

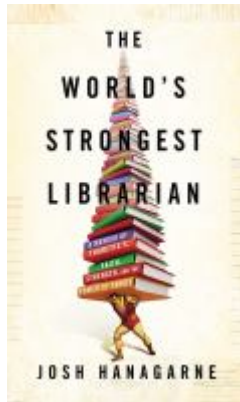
Oliver Wolcott Library

The World's Strongest Librarian: A Memoir of Tourette's, Faith, Strength, and the Power of Family

by Josh Hanagarne

Book Discussion Guide

Prepared by Patricia Moore



About the Book:

An inspiring story of how a Mormon kid with Tourette's found salvation in books and weight-lifting.

Josh Hanagarne couldn't be invisible if he tried. Although he wouldn't officially be diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome until his freshman year of high school, Josh was six years old and onstage in a school Thanksgiving play when he first began exhibiting symptoms. By the time he was twenty, the young Mormon had reached his towering adult height of 6'7" when—while serving on a mission for the Church of Latter Day Saints—his Tourette's tics escalated to nightmarish levels.

Determined to conquer his affliction, Josh underwent everything from quack remedies to lethargy-inducing drug regimes to Botox injections that paralyzed his vocal cords and left him voiceless for three years. Undeterred, Josh persevered to marry and earn a degree in Library Science. At last, an eccentric, autistic strongman—and former Air Force Tech Sergeant and guard at an Iraqi prison—taught Josh how to “throttle” his tics into submission through strength-training.

Today, Josh is a librarian in the main branch of Salt Lake City's public library and founder of a popular blog about books and weight lifting—and the proud father of five-year-old Max, who has already started to show his own symptoms of Tourette's.

The World's Strongest Librarian illuminates the mysteries of this little-understood disorder, as well as the very different worlds of strongman training and modern libraries. With humor and candor, this unlikely hero traces his journey to overcome his disability— and navigate his wavering Mormon faith—to find love and create a life worth living.

Source: ReadingGroupGuides.com

About the Author:

Josh Hanagarne believes in curiosity, questions, and strength, and that things are never so bad that they can't improve. He is a librarian at the Salt Lake City Public Library. He lives with his wife, Janette, and their son, Max, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Source: *ReadingGroupGuides.com*

Book Reviews:

"Josh Hanagarne is a remarkable man.... In this moving memoir, Hanagarne shows his readers what it is like to live with a severe form of Tourette's and how, with patience, love, and support from his family, he was able to build a rich, full life. Throughout, his optimism and amusing, self-deprecating sense of humor shine through. An excellent and uplifting story on accepting and coping with lifelong disabilities, of particular interest to librarians." — *Booklist*

"Wildly quirky memoir of facing down his ferocious Tourette's tics...Hanagarne's account manages to be very gag-full and tongue-in-cheek...highly engaging...Reconciled with Tourette's, Hanagarne never let the disease get the upper hand." — *Publishers Weekly*

"The World's Strongest Librarian is witty and wry but also generous and full of heart. Hanagarne's book reads less like a memoir than a story told by a good friend." — *Jennifer Miller, author of The Year of the Gadfly*

"Just like the library has every funny, beautiful, moving, wise story you'd ever need in it, so too does this book. This is not just your ordinary memoir: it is a soaring, inspiring elegy to the small and big miracles of parenthood and friendship and marriage and how they triumph over the not so small challenges of life. It is a perfect, perfect gem of a read, unputdownable, unforgettable, unmatched." — *Pam Allyn, author of What to Read When*

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you remember your first trip to the library? Do you read more or less now than you did as a child? Why?
2. Was there a book—or a character in a book—that infatuated you as much as Charlotte's Web and Fern did Josh?
3. Why do you think boys like Javier are embarrassed by their interest in books? What might be done to change young people's perception that books are uncool?
4. Could you relate to Josh's story about sneaking Stephen King novels into the house after his mother banned them? Is it okay to let kids read whatever interests them or should parents impose boundaries?
5. Should Josh's parents have taken him to specialists before the tics got as bad as they did during his high school years? Today's parents are more likely than those from previous generations to have their kids' "problems" diagnosed and treated. Is this a change for the better or worse?
6. Advances in DNA mapping are making it increasingly possible to screen for disorders like Tourette's. If you were at risk for passing down a non-fatal but challenging genetic condition to your child, would you want to know before he or she was born?
7. It seems unfair that Josh and Janette's application to adopt was turned down. How might the screening process be improved?

8. Do you strength train or practice some form of exercise? Do you find that your body's fitness affects your brain's fitness?

