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Proud to be a Librarian

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PROUD TO BE A LIBRARIAN

By Ying Chen, Johnson Library, Kennesaw State University

In a quiet afternoon in mid-fall 2010, I was in my office doing daily routines. Suddenly, a loud and angry voice broke the calm and peace. Seconds later, a staff member rushed to my office and asked me to help this upset student. I hurried to the reference desk only to confront a middle-aged man who was yelling. He was so furious and heated that his face was red and his voice was shaky. I took a deep breath and approached him quietly. Before I could say a word, he raised his voice even higher and screamed at me:

My paper is due tonight and no one can help me. If I don't turn in this paper on time, I will fail the class. If I fail the class, I have to withdraw from the college. If I drop out of the college, I will be stuck in my sorry job forever...

I listened without interrupting him until he outpoured all his fury and frustration. Then I asked him, "Could you please give me a chance to help you?" He ignored my offer and repeated what he said earlier. I kept nodding acknowledging his feelings of helplessness and fear. He finally came to a stop and I gently offered my help again. Knowing he didn't have other choices, he accepted my offer reluctantly.

I took him to my office and asked him what paper he was working on. After a brief reference interview, he confirmed my suspicion that he didn't understand the assignment and couldn't articulate his needs. The staff member who helped him earlier was confused and failed to find the information needed. Once we clarified the requirements for the paper, it didn't take long to find resources. He thanked me and left satisfied.

The rest of the semester past in a flash, just as it usually does for me. On the day before Christmas break, we closed the library five minutes earlier. While getting ready to leave, a staff member came to my office and told me that a gentleman wanted to come in to see me. I looked at the clock, it was still a couple of minutes before closing time which meant we had to let him in. While grumbling about this, I saw my visitor run to my office with excitement. Without introducing himself, he said he had just gotten off work and driven over ten miles in heavy traffic to see me. I puzzled for a second about who he was and then remembered that "difficult" student I helped several weeks ago on that mid-fall afternoon. He apologized for his quick temper that day and expressed his gratitude for the help I had provided then. With the information we found, he was able to complete the assignment on time. He was thrilled when he got an A for the paper. What was more exciting was that he also got an A for that class. As a result, he would not have to withdraw from the college. He told me that he was elated not only because of an A for the class, but the confidence and pride gained from the success. He was now more optimistic than ever that he could complete

college and earn a degree. He said I changed his life that day because nobody, not even his professor, was willing to help. I was so humbled to hear what he had to say and generously offered him all the encouragement I could. Before leaving, he hugged me and wished me a Merry Christmas. I confessed to him that I frowned when I heard him coming, but assured him that his visit was the best Christmas present I have ever received.

Years have passed since that day. I left the college and assumed a new position in a different city. Yet the memory of his visit and our conversation replays in my mind often. This experience granted me a better understanding of my job: I am not just an information keeper, I am a life transformer. And so are you. Be proud to be a librarian!