

James David Simmons Jr.

Mrs. Shelly Mitchell

8th Grade Literature

January 30, 2014

## Importance of Libraries

It might be more persuasive to tell you that I had never been in a library until I began school, but it wouldn't be true. My Mother took me to weekly "Times for Two's" at our public library for as long as I can remember until I progressed to the youth Summer activities where I touched reptiles, like an anaconda that was 15 feet long, and tie-dyed t-shirts. However, in the rural county where I live, many of my classmates did not get a chance to enjoy a book until they began school. Their families do not have the means to visit public libraries and a school library is all they've ever known. Libraries are an invaluable resource for anyone wanting to learn.

For me, libraries are a calming place to be in because of their quiet atmosphere and comfortable settings. They are amazing places that I enjoy being in. They are amazing for one simple reason - it accommodates all types of people and no one is exactly the same. There are different books, people, and reasons a person will go to a library. All ages go to libraries and it's inevitable that you will learn. Some people go to libraries to read and do research. Some people go to relax, others go to read for fun or read to be taken to another place for the time being.

Libraries are most important to me because I love to read. Four years ago, my father, David Simmons Sr., was critically injured in a rollover utility vehicle accident. He was working at his alma mater, West Wilkes High School, as a school resource officer for the Wilkes County Sheriff's Department just before the homecoming football game. He was put into the intensive

care unit at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center which is over an hour away from our house. For the first time in my life, I was not allowed not see him for days. He suffered a traumatic brain injury from a skull fracture as well as multiple other injuries. While this was going on, I was still trying to stay academically active. I was in fourth grade but in a fourth and fifth grade combination class as well as in the Academically, Intellectually and Gifted program. Every waking minute that I wasn't working on the directed schoolwork or homework, I was absorbed in a book. I kept an open book in my desk to pull out in between lessons. When the class took restroom breaks, I stayed in and read. I even received the "Best Reader" award that school year. Although I enjoyed reading, books took me away to a place where I did not have to think about my father's accident. Reading books helped me to cope with my dad's accident.

Unaccustomed to our family, my younger sister and I floated around from home to grandparent's house to great grandparent's house, and all the while I was toting my library book. Library books consoled me and put me in a different place. I could be anywhere at anytime and all I had to do was turn the page. I was entranced in these borrowed books. When we sat down for dinner, I would eat and then go to read. I read to my sister. I read in my fort, on the trampoline, down by the stream in my backyard, and anywhere I went. I read in the lobbies of multiple doctor offices with my Dad. I am the child that read in bed at night with a flashlight.

When my Dad was finally released into a regular hospital room it was extremely hard for me to see him because I didn't know what to expect. Instead of him rescuing me from my pain like he normally would have done, my sister and I had to walk into a dark room with an overpowering sterilized smell that had wires and cords unknown to me. Like the starting pistol at the beginning of a race, the beeping of the machines began our family's new normal. Although bed-ridden my Dad held us as the room full of visitors watched and cried. Numbed by her own emotions our mother encouraged us to be optimistic or forced us to be. I immediately dove into

the story of the Baudelaire children where Lemony Snicket clearly composed another family's tragedies. I immersed myself into the thirteen book series that school year. My school librarian asked me to be on the Battle of the Books team, but I declined because I wanted to read at my own pace about stories that interested me. However, all of my teachers and the librarian knew about my family's situation. My fifth grade teacher, a reader herself, pushed me to become an even better reader by encouraging us to keep a detailed reading log. She recommended books she had read herself and thought I would enjoy. She opened new doors by having me try new genres. I stepped out of the box of adventure fictions to mysterious, and fantasy books. She helped me to build a better relationship with my librarian just across the hall. Every time that I visited the library, the librarian would always talk to me and help me to find great books like Hatchet and the Eragon trilogy. That school year, I read well over fifty books.

Libraries are especially important in school because of our end of grade testings. Like all other states, now North Carolina teachers must teach the same Common Core curriculum and students must be proficient in core subjects in order to be promoted to the next grade level. To help with our performance at West Wilkes Middle School, we are required to take Reading Counts tests on books that we have read to show our understanding and comprehension of each book. Every library book has a certain amount of points given based on the lexile (or comprehension) level. All students must take tests and earn fifty points per nine weeks. This is a very difficult challenge for some students because this requires students to read around six books per nine weeks. It is proven that the more students read, the better they will perform on end of grade testing. Reading helps us to strengthen our minds. My sister's lexile level has increased over two hundred points in just five months. Given the facts, she should perform well on the North Carolina tests at the end of this school year. Our school library is an essential part of this equation.

