



Julia Young spends some quality time with two students in the Page 15 homework room.

[HELPING]

## Page Turner

Julia Young's mission to help children read, write and succeed is a story without end. **By Barry Glenn**

**JULIA YOUNG HAS THIS THING FOR *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO*.**

"I read it when I was 11 or 12 years old," she says. "And I think it changed my entire world—the way I thought about books. It's so ridiculously overwrought. There's revenge and romance and sword-fights and fainting!"

But the Alexandre Dumas classic wasn't the only work that influenced Young, 31, an Orlando native. She read everything from Archie comics to Nancy Drew adventures. She read with abandon and still does. She dreamed of one day helping children become voracious readers, prolific writers and confident achievers. And she's done that too.

It's a Tuesday afternoon at Orlando's Downtown Recreation Center, just before one of four free tutoring sessions that Young runs each week as part of a program she founded called Page 15. Volun-

teer tutors, many of them college students, will arrive soon. The kids will follow, most of them from low-income areas near the rec center, seeking help with various homework assignments. Meanwhile, a few blocks away at Howard Middle School, students are working on the next issue of *Howard Hype*, the online newspaper that Young's group helped create. And before you know it, Page 15's summer writing workshops for kids will be starting once again.

Young is recounting how her nonprofit came to be, how being laid off from her marketing job two and a half years ago created the opportunity, how former Urban Think bookstore owner Bruce Harris and others pitched in with support, how she named the program in honor of her grandmother, who said nobody should quit on a book before reading to at least page 15. She also talks about working with the children, about the pressure they feel as students.

"Sometimes they get *so stuck*," she says. "They can't go any further because they don't want to make a mistake. So we're really just trying to break loose of that and saying to them, 'I don't care if you get every one of these questions wrong on this sheet or if you spell every single one of these words wrong in your story. We'll go back and we'll figure it out together. We'll be here with you.'"

The students stream into the homework room—including a rather glum high-schooler who needs help on a reading comprehension assignment. "What's up?" Young says brightly, then summons a volunteer to help him.

At a nearby table sits Bill, a 10-year-old boy from Vietnam who Young says has "blown us away" with his progress in reading in the last year. He is writing a book report on *Charlotte's Web* and tells his tutor confidently that the plot "is about helping friends."

He's right, of course. Bill has most likely run across a quote uttered by the heroine spider Charlotte near the end of the book—a passage that seems quite fitting in this busy room, where youngsters are getting the help they need, all because one day, a couple of years ago, Julia Young decided to follow her heart:

*You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing.* ☐

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**MAGIC FORMULA.** As Orlando celebrates yet another Magic playoff appearance, let's think about how we were feeling six years ago at this time: The team had just completed a woeful 21-61 season, including a 19-game losing streak and a disgruntled Tracy McGrady. These days we gripe about things like not hitting 60 wins in a season. Ah, ain't life grand? Yes, we're spoiled—and thankful that GM Otis Smith and his crew aren't afraid to wheel and deal to keep us among pro basketball's elite.



**DOCTOR'S ORDERS.** Dr. Jack Cassell, a Mount Dora urologist, posted this message—"If you voted for Obama... seek urologic care elsewhere"—on his office door. Cassell says he was just speaking his mind on Obamacare and would never actually refuse to treat those who voted for the president. If Cassell was seeking publicity, he got it. Meanwhile, patients seeking basic, quality care might have felt a sudden, sharp pain—like passing a stone—about their choice of physician. Hey, Doc, talk radio or the op-ed pages are tailor-made for registering displeasure. Your office is no place to play politics.

