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Fight to ban books brings in author

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Editor's note: This is part one of a two-part series on the book-banning issue being pondered by the school board. BROOKSVILLE — It's 11:30 p.m., Monday. New York Times best-selling author Robert McCammon has fewer than 24 hours to act.

He knew his book was being reviewed by the county school district the next day. He knew the school board would vote Tuesday night on whether to accept or reject his book, "Boy's Life" for Nature Coast Technical High School's library.

"I want to come to the meeting (and) state my case for the book," McCammon said. "The book is being misrepresented. I can't let it be tainted."

In the end, it wasn't. McCammon's book, along with eight others, received the school board's approval.

But before approval came, McCammon appealed to the board.

He read a letter from 15-year-old Judy Gower, a Maryland student who said she had only read two books that she thoroughly enjoyed and both were McCammon's.

She aspires to be an author and asked McCammon's advice.

"I don't have any proof that kids are affected negatively by the profanity," McCammon said.

But it was the profanity that turned the school board off in May when Sandra Nicholson read an excerpt from McCammon's book.

"Hold still, you s---head!" Nicholson read, only she didn't delete the obscenities. "Where's the money, you m----- -f----- -?"

Silence met her recitation and later apologized for reading the explicit words in the excerpt but wanted to illustrate the need to get questionable books reviewed before purchasing them for school libraries.

Seven of the eight books under fire were unanimously approved by the board Tuesday night, the same ones given the OK by a committee that reviewed them during the summer. The books under scrutiny were deemed appropriate for a high school library.

McCammon paid for an airline ticket to address the school board because the book committee had problems with it as they did another volume called "Rats Saw God." Some on the committee said both were inappropriate for a high school library.

"You just can't pull the profanity out of the book and say that's representative of the book," McCammon said Tuesday night. "That's why I came."

McCammon's book and Rob Thomas' book "Rats Saw God" were approved by a 3-to-2 vote. School board chair Jim Malcolm, John Druzbeck and Pat Fagan agreed to purchase the book for the high school's library. Board members Robert Wiggins and Sandra Nicholson voted against buying the book for the high school.

COMING TOMORROW: How banning books could be a serious legal problem for the school district.

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This story can be found at: <http://www.hernandotoday.com/MGBWY7VGCSE.html>

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