrates for me how the visitor experience in our Museum is not "rote" or "routine" and that working on the floor is not just a "job" for our employees.

► The employee in the story is so focused on connecting with the family – it's well beyond a job for her, it's what she does and who she is. When she is here, she embodies the Museum. She thought about how to connect with them, the possibilities of being rejected. It also showed the extent to which our employees think about engaging with our visitors – it is not a "one size fits all" approach. This employee "read" the visitors – they were French, the boy was bored – she thought about what to do in that particular situation. Our Museum stands out in this regard – we do not have volunteer docents standing around the Museum pointing out the artwork. We do not have employees that just "do their job" day in and day out. Every day is different, every visitor is different, and our engagement with each visitor is unique.

► I liked the story here because it reminds you the importance of making an effort to reach-out and connect to another's world. All too often, people often do not notice, ignore or reject the opportunities to reach another world and the possibilities. True, that sometimes these possibilities involve being vulnerable at times, taking risks and facing possible rejection. But the rewards for connection, when it occurs, can far outweigh the risk. The French speaking visitors were just like any other family

visiting the museum in terms of wanting to have a rewarding experience. Ironically, they did not even need the French to communicate given they were fluent in English. But the fact that they could speak French, and the MG could connect at that point – was the opportunity. Teaching children the value to "being a difference maker" by having the sensitivity, awareness and empathy to connect at a special level with another human is invaluable and rewarding.

► Certain words jumped out at me as I read this story: nervous, am afraid of getting rejected. These and the event that were shared evoked the emotions that the writer must have felt during the unfolding of the story. This staff person saw a situation with larger possibilities and was motivated enough to move forward to engage the visitors despite his/her fear of things not working out. This was not a lost opportunity –there are no regrets here—and thus, this story was so gratifying to read! I felt a great sense of accomplishment in the staff person—made me really happy and proud of how we are training/nurturing our young team. In just the short amount of time that the Museum Guides (Playworkers) have shifted into playwork, we can see how much we have grown and changed. I love that we overcome our personal limitations to reach out to others to demonstrate how enjoyable/fun our museum can be!

Level 4 Comments

► I find this to be the most significant of the three stories because it demonstrates so many successes related to what we try to accomplish in our museum. Sometimes there is confusion about what our museum is, because just the word 'museum' can invoke the perception of a 'passive' place for visitors to observe the fine work of others, and we're definitely NOT that! This story demonstrates so well that we are about play, connectivity with others, community, confidence

building, critical thinking and taking time to observe the world around us; we strive to develop kids AND adults who take time to wonder, to observe, to take risks, to fail and recover, to problem solve, to recognize that we live in a diverse world and not everyone is like us and that's OK... AND to appreciate art. This story reflects that we all learn from each other, regardless of age, that there can be great reward when we risk reaching out to others. I love that the playworker observed the child's lack of enthusiasm, cared enough to engage and develop a plan, acknowledged and overcame their own vulnerability because they believed the child would benefit, created a great experience not only for the child, but for everyone involved, even our playworker. We are a special place, filled with an amazing team, who are committed to helping our visitors leave here knowing that they are special too!

OUR NEW STAFF MEMBER

When I walked out to the museum park to check on Toddler Time activities, I saw our 3.5 year old friend who comes to every toddler time. This day, he had an index card clipped onto his shirt that read STAFF. I approached him and asked him what he was wearing. His mom explained that her son often noticed the doors that read "Staff Only." He asked his mom to make him a staff badge that morning so he could see what was behind the doors. I told our friend to call for me at the welcome desk when he was done painting.

When he came inside, we went on a behind-the-scenes adventure! We showed him where all of the people from the museum work. He looked out the window from the admin office, pointing to a welcome desk associate. He knew him by name and pointed out his red hat. He was so excited to look out upon the museum from the balcony inside. He pointed at each door, wondering what was behind each one. We took a peek inside and I told him everyone was working very hard to make sure the museum was fun for him.

His mom was curious what I do here, so I explained. We explained it together to her son, too. Once he found out that I am a [JOB ROLE], he started listing off ideas of things he'd like to see here at the museum. He pointed out a couple of things that needed fixing. "You should put a little bit of oil on this latch, so it will be easier to slide." Now, each time he comes in, he shares his ideas

and checks to see if I did the things we discussed the week previous.

