PART TWO
1954–1974

Education
and
Modernity
Our Background

Mainland

1. France
2. England
3. Ireland
4. Ukraine

Newfoundland

1. Newfoundland
2. Maine
3. New Hampshire
4. Massachusetts
5. Rhode Island
6. New York
7. New Jersey
8. Delaware
9. Maryland
10. Virginia
11. North Carolina
12. South Carolina
13. Georgia
14. Florida
15. Alabama
16. Mississippi
17. Louisiana
18. Arkansas
19. Texas
20. Oklahoma
21. Kansas
22. Nebraska
23. South Dakota
24. North Dakota
25. Montana
26. Idaho
27. Nevada
28. California
29. Oregon
30. Washington
31. Alaska
32. Hawaii
33. Canada
34. Mexico
35. Cuba
36. Puerto Rico
When Bruce Weaver arrived in 1965 for his posting at the Mactaquac hydro dam construction site in New Brunswick, he found earth-moving trucks as big as houses and crews assembling elaborate systems of dynamite to blow apart obstructing walls of rock. This was still technically the frontier, but specialization and mechanization were changing everything. No longer did jobs require an army of men with axes and shovels. Canada still had a large hinterland, extractive economy, but brute human and animal muscle was being replaced by mechanical equipment. What thirty or fifty years before might have required simply a strong back and callused hands, now demanded workers with the skills to operate and the wits to work with a variety of machinery. Over the next thirty years levels of technology would continue to increase, and the complexion of work on the frontier would change even more.

Alfred Fitzpatrick and Edmund Bradwin had, in turn, guided Frontier College up to the moment of their deaths. When Bradwin died in 1954, the job of Principal was given to a recent Labourer-Teacher, Eric Robinson. The tradition of the Labourer-Teacher was firmly ensconced, and Robinson's task for the next seventeen years was to try to keep it going. He was then followed by another young ex Labourer-Teacher, Ian Morrison. The College's style of operation during this time was vividly described in a 1961 article by Labourer-Teacher Dennis Lee. But Robinson and Morrison found themselves dealing with a changing world. The bellwether for that changing world were the vivid reports sent in from Frontier College's instructors out in the field. With brash ideas and sure-footed words, Labourer-Teachers - and others - discussed and debated the role the College would play into the future.
By Dennis Lee
(poet and founder of Anansi Press, with another former LT, Dave Godfrey)

One of the most unusual recruiting campaigns in Canada will get underway in Hart House, Monday when roughly one hundred and fifty University of Toronto students come to the Music Room at one o'clock, to hear about summer and winter work opportunities with Frontier College.

This unique organization attracts many to its annual recruiting meeting who know nothing about Frontier College except that it is somehow unusual; it persuades many of these to apply, with what are superficially the most negative recommendations imaginable.

Students for example will be told by the College Principal, 35-year old Eric Robinson, "I can offer you hard work, long hours, black-flies, mosquitoes, dirt - and a chance to help your fellow man." He will go on to explain that each Labourer-Teacher, as the College employee is called, will work a grueling four-month summer on a railway gang, or in a mine or lumber camp.

In addition to a full fifty - to seventy – hour week as pick-and-shovel labor, he will organize evening discussions, sports, and classes in anything from basic English to folk-singing; for all this, his
pay will be the income from his day's work, plus a modest salary from Frontier College. Anyone who feels that there must be a catch somewhere is apt to be told: "You'll work seven days a week, with Wednesday afternoons off for burying the dead." With prospects like these, why are there usually three applicants from all across Canada for each of the 90 summer positions Frontier College offers? And even more important, why do instructors who have had their full summer's share of sunburn, backache, overtime, sweaty socks, mean foremen and primitive living conditions, return next summer and ask for more?

To find this out, we might look at a second-year Knox student, Zander Dunn. Stocky, outspoken Zander spent last summer on a railway ballast gang in Saskatchewan. When he arrived in camp, a string of box-cars heated by stoves and lit by Coleman lamps, he found a gang of 56 men, many divided by racial differences and all suspicious of their new college kid. His first week was spent getting used to rising at 4:30, working an 11-hour day with a ten pound sledge-hammer, and indulging in one shower a week.

He found that his fellow-workers, like the other quarter-million bunkhouse men in Canada, were living in a social, cultural and spiritual vacuum. The Canadians in the gang were often hard-bitten and cynical; one was an alcoholic. There were Yugoslavs, Portuguese and Italians, several of whom belonged in university. But their English was too faulty, and no amount of horse-play or backchat could conceal their loneliness on the gang.
With advice and supplies from home base in Toronto, Zander began to look for chances to interest the men in classes and sports. He found seven men who wanted to learn English three nights a week; classes were started in an old dining-car. Two young Canadians decided to take Grade Eight math. When horse-shoes appeared alongside the cars one Sunday, the men got to work and cut some pipe into uprights; later one of the foremen discovered he enjoyed a game with the men. Another dining-car was christened the Roxy, and weekly movies began. Gradually a full Frontier College program went into swing.

Over the course of the summer, Zander found himself in some unusual situations. At one point he was nearly fired by a hot-tempered boss who didn't appreciate his sense of humour. He wrote love letters for a young Yugoslav, climaxing them with a successful proposal of marriage.

