

## **Interview by Drake Lucas, Staff Writer**

### **Why did you decide to donate the books?**

On one hand, I'm a writer, so I simply love reading and writing books. But on the other hand, I believe in education as a way of fixing social inequality and simply helping people become better human beings. Books are an absolute treasure for me. So donating them means giving the gift I value the most. I'll give books to places with few resources and low budgets, or children from other parts of the world whose priorities are so basic that there's just no room for books in what they have to spend. In this case in particular, I wanted to give books to the school where my children go, to contribute to their education and their classmates' education.

### **Why are books important for children who are in elementary school?**

Elementary school is exactly when kids are in that first stage of forming their reading habits. A child who doesn't develop a reading habit in primary school - or even earlier - may not be able to pick it up as easily later on in life.

I read stories to my children even in the womb. The idea came to me that even the rise and fall of my voice, even though they couldn't understand the words, would somehow lead them to love reading later on.

In the past, a book was a wonderful way to have fun. But today there are so many ways a child can be distracted. TV and video games are practically hypnotizing influences, and there are so many other consumerist distractions that lend little or nothing to their development. It's a given that books can't compete with all of the commercial overload, not even if they have shiny covers, or if they're sold with toys or flashy marketing. A book is like a shy child. It's an older, more mature thing. It doesn't have to bash you over the head or blind you with flashing lights to get your attention. It just sits there quietly on its shelf, ready to be read by children who want to learn things and understand the world. Parents and teachers need to share a secret with their children: a book is really a universe, captured in words. Every book tells thousands of stories - the one that is written and the ones that we can imagine by ourselves.

Elementary schools should devote themselves more to reading books, because if they get students into a reading habit at that early stage, it's something that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

### **How did you decide on the titles?**

I picked books from a bunch of companies I admire, companies that I have published with: Houghton Mifflin, Scholastic, McGraw-Hill, Lectorum, Everest, etc. Many of the books were created specifically for an elementary school curriculum, so they are linked to subjects like social studies, math, etc. Others are books that my kids just love. A few are books I wrote myself. And finally, I included a few books in Spanish, because in today's world, where every country is just a click away, anyone who thinks they can succeed speaking just one language is fooling himself. Children are little sponges; they can learn languages amazingly easily. My children are bilingual but since they have relatives and friends from other backgrounds, they want to learn French and Italian too. I would love for them to learn an Asian language too.

### **Is this the first time you have donated books to the Sargent School, or any school?**

No, I've donated books to places in California, Texas, Florida, Latin America, Spain, and most recently to several pre-schools in the area. I also donated books to a school in Andover. But this is my first donation to the Sargent School. And hopefully not the last!

### **How many children do you have at the Sargent School?**

I have two: Ares, who is 8 years old, and Eros, who is 5.

### **What do you think of the elementary school libraries being closed?**

Well, my real answer would run much longer than space probably allows... but essentially, who could possibly be happy with such sad news? They closed because there's no budget to run them. They closed because education budgets are always shrinking and it really hits everywhere, bit by bit. From libraries to extracurricular classes - all of these things are important and enriching. So why is there less money now? There are so many answers, from the real ones to the ones they want us to believe... My personal opinion is that we're irrationally spending enormous amounts of money and resources in a war that not only is unending, but that has been creating MORE wars and misunderstanding between human beings. The

number of deaths, both Americans and innocent citizens, is going up every day, as is the amount of terrorist attacks, uncertainty, other offshoots of this war... It's just depressing that we're still fighting just because we can't think of a better way to communicate and have people respect and love us.

If all the money we spent on war had been invested in the US, in intelligence resources to prevent attacks from the outside, and in a thoughtful campaign for peaceful understanding between nations, maybe the results wouldn't be so drastic. I would like nothing better than to dedicate all possible resources to educating new generations, and heightening their levels of tolerance, ability, and human values... The more we culture ourselves, the more sensitive and human we will be, and the less we will opt for war as a solution to our problems. Ignorance at all levels, and the fear of the unknown and the different, is what makes us blind, deaf and dumb.

I love this country. My children were born and educated here. It scares me a little that the first to be "sacrificed" for lack of money are the libraries. Taking away such an exclusive place of learning and reading is like declaring war on childhood. What will it do to the future of mankind to raise children who cannot read about their own past and the present?

**Do you think giving the students access to more books (because of your donation) will help the situation?**

It won't help the library problem, but I just want kids to have more books. Libraries aren't closing for lack of books; they're closing for a lack of resources to run them and pay the librarians - sometimes there isn't even money to pay for more teachers. I wish I could solve the library closings just by donating books, but that's not going to happen. Nevertheless, if students have a wider variety of titles to choose from, it covers a wider variety of interests. There are kids who are crazy about science fiction while others prefer realistic fiction. What's important is that, one way or another, they learn to love books and answer their questions both now and in the future.

**What was your favorite book when you were young?**

The Little Prince, by Saint-Exupéry, and all of the classic stories from around the world. I also loved Robinson Crusoe, the works of Jules Verne, Pippi Longstockings, Michael Ende's Momo...the story of my favorite stories is a loooooong one. Maybe I'll tell it some other time.