This child comes to the museum very often. He has a lot of friends who work here. He notices the staff-only doors and is curious about what is behind them. He went through a thought process in the morning when he found out they were coming to the museum. Although he is only three years old, he thought about the doors he couldn't enter, and figured out a solution to enter those doors he was so curious about. With a supporting mom, he was able to come to the museum with his Staff badge. He was so excited and happy that it worked. He also spread a lot of smiles as he walked through the admin office in his matching Hawaiian shirt and pants, an index card clipped onto his shirt, and a huge grin on his face. This was a day I will not soon forget. I love making connections with the families that come back time and time again.

Level 1 Comments

► This story reveals how visitors think about the Museum when they are not here. I love how the staff member responded by taking him on a behind-the-scenes adventure.

► I love that this toddler went home and thought about the museum when he wasn't here. Little people are very observant! We often wonder what kind of conversations our visitors have AFTER they finish their visit, and this story is like funny evidence of that. It also acted as a play bow so that the staff member could build on the toddler's interest-- he became staff for a day!

Level 2 Comments

► This is such a playful example of how we bend and blur the boundaries between staff and visitors, forging a community instead of providing the standard customer service experience. In fact, this story shows that we don't even think of our visitors as customers but an integral part of the museum!

► I loved the curiosity, imagination, and PROBLEM SOLVING of this child figuring out how to get behind the doors. It was also interesting, sociologically how he fully took to his adopted role.

► The things kids say and do after leaving the Museum are a fantastic example of the impression our Museum has on them. We don't always get to see it, but when I child returns and shares a memory/thought/experience that they had following their visit demonstrates the lasting effect we have on kids.

► It is exciting that our staff feel empowered to impact visitors in this way and make this personal connections . This impact not only made this child's day but it is a level of customer service and visitor engagement that the mom will never forget.

Level 3/4 Comments

I LOVE this story because it so clearly demonstrates what we hope happens to children who have the opportunity to experience this museum.

First, he immediately demonstrates that he is comfortable here and that he 'owns' the reality

OUR NEW STAFF MEMBER (Continued)

that he is a welcome member of our 'community.' He knows he belongs here.

He demonstrates 'intellectual curiosity' and is an example of success for how we encourage 'creative exploration.' He wanted to know more about the world he couldn't see.

We say that we help build critical thinking and problem solving skills... what a great demonstration of THAT! His own 'staff' badge. He had confidence that he could overcome the 'barrier' and achieve his goal... to get behind those doors!

And finally... leadership... we say that we are building the next generation of leaders. This young man is already a leader and obviously very comfortable in management, observing what improvements could be made to enhance the museum and feeling comfortable sharing his ideas and providing instruction on how to accomplish what he believes needs to be done. We should all get his autograph now! He has a bright future ahead.



‘THIS IS THE COOLEST MUSEUM WE’VE EVER BEEN TO, HONEY!’

Around 10:00am as we are opening, I am sitting at Orange We... and a mother is watching her daughter play on the loop-de-loop. The girl is swinging on the "monkey bars" as she calls them, and as she reaches to skip a bar as she swings her mom says, "Wow! You skipped a bar honey! Do it again so I can take a video to show Grandma!"

The girl, who is smiling and laughing, repeats the action a few times for a video. The girl continues to play on the loop-de-loop while her mother watches her but also begins to space out. She [mother] says quietly, looking beyond Orange We..., "This is the coolest children's museum we've ever been to honey..." Then she looks at me and says "I just love the industrial look!"

We begin a conversation and she tells me that her husband regularly travels for work, and wherever he goes, she and their daughter accompany him. She says "Our first stop in a new city is always the children's museum. Our trip plans always revolve around our daughter."

She told me that this weekend they plan to go to the Zoo, Balboa Park and the Maritime Museum for a pirate ship event. She asks her daughter if she is done playing at the loop-de-loop and she says "yup!" and they make their way over to Innovators Lab. Over the course of the day I see the mother

and daughter playing in the museum until about 1:00/1:30pm.

This story feels significant because this family has visited many children's museums all over the United States as the mother told me. She said that this children's museum was the coolest one she's ever been to! From what I can tell of the situation, she and her daughter had only been on the main level, but the Mother recognized that something about this museum was positively different from other children's museums and felt the need to express that out loud. This comment speaks to the significance of the museum's architecture, exhibitions on main, and the vibes/ environment/feeling that visitors perceive when they enter the museum.

WE HAVE PHONES, TABLETS & PIZZA!