9. When was the last time you went to a library and what was your reason for going? When was the last time you looked something up using the Dewey Decimal System?

10. A recent Wall Street Journal article profiled libraries that have expanded their offerings to include a hog-butcher demonstration, Wii bowling, and Star Wars days. Do you agree or disagree with the notion that "libraries must stay 'relevant'" (p. 213) in an increasingly electronic age?

11. Does Josh's success managing his tics inspire you to tackle a challenge of your own?

Further Reading:

Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long Distance Swimmer by Lynne Cox

Lynne Cox started swimming almost as soon as she could walk. By age sixteen, she had broken all records for swimming the English Channel. Her daring eventually led her to the Bering Strait, where she swam five miles in thirty-eight-degree water in just a swimsuit, cap, and goggles. In between those accomplishments, she became the first to swim the Strait of Magellan, narrowly escaped a shark attack off the Cape of Good Hope, and was cheered across the twenty-mile Cook Strait of New Zealand by dolphins. She even swam a mile in the Antarctic.

Mennonite in a Little Black Dress: A Memoir of Going Home by Rhoda Janzen

Not long after Rhoda Janzen turned forty, her world turned upside down. It was bad enough that her brilliant husband of fifteen years left her for Bob, a guy he met on Gay.com, but that same week a car accident left her with serious injuries. What was a gal to do? Rhoda packed her bags and went home. This wasn't just any home, though. This was a Mennonite home. While Rhoda had long ventured out on her own spiritual path, the conservative community welcomed her back with open arms and offbeat advice. (Rhoda's good-natured mother suggested she date her first cousin—he owned a tractor, see.) It is in this safe place that Rhoda can come to terms with her failed marriage; her desire, as a young woman, to leave her sheltered world behind; and the choices that both freed and entrapped her.

This Book is Overdue!: How Librarians and Cybrarians Can Save Us All by Marilyn Johnson

This Book Is Overdue! is a romp through the ranks of information professionals and a revelation for readers burned out on the clichés and stereotyping of librarians. Blunt and obscenely funny bloggers spill their stories in these pages, as do a tattooed, hard-partying children's librarian; a fresh-scrubbed Catholic couple who teach missionaries to use computers; a blue-haired radical who uses her smartphone to help guide street protestors; a plethora of voluptuous avatars and cybrarians; the quiet, law-abiding librarians gagged by the FBI; and a boxing archivist. These are just a few of the visionaries Johnson captures here, pragmatic idealists who fuse the tools of the digital age with their love for the written word and the enduring values of free speech, open access, and scout-badge-quality assistance to anyone in need.

Among Schoolchildren by Tracy Kidder

Tracy Kidder -- the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Soul of a New Machine* and the extraordinary national bestseller *House* -- spent nine months in Mrs. Zajac's fifth-grade classroom in the depressed "Flats" of Holyoke, Massachusetts. For an entire year he lived among twenty schoolchildren and their indomitable, compassionate teacher -- sharings their joys, their catastrophes, and their small but

essential triumphs. As a result, he has written a revealing, remarkably poignant account of education in America . . . and his most memorable, emotionally charged, and important book to date.

Against Medical Advice by James Patterson and Hal Friedman

Cory Friedman woke up one morning when he was five years old with the uncontrollable urge to twitch his neck and his life was never the same again. From that day forward his life became a hell of uncontrollable tics, urges, and involuntary utterances. Eventually he is diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive disorder, and Cory embarks on an excruciating journey from specialist to specialist, enduring countless combinations of medications in wildly varying doses. Soon it becomes unclear what tics are symptoms of his disease and what are side effects of the drugs. The only certainty is that it kept getting worse. Despite his lack of control, Cory is aware of every embarrassing movement, and sensitive to every person's reaction to his often aggravating presence. Simply put: Cory Friedman's life is a living hell.

Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil by Deborah Rodriguez and Kristin Ohlson

Soon after the fall of the Taliban, in 2001, Deborah Rodriguez went to Afghanistan as part of a group offering humanitarian aid to this war-torn nation. Surrounded by men and women whose skills—as doctors, nurses, and therapists—seemed eminently more practical than her own, Rodriguez, a hairdresser and mother of two from Michigan, despaired of being of any real use. Yet she soon found she had a gift for befriending Afghans, and once her profession became known she was eagerly sought out by Westerners desperate for a good haircut and by Afghan women, who have a long and proud tradition of running their own beauty salons. Thus an idea was born.

~This book discussion guide including the further reading recommendation list was prepared by the Oliver Wolcott Library.