Seamus Bruns

Good Afternoon. My name is Seamus Bruns and in 2009 I was a first-grade student at Colonial Hills Elementary School in Worthington, OH. I was falling behind my peers in learning to read and write. Luckily, Worthington Schools had been implementing Reading Recovery for over 30 years. In the fall of 2009, I started Reading Recovery with (now) Dr. Jamie Lipp, but who I will always know and refer to as Mrs. Lipp.

Despite finding reading and writing to be challenging at the time, my parents and teachers described me then as a sweet and bubbly kid who had a happy go lucky attitude. I remember enjoying my time with Mrs. Lipp. We were reading lots of books and I quickly began to feel like a reader. And I was a reader! In just 13 short weeks I was discontinued from Reading Recovery. That means I became a confident reader and a writer in just 47 short lessons. That is just 23.5 hours of instruction when you break it down!

I remember Mrs. Lipp challenging me with high expectations and supporting me to take risks in reading and writing. I also remember that my classroom teacher, Mrs. Samantha Fell, spent a great deal of time talking about me with Mrs. Lipp. Mrs. Fell is now the Reading Recovery teacher at Colonial Hills Elementary. I remember Mrs. Fell coming to see me in a Reading Recovery lesson and Mrs. Lipp coming to see me reading in the classroom. It’s like they were working together — and looking back now, that’s exactly what they were doing. Mrs. Lipp tells me they were “problem solving my strengths and difficulties.” I also know that Mrs. Fell, my classroom teacher, provided me with an excellent learning environment. She was also an awesome teacher.

I was lucky enough to have two teachers so committed to my learning that they would stop at nothing to see me succeed. And succeed I did!

Since those days of Reading Recovery, I have had many great things happen in my life. I never again received reading intervention after first grade in Reading Recovery. I scored Accelerated when taking the 3rd grade Reading Assessment, doing the same again in 6th and 9th grade for English. Right now, I am a junior at Thomas Worthington High School. I have earned several distinct academic honors as a high school student. I just found out I am being inducted into National Honor Society! I have also been identified as gifted in reading, inducted into the Spanish National Honor Society, and was a Bronze Key Recipient, earning recognition for receiving a 3.5 GPA or above for 3 consecutive semesters in high school.

Nowadays, I would like to think I am still that happy go lucky kid. I like soccer and golf and I am beginning to explore my college options. I’ve thought about Penn State, Miami University, or maybe The Ohio State University. Maybe I’ll be an accountant. Maybe I’ll be a teacher. I’m not quite sure yet. What I do know is that when I was
6 years old I became a reader. After that, anything was possible.

I want to say thank you to my teachers, Mrs. Lipp and Mrs. Fell, who gave me such wonderful opportunities to learn. Thank you to my parents who always believed in me, then and now. Coincidentally, my mom now works at Colonial Hills and supports one Reading Recovery student with homework. The program has meant a lot to her, too. And thank you to Worthington Schools for valuing Reading Recovery, so that kids like me can go on to do great things. Reading Recovery works — and I am a real life example of that!

**Chris Graham**

In 1989, I was a first grader at Olde Sawmill Elementary, in Dublin, OH, and I had two big problems: One of them was that I sat out most recesses for cussing. The second problem was that I couldn’t read.

Mrs. Barnett was my lovely first-grade teacher. Unfortunately, my normal day included sitting at my little table and Amy Blankenship saying, “Mrs. Barnett, Chris said a cuss word.” And just like that — no recess. It was rough not being able to quote *Back to the Future’s* Doc Brown at will.

Not much later in the year, I was introduced to Mrs. Lowery. I was told I’d be taken out of the classroom and I couldn’t have been more excited. We started to hang out and immediately my reading started to improve. It didn’t take a whole lot of time. It seemed like no time at all. I remember sitting down with my mom one night and I read her, the whole book, *A Fly Flew By*, which was about 42 pages. My mom was just ecstatic, and I was ecstatic. Shortly thereafter, I went back to Mrs. Lowery and we sat down and she showed me a chart. Then she said, “You know, when we started, you were here. You were towards the bottom of the first graders, and now you are towards the top of second graders.” And I thought, “This is amazing. This is so great.” And then she told me we were done.