I walked into the Rain House on a moderately busy afternoon. There were two school visits in the museum, and one of them was playing "the floor is lava" in the Rain House. As I walked in, I was immediately deemed the "lava monster" and I began chasing the school kids as they jumped from pillow to pillow. I noticed two girls peeking through a window and asked if they wanted to join our lava play. They politely said "no" and that they were "just looking."

Soon after, the school visit left and the two girls ventured into the Rain House while I was neatening up. They had blue and orange unit cube blocks with them and they explained that they were bringing in the mail and they would deliver it later. The younger girl (they are sisters) told me that I was the mommy and they were the babies. I was supposed to sit and watch them while they cleaned the house. One of the girls handed me a kapla block and said it was a phone, so naturally I began to order some pizzas for delivery. The girls said they wanted pepperoni.

Eventually they delivered the mail and the girls indicated we had been sent cell phones and tablets. They organized them and set up a store for the sale of these cell phones and tablets. Another staff member came in and became our first customer, but quickly another school visit came in and took over. The girls left the Rain House until the school visit left, and the younger sister made a comment that they could play again. Thus, the cell phone and tablet store had reopened.

This story shows how much these two girls cared about their play narrative. They were not quite comfortable with the chaos of the school visit play and quickly took over the Rain House when all of the school children left. They also felt that their play narrative was interrupted when another school visit occupied the Rain House. It shows the different levels of comfort children require in order to full explore their play imaginations.

MOM FOR A DAY

A young girl ran ahead of her family (mom and grandma) and came up to me at the Welcome Desk and informed me she was mommy today. Her mom then came to the desk and informed me that they like to switch roles. The little girl then introduced herself and told me she needed 3 tickets. I asked her if she was in charge of paying since she was Mommy. She giggled and proclaimed "No way!" While I was finishing the transaction, [the little girl] started "hiding" behind the side of the welcome desk and would peak out and say "boo." Every time she did I pretended to be scared. Then it was time to play in the museum.

It was really interesting to see the young girl flip between the role of "mom" and then be a kid again, playing and being silly. It was also funny that she didn't think paying should be in her role as mom. At the welcome desk we don't get a lot of these playful experiences, so it was really nice to see.

TIGER SHARK FATHER PREFERS MUSEUM TO ZOO

On a Sunday morning, a return spy searches endlessly for the tiger shark. As his child intensely searches for the Tiger Shark, the parent comes over to talk to us (by the spy namewall) about how his child loves being a spy and finding the tiger shark. The last time they were at the museum his child searched for 2 hours until he found it. As we are talking, the parent observes another agent working on the floor completing a mission (spying on Agent [AGENT NAME]). "What's that about?" he asks me. "Is she looking for the Tiger Shark too?" I then give him a broad explanation of how kids can play the spy game and how they go on all kinds of missions.

We go on our separate ways until 20 minutes later we coincidentally meet up and we are observing kids spy on Teaching Artists on Clay Patio. The Dad starts talking to me and telling me about how he creates scavenger hunts for his kids at home. He praises the museum and I ask him what his favorite part of the museum is. He says he can't pinpoint one thing, and he tells me he prefers coming to NCM rather than SeaWorld or the Zoo for two reasons:

1. After a full day at NCM, he isn't tired. He feels relaxed. Whereas when he takes his kids to the Zoo or Seaworld he's completely exhausted by the end of the day.

2. His kids do not get bored at NCM and they rarely complain while at NCM. Whereas at the Zoo or Seaworld, his kids tend to get bored after a few hours.

This story is significant because it shows how our visitors differentiate NCM from other institutions who have child-centered audiences. The parent expressed how the different institutions made him feel emotionally/physically during his experiences in each respective place. It's also significant because it shows that parents who do/make playful activities at home resonate with how we address play at NCM. This story feels significant to me because the Dad was really excited about his son playing the spy game and it seemed to make him feel happy that his kids were having fun. As someone who works on the floor it's really wonderful to witness parents experience delight watching their kids play.

Level 1 Comments

▶ This feels significant to me because it feels like the dad and the son are both getting something out of the museum experience-- they can both find ways to play here.

▶ This story makes me wonder how we can be empathetic towards parents who do not resonate with how we address play at the museum and grateful for the parents that do, for they are our allies. Even though those of us on the floor do not have kids of our own, we can still relate with parents.

Level 2 Comments

▶ This story is significant because it shows that when visitors' basic needs like comfort, safety, and fun are met that it shines and is noticed by caregivers. We don't often think about things like are the kids getting too tired and worn out or are they having enough fun, enjoying themselves, etc. - we take these simple things for granted yet they are greatly appreciated and valued by the adults that bring kids here.

