

From the President

Ross Holt, President

Editor's note: NCLA President Ross Holt's inspirational column initially ran in *Tar Heel Libraries*. It is reprinted here for the benefit of the readership of *North Carolina Libraries*.

Libraries Make a Difference

Recently I met an extraordinary fellow. I was tending to the Reference Desk one morning when a circulation librarian escorted a gentleman to me and said, "Ross, this is Mr. Holmes. You've got to hear his story!"

Mr. Holmes was George Holmes, a semi-retired Episcopal clergyman and former chemical engineer. He was visiting Asheboro while his wife was at an appointment in town, and he stopped by the library — to say thanks.

He explained that, when he worked as an administrator at a prosperous engineering firm in Asheboro during the 1970s, he suffered two detached retinas back-to-back. He knew that something like this might happen one day; doctors had told him so during the waning days of World War II in Europe, as he recovered from injuries sustained when he was shot down while flying a reconnaissance mission over Frankfurt.

Thirty years later, he suddenly found himself looking at a long recuperation from emergency surgery, unable to see for awhile and with limited vision for a long period following. He faced the prospect of being unable to work — especially unnerving when you have nine kids. "It's very frustrating when you think your working days are over. It's scary," he said.

As he recovered from two rounds of surgery, friends told him about the services for the blind and visually impaired available through the Randolph County Public Library and put him in touch with then director (and former NCLA President) Charlesanna Fox. In short order, he was receiving material such as technical manuals and EPA reports in audio and large-print formats, material that was essential if he was to keep up with his fast-moving job.

"The library kept me working," he said. "I never thought the library would turn your morale around," George said.

George went on to tell me (with a fair amount of prompting) how he landed with the 29th Infantry at Utah Beach on D-Day to establish the first Allied air strip, and how, once recovered from his wounds after his air crash, he volunteered to fly Poles liberated from Dachau and Buchenwald away from the camps to hospitals and home towns. It was something he would never forget, and something that led him into the ministry.

I was amazed, and I felt privileged to have met him. I also felt humbled on understanding anew the difference libraries make in peoples' lives.

After our conversation, I realized what day it was. It was June 6.