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Now, there were only two things that I like at school: Mrs. Lowery and Amy Blankenship. It was wild transformation, because now I knew how to read. But I was still a huge troublemaker. And I remember, later on that next year, Amy told me, “Chris, I would like you, if you just wouldn’t get in trouble so much.” It was then that I knew our love wasn’t meant to be.

My schooling from that point on was being the class clown. I had the most detentions, most Saturday schools, and was definitely disruptive. Teachers would say things like “doesn’t pay attention” or “disorderly” on all of my grade cards.

However, the beautiful thing about Reading Recovery is that sometimes literacy lays dormant. Teach a child to read, and it might not seem like a lot has happened. There’s a compounding effect of literacy.

About 20 years after Mrs. Lowery kicked me out, I started a small business, Chris Graham Mastering. And my goal was to have people send me their records; I would make them sound better, then release them, and money would be involved. I tried this. I built a website and it took off really, really fast but I couldn’t handle it because I had no idea how to run a business.

A friend of mine mentioned a book called *The Four Hour Work Week*. I picked it up and I read it. As my business changed overnight, I finally felt like I knew what I was doing. I built systems for my company that gave me free time to read more books. I did that and I didn’t stop. I read 60 or 70 business books after that and business exploded and was growing 30% per year.

Eventually a friend of mine invited me to cohost a podcast with him called “The Six Figure Home Studio.” Through
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it, we give business book reports to people in the recording industry and talk to them about how to get more customers and to keep their customers happy, and how to grow their business. Essentially, it’s a reading podcast.

I get tagged on Instagram all the time with stories of listeners who are reading books. Listeners who probably wouldn’t have read a book that year had it not been for our podcast promoting reading as the best way to grow their businesses.

I’m a reading advocate in my industry now, and it’s been wild to see people’s reaction to catching the bug of learning that they are in control of their own destiny because they can buy a book, learn about a problem, and can fix it.

We live in a tough time right now. A lot of people are on opposite sides of a lot of different fences. Alexander Hamilton is famous for saying that the safe keep of democracy is the education of the people. At its core, education is literacy. It is because literacy can lay dormant. You can teach a kid and he can get all Cs like I did. Then he can graduate and rediscover books and become successful through literacy 20 years later.

If you look at democracy as a machine and you want to improve it, there’s one knob — literacy. If we turn that up, it will impact every aspect of our society. I encourage you that the work that you’re doing truly matters — not just for the kids, but for our society. Literacy can change everything. It might take 20 years after these kids learn it, but there’s a compounding effect to the work that you do. A kid who goes out and has literacy has the world open to them. Anything is open to them.

The work you do matters. And it impacts us and it’s relevant to democracy surviving. It’s essential. Thank you.

Jady Johnson Receives Special Excellence in Service Award

A special award was presented to Jady Johnson, retired executive director of RRCNA, in recognition of her significant contributions to the work of the Council. Johnson led RRCNA for 16 years and throughout that time, she strived to help others understand the power of Reading Recovery for students, teachers, and schools, and how it could influence schoolwide literacy more deeply.

The award was presented during the anniversary luncheon by RRCNA President Karen Scott who stated: “Jady believes that all of us in Reading Recovery have reason to celebrate and be grateful for the opportunity to do this life-changing work. She worked tirelessly for the teachers, for the children, for all educators, and for our entire community. The foundation she built continues to influence the direction of the organization. To show our appreciation, it is a pleasure to present the 2020 Excellence in Service Award to her for her extraordinary service and dedication to the Reading Recovery community. It goes without saying that it is well deserved.”

Our thanks to the sponsors of the 35th Anniversary Luncheon Celebration of Reading Recovery

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