▶ I loved that it was a DAD. And that he was curious. And that he let the timing/flow of his son dictate the visit. It also seemed significant that this dad was involved instead of just checking his email.

▶ This story is significant because it shows how important our experiences need to be for caregivers, not just the children.

WHAT GOES UNNOTICED

An eight-year-old child acts like a monster/zombie/animal on the Desert Derby reservoir. She blocks cars driving down the Desert Derby track, growls, crawls and drives cars on the reservoir. She barks and tramples, lays down and drags herself across the reservoir. Her caregivers smile and her siblings join in on occasion, but mostly drive the cars around the track. She swings her head around and then gets up suddenly and howls. She doesn't ask anyone to watch or pay attention to her. She crawls towards the mural and back again. She stares at the mural and then pats it.

Desert Derby is not packed. There are about six kids and four adults. I observe from Orange We... and go unnoticed. I decide to move closer and the girl/monster/zombie/animal/etc notices me watching and stops. Within a couple of minutes, the girl and the people she is with decide to move on to another exhibit.

What takes place when we are not observing? What goes unnoticed? I began observing after the play had already started; how did it start? Did my presence (i.e., the girl's awareness of me watching) cause her to stop?

What intimate, playful moments do we miss? This observation reminded me of how many complex and diverse narratives are taking place simultaneously at the museum, and many of which we (as employees and visitors) are unaware of? They all combine, blend and flow together in a moment, in a space, and I feel we are lucky to be a part of it!

'WHERE'S MY FRIENDS?'

A 2-3 year-old toddler and his guardian make eye contact with me as I turn the corner from Orange We... and am heading up the stairs. The [Child] and I immediately recognize each other and surprised gasping faces. His guardian is smiling. [Child] says "I'm gonna get you!" and I sprint up the stairs.

Two weeks ago, [Playworker 1] and I had played hide and seek/peek-a-boo with him over a 3 hour period. I am observing upstairs by Wobbleland and [Child] runs over to me and yells "boo!" I pretend to be scared and he says, "Now you chase me and I'll hide!" This dynamic continues for 10 minutes-- [Child] uses the blankets from Rain House to either hide or pretend to be a monster. He asks me "where's my friend? Where's my other friend?" His guardian says, "Oh, your other friend who was here last time" remembering, I assume, they are both referring to [Playworker 1] and because she's not here today I call the Playworkers on the floor-- [Playworker 2] and [Playworker 3]-- and let them know that the peek-a-boo king is here. We all each play the hide and seek/peek a boo/ chase with him for nearly two hours -- [Teaching Artist], a teaching artist, also played with him for a little bit.

Some quotes of what he says while playing:

"Now you go hide! I'll find you!"
"Where's my friend? Where'd he go?"
"You silly boys!"
"I'm gonna get you!"
"Now I go hide."
"I'm a monster! Rawr!!!!!"

All of the play took place on upper and other visitors were watching us play. The play ended when the museum closed.

In my opinion this story is significant because it shows how floor staff and visitors (both children and adults) develop play friendships and together create an even more playful vibe inside the museum. At the time, it seemed significant that other children were wondering what we were doing and parents were laughing at the toddler (kindly). This could be good or bad-- we could have been distracting kids from their own play cycles, or we could have influenced them positively by playing. To me it feels significant because we played for so long and it was fun for all floor staff involved and the toddler. In my opinion, the significance lies in the fun moment shared between people occupying the spaces of the museum.

UNTITLED 1

Prior to checking up on a malfunctioning microphone, I decided to dance in front of the Caraoke monitor cam to see if there was anybody inside. Getting no response, I walked to the car to find three people occupying it (2 children and one caregiver). Surprised, I asked "Did you like my dance?" They hadn't noticed me. So I walked around and danced again. The caregiver whooped with delight and sent out a little girl to dance. Seeming shy and refusing to step onto the dance floor, I beckoned her with my hand and said "Come dance with me!" She shook her head and remained where she was. After dancing alone a few more seconds, I looked back at her and said "But why? It's fun!" She was quiet for a few moments, then yelled:

"I DON'T DANCE WITH OTHER PEOPLE!"

Shocked and bemused, I said "Oh! Well, the dance floor is all yours!" and moved off the stage. She immediately took my place and began dancing in earnest.