Libraries are not simply a place to borrow and read books, but is also a place to use computers for research and where I take a Technology Design and Innovations class. I truly enjoy this class. My librarian, Mrs. Shelly Mitchell, has made a huge impression on me this school year. I have learned about journalism, photography and am the yearbook captain. Mrs. Mitchell has given me independence and allowed me to be creative in her class. I've designed a yearbook page, am on "Knight TV" for daily morning announcements, and help other students when needed. Within my school library, I've applied for a grant to provide cameras for our yearbook committee. These are things I would not have been able to do at a public library.

I know it may sound like I am a book worm, and I can be on some days but I am also an athlete. I also play football and basketball for my school, as well as compete in triathlons and am an active member of our local YMCA. I am mentally and physically fit and believe that reading has helped me to understand more about my abilities as an athlete. Although I am not the most athletic person on my teams, I understand the games more than most players and this gives me a much needed edge. I've read multiple books on each sport, and I have learned what my body can do. I have studied each sport to be better for every event.

Some may ask, if I want to read and do research, can I go to a public library instead of my school library? No, I cannot. With my father's injury and my mother now working full time there is not enough time to go to the library. Without my school library, I will not be able to read the fourth Eragon book that I am eagerly awaiting.

From a time where my Dad would come home from work telling us great tales of bravery and heroism, books temporarily replaced the adventure I imagined. Coping with constant migraines, short term memory loss, and surgeries, my father continues to recover. He has had a long road to get to where he is now, and it has been helpful to me to be able to put my face in a book when he is feeling bad. He still has his good days and bad days. He is a self-proclaimed

genius and recently helped me study for the Geography Bee where I surprisingly placed second in my school. Although injured, he's still the most intellectual person I know. He loves history, can easily name every President of the United States and has always wanted to go to Washington D.C. For a few different reasons, in April of this school year, I am not going on my eighth grade school trip to Washington D.C. If I can win this trip, it will be the trip of a lifetime. I will take my Dad and we can spend time together. I will be able to learn more about our country and founding fathers and put my knowledge from books to work.

My father and I are both history buffs. We read history books and watch documentaries together. Any chance I had when I was in elementary school I would get a history book for me and my father to read together. I think that it would be incredibly beneficial for us to ride a bus to Washington D.C. because my dad could rest along the way and he would not have to drive such a long distance. Spending the night at the nation's capital in a motel with just my Dad would be a lot of fun. In months of cognitive therapy, my Dad learned if he can attach an emotion to an event, he has a much larger chance of remembering it. My Mom videos and takes pictures of all ballgames and every event I have just to be sure she can take him back to a special time. There's no way he'll remember that special catch or what award I received, but I know this will be one trip he will always remember! We would enjoy the sightseeing more than most because of our love of history and because we have never been to our nation's capitol. Because our State Leaders, House of Representatives and Senate must be re-elected, this is a chance to meet very important people that can influence our state and our country's history. We may never be able to do this again. I understand and appreciate what an amazing opportunity this would be.

Libraries are necessary for the well being of North Carolina and future North Carolinians because books are timeless. I want my children to be able to read some of the books that I have read. However, I do not own all of these special books. I want my kids to know the enjoyment of

reading a good book. I want them to feel the emotion and power of reading a great novel. I want them to learn about how a good book can help to give you pointers in life. I believe a smart person will learn from another person's mistakes. When you read a story, you can learn to be humble or prideful, brave or scared, and optimistic or pessimistic. Books can help show you and transform you into a better person. A book changes people; it is inevitable if you read a good book. I want to be able to teach my children to read. As my parents did, I want to take my children and encourage them to learn in a library as I have. I hope my children have the opportunities that I have had in my school library.

Contact Information:

James David Simmons Jr.  
8th Grade  
West Wilkes Middle School  
Librarian: Shelly Mitchell

Home Address:

1540 Overlook Dr.  
Wilkesboro, NC 28697  
336.667.8983