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For as long as I can remember, libraries have been an integral part of my life. From Mother & Baby Story-Times, to Preschool Reading Programs, to the magnanimous event that is Summer Reading, my mother had me involved in libraries from the start. It was thanks to her education and the fun environment of our local library in Canton, NC that I developed a love for reading.

By the time I was four, I knew I wanted to be a writer, and when I wasn't poring over my favorite books in my tree-house, I was scribbling stories of my own. Since then, I've gone on to win multiple writing contests, write a novel, and, for five years, have my own column in a local newspaper.

When my family and I moved to Oklahoma several years ago, we searched first for the local library. The people and culture might be different in a new state, but a library remained the same and offered us a sense of community. When we moved home again, years later, we again sought out the town's library, ending up at CCML in Shelby, NC.

A library itself is exciting to me; I have only been too glad to spend hours at a time there, curled up in a window-seat with an old favorite or browsing the shelves for hours in search of a new literary love-affair. But for others who perhaps are not as enthralled with the written word as I, libraries offer special events—reading contests, free Saturday morning matinees, classes and opportunities to learn new things, and more! A library is more than just a house for books, as so many think of it—especially at Cleveland County Memorial Library!

I started volunteering at CCML in the summer of 2012, at the beginning of their Summer Reading program, and have continued till present, in many other events, particularly a morning program for preschoolers, designed to build reading skills before they reach kindergarten. Being involved with this library, helping kids learn to love reading is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life and I wouldn't trade it for the world. Despite the myriad extra-curricular activities I'm involved in, in addition to keeping up with school, my life would be so empty without my library!

When I was younger, I was told that, "Reading is the magic key to take you where want to be," and I'm inclined to agree with that statement. Whether it's to a faraway land through the pages of a fairytale, or a job opportunity you might not have had were it not for your education, reading is at the core of education and the core of personal and national success.

Where would we be without reading? It has become such a matter of course, we no longer make the effort to appreciate or respect it. But from the beginning of time, literacy has been a privilege. For centuries, it was intentionally withheld from those who were deemed "unworthy" of that privilege, or who could not afford an education.

How thankful we all should be that it has since been declared a right for everyone! We all want the brightest future for ourselves, our children, and the children of tomorrow—and no resource helps us achieve that goal like libraries. Libraries are a cornerstone of education; theirs is a lasting legacy, a tangible beacon of hope in today's tech-crazed society.

They can remain so for generations to come, but we must take care of them. We must take on the responsibility of maintaining their legacy, of not allowing them to fade. It is our duty to volunteer, to make donations, to work towards our own continuing education so we may have the resources to help others. It's time for us to give back, as our libraries have given to us.