The child responded to my play cue with a return that simultaneously established a frame that necessarily excluded me. Her play was only comfortable in my absence, despite my attempt at playing while excluding an external agenda. Even something like "This is a fun activity" is prescriptive and can inhibit the child's return.

FORT BUILDING & ANIMAL PLAY

A child and her caregiver built a fort in the Rain House using pillows and blankets. I was notified that there was some great play happening in the Rain House by a member of the floor staff. I walked over and peeked through the window and saw an elaborate fort with four pillars made from pillows and covered entirely with blankets. I cautiously walked into the Rain House and then got on my knees to crawl over to the opening of the fort. I knocked, and the girl opened the "door" to her new abode. We exchanged a few kind words before I realized that the fort was just big enough for the girl and her caretaker. Thus, I retreated to the back of the Rain House, where another staff member joined me.

Both myself and the staff member watched the girl and her caretaker play. The girl popped out of a small "window" in the fort, catching our gaze from the back of the Rain House. We froze in playful shock, leaving a silly grin on our faces. The girl disappeared back into the fort under the protection of her caregiver. She popped her head out again, and this time we made animal noises at her, which she playfully reciprocated. The girl then transformed herself into a dog to ravage the fort she admitted her caregiver had made all by herself. The caregiver announced it was time to go and told the child "come on little doggie." The child followed the caregiver out crawling and barking like a dog.

It was such a flawless play experience with no anxiety, fear or gaps. The girl, nor her caregiver,

seemed not at all bothered by the presence and participation of staff in their already established play cue. We intervened to admire their creativity and by chance were invited into their play story.

It is also significant because the child and her caregiver were so synced to one another and age didn't seem to stand between them. It was like they were two friends from school who hang out and play at least once a week. They played as equal allies, unaware of any possible hierarchy that exists between the two.

'I DON'T PLAY'

We were at [LOCATION] for the second Mass Creativity workshop and the environment was filled with over 20 kids running around with bed sheets tied around themselves like capes. At first this began as "super hero" play but it eventually turned into kids simply wanting to wear a cape as they ran around the trees and the grass area. I was sitting down at the bench beneath the trees typing capes onto the line of kids who stood in front of me anxiously waiting their turn.

After what felt like 10 minutes of constant tying, the line finally slowed down and one boy (8-9 years old) came up to me and said "What are you guys doing over here?" I told him, "We're playing!" He giggled and said "Oh, I don't play any more. I have video games." I was of course heartbroken to hear this from him but I kept my cool and calmly said "Well, you should give it a try. It's really fun!"

He shrugged his shoulders and sat down next to me. I watched him as he observed the other kids running around with their capes on. He watched them as they put tape on the trees, decoded secret spy messages, played with cardboard boxes and decorated the grass with multicolored strands of yarn. We sat in silence for a few minutes until I turned to him and said, "So... do you want a cape?" He jumped up and yelled out "Yes!!" As soon as I tied the cape around him he completely transformed and became a kid who plays again. Needless to say, my heart was repaired after seeing this happen.

I think this story is significant because he played!! The fact that he completely transformed and changed his opinion about play is so important and was truly one of the highlights of my day at Mass Creativity. I hope that he continues to play and that his day at Mass Creativity inspired him to imagine and create once again.

Level 1 Comments

► I love that the boy changed his mind and how the author responded so joyfully!

Level 2 Comments

► Children are constantly being exposed to new technology and are becoming increasingly detached from the "real world". Last year, I witnessed a one year old play on an iPad and figure out the basic functions within a matter of minutes. We are living in a world that is connecting us to more people, more resources, and more information but this is also further isolating individuals. This story is significant because this child seemed to find his playful side again - outside of a remote control and television.

► It seems like encouraging the kid to dress up allowed him to step into a new character, one who loves play. It's great that the author made the kid feel comfortable trying on a different persona.

► I love that the boy didn't feel the need to hang on to his "I don't Play" belief about himself and embraced the play. Imagine if more kids and adults tried this!

Level 3/4 Comments

► I loved reading all five stories and so needless to say, it was very difficult to select just one to comment on. All of the stories have some common threads which I want to point out: they are all about interactions between our visitors and staff, they all demonstrate the strengths/skills/confidence of our team, and finally, they reveal how far we have come as an organization investing in our team, how we activate the philosophy that we believe in: empowering children & being responsive to their adult caregivers, that people are our greatest assets and deserve the best training, nurturing, and appropriate "space" to tap into their innate skills to forge the museum's mission. The specifics of this story were also very significant (children, play, contemporary society, commercialization, etc.) and respond to why we do what we do as an organization.

