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“All those years, I took all those tests and all of those reading programs, and they never worked for me. But this time, it was almost like magic. One day I just sat down and read the pet classifieds section of the *Orlando Sentinel* to my grandfather. I read it like it was nothing. And before, I wouldn’t even know what it had said.”

**Willie Brown**

20 year-old Willie Brown still remembers his 10th-grade *Fast ForWord* reading breakthrough like it was yesterday. It was, as he puts it, “a life-changing experience.”

All through elementary school, middle school, and

the first half of high school, Willie struggled to learn how to read. “I just didn’t get it,” he says. “They would tell me over and over how to put the words together, and I couldn’t do it. It just wasn’t clicking with me.”

continued

Early on, Willie was put in Special Ed classes, where teachers tried but failed to help him make sense of words on a page. “I don’t think they had the right tools to help me,” he speculates. “I got things like work packets and reading programs, but the teachers couldn’t spend that much time with me because they had to tend to other students in the class.” The result was that he sat there, term after term, learning next to nothing. And he kept getting promoted to higher grades, which only increased his frustration.

The low point for Willie was reaching 10th grade with a 1st grade reading level. Still in public school, his teachers suggested he try a program called On the Job Training (OJT). Basically, this was a sign that they were giving up on him. “Suddenly I didn’t have to do reading or math, or anything,” he says. “I would go to this hospital for three periods a day and work. I wasn’t learning, I was doing things like stocking up the coolers.”

### **A new environment makes all the difference.**

But a different fate was waiting for Willie, a much better one. While he was struggling through 10th grade, he got accepted into PACE Brantley Hall, a private school that was founded over 30 years ago to meet the needs of students with verifiable learning disabilities or attention-deficit disorders. Suddenly, Willie found himself in a whole new environment.

“Everything changed when I went to PACE Brantley Hall, everything,” he says. “They had the tools to help me, and they knew what to do with me.” In particular, Willie is grateful to principal Jacki Egli and teacher Lynn Yarborough. It was Jacki Egli who first suggested Willie try *Fast ForWord*, and Lynn Yarborough who acted as his coach while using the program.

With encouragement from his principal, his teachers and his parents, Willie began using *Fast ForWord’s* Language Series for 60 minutes every weekday. Results

were not immediate, and he was a little disappointed at first.

“The program was okay. I was mainly happy because I was getting out of English and Spanish class, my first two periods. But I didn’t understand how it could work, because for the first two weeks I was making these sounds, aaahhh and baaahhh, and figuring out what the kid in the picture was doing. And I was thinking, where’s the reading, where’s the spelling? And I told Miss Egli, ‘This is all fun, but don’t you think I should be getting back to class?’ And she said, ‘Wait. These first two weeks, you’re not going to see results, but the third week, you will.’”

Sure enough, week three was the moment of pure magic for Willie. Still not aware of the progress he was making, he sat down one day with his grandfather, who was always insisting that Willie read the *Orlando Sentinel* out loud to him. Willie, of course, would struggle with the words and give up fast. But that day,

Willie started reading his favorite section, the pet classifieds, out loud to his grandfather. “I remember it like it just happened,” he says. “I read, ‘American Pit Bull Terrier puppies, AKC registered, 6 females, 3 males.’ I read it like it was nothing. And before, I would have no idea what it said.”

Willie’s grandfather was shocked. Just to prove a point, Willie read the entire pet classified section out loud, from the dogs all the way to the horses. Just like that, he was reading.

### **From the classifieds to *Lord of the Flies*—and college.**

Willie didn’t just learn to read—he became a reader. “I love reading,” he says. “Used to be, if you put a book in my hand, I’d say, take it back, I hate reading, reading’s for losers. Now I’ve read all the Harry Potter series, and I’m waiting for the next one to come out. I read *Lord of the Flies*, *The Island*, *The Notebook*. And I just finished a book, *The Dreamcatcher*.”

And, after struggling through most of grade

school, middle school and part of high school, Willie will be attending Valencia College in Orlando, starting with the fall 2005 semester. He still isn’t sure what he wants to do eventually, but right now he’s thinking about possibly becoming a history teacher. “I’ve been going around to schools, talking to students and telling them about my experience. Kids are always coming up to me and saying, ‘I was in the same predicament you were in, and I felt the same.’ And I’m starting to like talking to these kids and think it might be great working with them.”

### **It takes a team to create a reader.**

Willie credits his success to the teamwork he had behind him. “In order for *Fast ForWord* to work, it has to be 50% from the teachers and 50% from the students. Because if the teachers aren’t really into the program, the students aren’t going to be into it, either. Even when I was getting discouraged, Miss Yarborough, my *Fast ForWord* coach, kept

telling me the program was going to help me. My parents really pushed me, too. I think that was one big reason why the program worked, because of all the support I was getting. Without that, I would have given up before it had time to work.”

Willie is living proof that *Fast ForWord* can help students who are struggling to read at any age. We can only imagine how much easier his childhood would have been if he’d been given *Fast ForWord* back in 3rd grade or 4th. But Willie isn’t complaining. “In just a couple of months, my reading level increased about three years, and I just kept going up from there,” he says. “*Fast ForWord* gave me that nudge, that push I needed to get up the mountain.”

**For more success stories and further information on reading intervention contact Scientific Learning at 888-452-7323 or [www.scientificlearning.com](http://www.scientificlearning.com)**