READING COMPREHENSION

SECTION B – PART 1 | Julia Burney: "Reading Changed My Life"

Instructions: Read the passage carefully, then answer questions 9–15. Answer in complete sentences and in your own words unless otherwise indicated. All answers must be based on the passage.

Julia Burney was afraid of Fridays as a child. Her mother and father would return home from the clubs in Racine, and then the brawling would begin. "Call the police!" her mother would often scream. "Julia Mae, do something!" the younger children would shriek. Eight-year-old Julia, the oldest of eventually twelve siblings, would try to dodge her father as he reached the phone. If she made it, she would dial the number of the police department. Then, she remembers, it was as if a miracle happened.

"The moment the officers appeared, everything changed. My dad would sit up, listen to them, and act right. My home would be peaceful again. So that became my dream," Julia says today. "Someday, I would do that for another child."

Julia would achieve her dream, but she had a lot to go through first. She lived in Racine, Wisconsin, where her parents had moved from Mississippi when she was four to look for better jobs. Neither of her parents could read nor write well. Their daughter says her relationship with them was bittersweet. "They were hard-working people, well-respected," she says. "They were generous – they taught us to share whatever we had, and to look down on no one. They had plenty of common sense, what my father called 'mother-wit'. But they were so young when they had us and there were so many of us. I am amazed that they accomplished what they did. They raised us and kept us together. With all they had to cope with, I can understand why they drank. But alcohol ruined a large portion of our lives. I loved my parents but I hated their drinking."

As the oldest of so many children, Julia was expected to take on a great deal of responsibility. "I remember playing outside with friends, but those memories are few," she says. "After just a few minutes it was, 'Julia Mae, get in here and start dinner.'" When she was nine years old, she was giving children baths, fixing their hair and calling the gas company to get an extension on the bill. The electricity was turned off many times. In Racine, Wisconsin, the winter wind chill can plunge to 60 below zero. Unlike today, public utilities had the right to turn off people's heat for non-payment of bills. Consequently, Julia's family spent many frigid winters trying to warm themselves with candles and extra layers of clothing.

School became a refuge for Julia. "I loved school from day one," she says. "And reading came naturally to me. But any encouragement to read stopped at our front door." The idea of reading for pleasure was foreign to her parents, for whom a book might as well have cost a million dollars. If she did take home a borrowed book, they would secure it on the top of the refrigerator.

However, Julia found a place where she could read to her heart's content – her aunt Ruby's house, where she would go to babysit. Her aunt had a sizeable personal library and encouraged Julia to read and discuss what she was reading. Julia's passion for reading helped her to become a fine student, one determined to prepare for a better future. She simply ignored anyone who suggested she should neglect her schooling. She also declares that, in a way, her parents taught her a great lesson about smoking and drinking. She looked at their example and thought, "That's what I'd become."

Despite her strong will, Julia stumbled. She says, "Mom and Dad never said, 'I love you'. They never hugged or kissed us. To them, putting a roof over our heads and food on the table was love. But I wanted someone to tell me." When she was seventeen, a boy fulfilled this yearning, and Julia found herself pregnant.

Shortly after her baby was born, at eighteen Julia moved out from home into a place of her own. She transferred to a school that offered night classes to finish her high school diploma and raise her baby. As the years passed, she raised three more children on her own. Julia worked as a clerk by the Racine Police Department, then as a teacher's assistant. In 1979, she was employed as a clerk by the Racine Police Department. Five years later, she had become a police

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officer.

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QUESTIONS 9–15

Write your answers in the spaces provided.

9. Where did Julia's parents go on Friday nights?

10. Why did Julia view the police officers as miracle workers?

11. Give TWO pieces of evidence from the passage to show that Julia's parents were poor.

12(a). Julia's parents gave her many duties/responsibilities. Identify THREE of these responsibilities.

12(b). What effect did all of Julia's responsibilities have on her?

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QUESTIONS 13–15

Continue answering the reading comprehension questions.

13. Using numbers 1–5, place the events listed below in the order in which they happened in Julia's life. Write the correct number beside each event.

____ a. The police officers visited Julia's parents in Racine.

____ b. Julia got her high school diploma.

____ c. Julia began babysitting for her aunt.

____ d. Julia's parents moved from Mississippi to Wisconsin.

____ e. Julia became a police officer.

14. Quote the sentence located between lines 30 and 44 in the passage which tells that Julia made mistakes even though she was determined to succeed.

15(a). In some ways Julia's parents were very good role models for their children. Give TWO examples of positive behaviours that Julia's parents modelled for their children.

15(b). Give TWO examples of negative behaviours that Julia's parents modelled for their children.

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