SPONTANEOUS DRUM CIRCLE

I walked out to the clay patio to relay some information to a coworker when a catchy song began to play on the radio. As I listened, I unconsciously began drumming on the clay cart. A moment later, a girl (age 5-6) approached my coworker and asked for a pencil. My coworker proceeded to hand the girl a pencil and for a moment my coworker thought that she was going to write on the cart. However, to our surprise, the girl began drumming along to the song with me! She had been working with clay with her mom and sister prior to joining my spontaneous drumming. With our new drum friend, my coworker joined in, and we all finished out the song together!

Our new drum friend wanted to keep the music going after the song had ended and a new song started, so we picked up some of the clay tools and began keeping a beat with those. After the next song had ended, our friend wanted us to ditch the drums and dance to the next song. So we did! After we danced, our friend wanted to paint, thus ending our spontaneous drum and dance circle.

I was unconsciously doing something which a child noticed and saw as playful. She initiated a play cycle by picking up on a habit which I didn't notice I do most of the time. She also added her own flare, crafting the play to her play needs/desires. We happily responded, and this gave us a great opportunity to respond to an unexpected call for

play. The child both invited herself into the play cycle and initiated the play. And it was fun!

Level 1 Comments

▶ This story seems so fluid and natural. The author wasn't trying to initiate play, it happened because she was being herself!

Level 2 Comments

▶ I like that staff people who normally inhabit different roles at the museum were encouraged to come together in this drum circle! I also love that both people were willing to suspend what they'd been working on to enjoy this moment.

▶ I love how naturally the play evolved. It also is a reminder to how much kids are influenced by adult actions around them.

▶ This story is significant because it was unexpected play.

▶ I loved the easy, natural "stage" presence and leadership of the young girl and how it evolved so organically.

RAIN HOUSE CHATS

I was sitting near Rain House writing observations in my notebook when one dad popped his head out of the Rain House window and asked me what I was writing about. I explained to him how we write down our observations as we are constantly thinking about how we can transform certain spaces in order to add to our visitor's opportunities to play. He nodded his head and said "Oh okay that's cool!" He then went back into the house and continued to play.

A few minutes passed and he walked up to me and said "You know this kind of stuff [the museum] makes me really happy. When I was a kid growing up here we didn't have anything like this." He smiled and continued to tell me how his wife had brought their daughter to the museum before but he had never had the opportunity to visit until now. He seemed to be so happy as he took pictures of his daughter standing in front of the Rain House and he ended our conversation with "You must really enjoy working here. It's a great place."

I think it's really important to acknowledge how happy Dad was to be at the museum not just because he was having fun, but more so because he was so glad to see that his daughter was experiencing an environment he was never exposed to as a child. Although there was a hint of nostalgia in his tone as he made this comment overall, I think it's so significant because he acknowledged how important these memories and experiences will be to his daughter. Thinking about how we are creating life long memories here is a very important point to think about and keep in mind as we are out on the floor interacting with our visitors.

PILLOW FIGHT

Two boys (age 6) throw gold pillows at an adult (parent or caregiver) in Stacked Stories. The boys are friends and it looks like the adults are friends too. The adult is tall and smiley. She willingly throws the pillows back at the boys and does so with force. The boys use pillows to block themselves as they scramble around the alcove. They bump into each other often and fall over.

The boys' throws are weak and barely impact the adult, who grabs the pillows from the floor and hits the boys so hard they fall to the floor almost every time they are hit. Their play is high-energy.

After a couple of minutes, two more adults join in the throwing: it is now three against two. Everyone is laughing. The adults seem calm and giddy. They are focused: I don't see them look around and they don't try to get the kids to move on. The play lasts for about 10 minutes.

Their play activated Stacked Stories in a fun new way. I laughed as I watched the pillow play unfold in front of me. I found this story significant because it happened in a 'corner of the museum' (i.e., downstairs near Studio Q) on a busy day. There was so much else going on in this moment in time, so many things to be distracted by, but the visitors (and me watching) appeared to be completely absorbed in their play. It's fun to watch others have fun.

