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of Cape Coral has a Ph.D. in education and is the mother of three children.

# Independent reading

The **benefits are worth** the struggle

**T**his last school year, Maggie, my 7-year-old, began her quest to become an independent reader. She started the year off slow, falling behind the class a bit with her reading level.

Maggie had absolutely no interest in reading. She would get frustrated by her ability (or lack thereof) to sound out words or recognize a sight word. Each time she stumbled upon a word she didn't know, she quit. I tried giving her the word each time, hoping that would relieve the angst. It was to no avail; she just wasn't interested.

We were halfway through the school year when I really started to worry. Maggie still had absolutely no interest in reading and refused to read with my husband or me.

Her first grade teacher, Mrs. Durand, had an idea. She assigned Maggie and her cousin Wyatt to a volunteer who came once a week to read with the children. Maggie loved reading with her newfound friend.

Mr. Woolam's visits became Maggie's favorite activity of the week. He would take Maggie and Wyatt outside to the garden area where he would read to them and listen intently while they proudly read to him.

All of a sudden, Maggie became an empowered reader. Wyatt's confidence soared, too. Maggie couldn't wait to read to us at night to demonstrate how much she had improved that day. Their enthusiasm for reading skyrocketed.

Mr. Woolam, a very sincere and patient grandfather to many, claims he gets more out of volunteering than the



Photo special to SW FL Parent & Child

Wyatt, Mr. Woolam and Maggie

kids do. "Watching their little faces light up makes it all worthwhile," he says. However, what Maggie gained through his volunteer work is hard to beat.

Maggie has not only become an independent reader, but has developed a passion for reading. Since summer began, Maggie has finished four chapter books. She reads independently as well as to her siblings, grandparents, mom, dad and pretty much anyone who will listen. It is awesome to see her so passionate about something with such positive long-term effects. Even more exciting is to hear her "book chat" as she shares the story line or a funny part of the book she ➤➤

## DECIPHER THE CODE

■ Reading levels are usually indicated by a number followed by a decimal point and another number, like this: 1.3. The number before the decimal point represents a student's grade level. The number after the decimal represents the month of the school year. In this example, the child is reading at a first-grade level equivalent to the third month of the school year.