PATIENCE AT THE LOOP-DE-LOOP

A boy climbs on the Orange We... loop-de-loop. He is around four years old-- I have seen him and his dad before, they are members and visit the museum nearly every members-only Sunday. The boy is having trouble climbing the loop-de-loop. He tries and then falls a few times and then quietly yells, "Daddy, help me! I'm falling!" His yell does not sound urgent. Dad smiles but does not say anything, he just continues to watch his son. After about five minutes, Dad begins to respond to the boy's yells by giving suggestions: "Try it this way" and "Maybe if you do this..." but still continued to watch. After the boy's yells grow in frustration, Dad gets up and assists his son, but only slightly. Dad then sits back down again and watches as his son slowly completes the loop-de-loop, and yells "You did it!!" when he reaches the other side. The boy shows little excitement, but gives his dad, but gives his dad a hug. The museum is quiet; there aren't many visitors in Orange We..., maybe 4. Dad and son leave for lower level.

Dad gave his son time and space to complete the loop-de-loop. Was this because he [the son] had done it before? Because they were members and therefore might be more comfortable with the space? Both the museum's flow-- quiet and spacious-- and dad's temperament-- calm and focused and patient-- permitted the boy to traverse the loop-de-loop in his own way and in his own time. Dad seemed comfortable enough in the space to allow that to happen.

YOU ARE THE DANCING QUEEN

I walk onto the upper level and run into a member (age 6). She and her family (dad, older brother and two babies) come to the museum weekly. She smiles and begins to jump up and clown. I jump, too. We jump together-- in circles, with our arms up and down, while spinning-- next to the Rain House.

After around one minute of continuous jumping, another museum guide joins in. The three of us jump and jump and jump. We do not talk, but we do giggle. There are around 15 visitors (kids and adults) on upper-- some watch us and others continue their play.

After around five minutes of continuous jump-spin-dance-shaking, toddlers begin to join in. They circle us and move their legs. Some parents smile, others don't. The jumping continues for another couple minutes until the member has to leave with the family. The dancing toddlers disperse and we stop dancing.

What a way to start the day. I felt rejuvenated.

This member shared her delight and enthusiasm with us. Although I had interacted with her before, I wonder if she had watched me play with my co-workers or other kids, and therefore knew I was playful? In observing her family in the past, I noticed she was more reserved. What internal and external factors contributed to her forwardness when she approached me? Does she feel more comfortable at the museum than before?

The jump-dance transformed the upper level for a brief moment, and the member's delight and enthusiasm allowed us to be in the museum in a different way for a moment in time.

UNTITLED 2

I was walking around upper level when I overheard a group of four kids (ages 6 - 9) who were so bummed to see that the jumpy was gone. I watched them as they all stood by the elevator as they were trying to figure out what to do. They looked rather disappointed so to cheer them up I walked up to them and said "I think you should all go to Locker 66. You are perfect recruits for the spy agency." Their eyes lit up and after a few questions they all ran to find the locker and began their careers as spies here at the museum. They were all so excited and it was wonderful to see how they created their own narrative about discovering who the anti-spy is and decoding/writing secret spy messages.

I spoke to Mom for a while after she asked me what exactly the spy game was all about. I explained the spy agency to her and how generally this narrative is for older kids. She then said "I thought they had outgrown this place. I was just thinking how this might be our last visit. But now I see how much fun they're having, thank you." We continued to talk for a while more until the spy crew ran up to me to report on their latest findings for who the anti-spy may be. Mom got to see them entirely invested in the spy world and every

time we would huddle she would run over to take pictures of our secret spy meetings.

I think this story is significant because Mom and her four kids realized that they hadn't "outgrown this place." They were introduced to another world here at the museum and it made me so happy to see that they were no longer disappointed to see that the jumpy was gone but rather really excited to be spies. And not only were the kids excited but mom was as well! She took pictures, asked questions and thanked each of us who were involved in the narrative. This story is so significant because this family felt the magic of the museum once again.

INSPIRING BODY POSITIVITY

I brought my almost 10-year-old niece to the Museum for the first time since she was four. She has grown significantly since then and simultaneously has become a very introverted and shy pre-teen.

I introduced her to the spy game and she was very hesitant at first. She was uncomfortably aware of how silly she looked running around the Museum in a make shift leopard cape. She didn't want to play. She didn't want to approach anyone with an ear tug, because of course everyone will laugh at her.

She finally worked up the courage to approach a team member and within about ten minutes, they were rolling around the floor dodging the looks of an enemy spy. She couldn't believe A) An adult was being so fun and B) Taking her and the play seriously. She thought this team member was so cool and beautiful and amazing.

After our museum day was over, my niece pointed out that this team member was not only really cool, but she also pointed out that team member did not shave her legs or wear make-up or even wear a dress. She was (team member) very comfortable in her own skin, both in looks and personality, something that my niece was not, and my niece admired her for that.

This is significant to me because my niece has been struggling to find confidence in herself lately. She is going through those pre-teen years where she is becoming painfully aware of the hair on her legs and every "imperfection" on her body. She wishes she could wear make-up and often wishes she could be more outgoing. This team member showed her that it's okay to be yourself and that you don't need to change for other people. She is a great role model, as are all of the team members on the floor. I am so grateful for the team we have. I know my niece will remember this experience for the rest of her life.

Level 1 Comments

▶ This is huge! It reminds me how sometimes we do not realize how much we impact others. The pre-teens experience at the museum impacted her life. We can be so powerful when we are ourselves, whatever that looks like and however it emerges.

Level 2 Comments

▶ I love this story so much. The act of being yourself is so simple but so rare and profound that it can inspire the people around you. I'm so happy that the young girl recognized that there are so many ways to be beautiful.

▶ . Ten can be SUCH an awkward age for girls, and the magic of the museum/staff totally transformed this visitor for the day-- and likely for a long time.

▶ This is a perfect reminder of how impactful our Museum roles can be. Additionally, welcoming diverse staff to our team gives more opportunities for connection to kids and families.

▶ This story is significant because it shows that we never know who or how we may impact an individual that we encounter at the Museum. Treating each visitor with respect and kindness makes a long last impression. It is amazing to think that this Museum is not only a play space, or a place for artists to exhibit work, it is a place of comfort, encouragement, and community for the people that work and visit here.

‘I WANT TO GO TO THE MUSEUM! WHERE MY FRIENDS ARE.’

The peek-a-boo king comes into the museum and immediately finds museum staff to play with. We play with him on Upper and while I begin to pick up some blocks his nanny sits down at the table. We start talking and I ask if he always has this much energy. She says "Yes, he always does! Every day." She starts showing me videos on her phone of the child playing at home, outside on a boardwalk, and on a playground with his typical wild energy. I ask if she is with him every day and she tells me her normal schedule (a few days a week). She says that they used to go a lot of different places in San Diego-- the Zoo, Balboa Park-- but whenever she asks the child where he wants to go he says "I want to go to the museum! Where my friends are." The child always refers to staff here as his friends. When we play peek-a-boo, and he wants to find someone with you, he'll say "Where's my friend? Where'd they go?" He recognizes, somehow (maybe by our uniforms/badges) that we are people he can play with.

This story feels significant because the child sees all employees of the museum as his friends who he can play with, and the museum as a place he can play in. At only 3, he remembers and specifically requests to visit the museum because he knows his friends are here. What other institutions/space/ places offer this kind of an experience for a child? Where else can children play with adults and consider adults their friends? Where else can kids

simply be supported and encouraged by adults and not told what to do? This child chooses to come to NCM over the other choices his nanny gives him. And the nanny clearly enjoys coming here, or else she would probably take him elsewhere or not give the museum as an option as somewhere to go. This story is significant because it emphasizes the kind of experience NCM manifests and how visitors are resonating with it.

Level 1 Comments

- ▶ This story reveals how visitors think about the Museum when they are not here. I love how the staff member responded by taking him on a behind-the-scenes adventure.
- ▶ I love that this toddler went home and thought about the museum when he wasn't here. Little people are very observant! We often wonder what kind of conversations our visitors have AFTER they finish their visit, and this story is like funny evidence of that. It also acted as a play bow so that the staff member could build on the toddler's interest-- he became staff for a day!

Level 2 Comments

- ▶ This is such a playful example of how we bend and blur the boundaries between staff and visitors, forging a community instead of providing the standard customer service experience. In fact, this story shows that we don't even think of our visitors as customers but an integral part of the museum!

▶ I loved the curiosity, imagination, and PROBLEM SOLVING of this child figuring out how to get behind the doors. It was also interesting, sociologically how he fully took to his adopted role.

▶ The things kids say and do after leaving the Museum are a fantastic example of the impression our Museum has on them. We don't always get to see it, but when a child returns and shares a memory/thought/experience that they had following their visit demonstrates the lasting effect we have on kids.

▶ It is exciting that our staff feel empowered to impact visitors in this way and make this personal connections . This impact not only made this child's day but it is a level of customer service and visitor engagement that the mom will never forget.