Older men in the gang he found very hard to reach; after a lifetime spent in extra gangs, they had little use for anyone who was trying to rouse them. Zander began by leaving magazines in their bunkcars, finding by experience that anything but pocketbooks or magazines with pictures would be left untouched.

He waited till they were ready to talk about the boss, or about the family they'd left back in New Brunswick; gradually some of them decided that this 'perfessor' was genuinely interested in them, and wasn't trying to sell them anything. Others remained mistrustful till the end of the summer.

Every instructor is bound to have one or two special interests. His basic responsibilities are to do the same work as the men he is with; to take classes in English, arithmetic or trade-training for men who are willing to better themselves; and to offer everyone recreation, movies, discussion, and anything else suitable to the role of teacher or friend. These opportunities are fairly constant in both railway gang and mining or lumber camp. But every good Labourer-Teacher draws on his individual resources as well. He may give classes in creative writing, or teach swimming.

Some instructors have a knack of unearthing unexpected talents in their fellow-workers - particularly among New Canadians there are often gifted mimics or musicians. And there are always a few men like the Ph.D. from Belgrade, who informed the Frontier College man on the first day that he "wished to better my syntax, which is unfortunately not yet impeccable;" or the French Canadian who told his teacher rather superciliously that "incontinency is unaesthetic."

In the case of Zander Dunn, the particular interest was a bulletin-board, rescued from a junk pile and nailed to the side of a bunk-car. On it appeared the Joke for the Day, news, Frontier College announcements, and twice a month, the "Ballast Gang Bugle." This little journal poked fun at overtime, camp food and the foibles of the men including the Labourer-Teacher himself. Apart from nearly getting him fired, it provided a rallying-point for gang morale and helped break down the many barriers between the men.
At the end of his summer, Zander shared at least one thing with his fellow instructors: he felt that he brought away more than he had given. What he had given was not easy to pinpoint: for a very few men, the vocational future or outlook on life was radically changed; for many more, there had been moments of excitement and deepened friendships; and for all men on the gang, there had been the chance to sense that they possessed capabilities and an essential dignity which this man respected, and which are too often crushed by life on the frontier.

What Zander brought back from his summer he knew more definitely. First, over nine hundred dollars pay. Then, the knowledge that he had been of service to men who are usually forgotten - a rather disturbing insight into our society. And a firm pride in having tackled what was a man's job in every way, and having seen it through.
In 1965 when I was a 17-year-old high school student, I was assigned a Labourer-Teacher position near Fredericton, N.B., working on the initial stages of what has since become the Mactaquac Hydro-Electric dam. I have a clear recollection of the first day I arrived.

Eric Robinson, who was the Principal of Frontier College, had impressed upon all of us that we should always give a good impression of ourselves since we were Frontier College "ambassadors," and give 110% effort to everything we did. I took this to mean that we should arrive at our place of summer employment in our best attire. Thus, dressed in my one good business suit, I climbed off the train and bus and reported for duty at the project Manager's office.

Within 5 minutes of reporting in, one of the Supervisors showed me where I was to work – a place where monster-sized trucks were backing up to a cliff to dump earth and stone removed from the areas just blasted out of the place where the dam would eventually rise. I was supposed to stand there and, in this cauldron of noise, indicate by sign language just how far back the trucks could go before joining their load at the bottom of the cliff.

The temperature was in the mid 90's, and up there on the cliff the Convection Principle became a reality. The hot wind came howling back up the cool face of the cliff, bringing with it 110% more dust than was dumped down. I, naturally a somewhat pinkish white, quickly turned gray and eventually dirty black. My suit never recovered from this traumatic experience.

This first Frontier College assignment for me was during the period when the School was experimenting with somewhat larger projects. I set up classes in the cafeteria which was big enough to handle about 5,000 people, and there, lost in a corner where, despite big posters advertising "Come Learn How to Read and Write with Frontier College," only a few people were actually able to find me. Actually, it had somehow escaped my attention that the very people who would most benefit from this facility were the very same people who couldn't read the posters.

Eventually, I learned from my errors and spread the word verbally during the down-time periods just before the next round of blasting took place. There was something magical about sitting there in the cafeteria, and watching everything (books, papers, bottles, and me) jump about two feet into the air as 50 tons of explosive would detonate half a mile away.

BRUCE WEAVER
In the 1960s I got a summer job at Renabie Gold Mine, off in the bush near Missanabie, Ontario. The men resented a college boy and my presence underground was barely tolerated. I was assigned to the 1400 foot level with Old Pete, a Yugoslavian who loved to turn off his lamp in the middle of a shift and pretend we didn't exist. "Take it easy, boy. We take it smoke." Sometimes, late in the shift, a sharp "click" would come through the rock, followed by a rumble. If we turned on our lamps quickly, the smoke from our cigarettes would dance back and forth without changing shape, as the pressure waves went by. "They blasting," Pete would remark. Strangely, none of the blasting smoke itself, ever drifted through the 1400 foot level.

One day Pete took sick and I was given to Stan, a snappish old miner who ragged me mercilessly. We worked at the face, essentially the end of a long tunnel called a drift. They had just blasted there at the end of the previous shift. Shattered rock was everywhere. I operated a hose, washing off the face. I let the hose point down momentarily at the loose gravel called muck, on the floor of the drift.

"For Christ's sake!" said Stan. "Keep that hose off the muck. You want to kill everybody?" What did he mean? "The water," he said, "makes poison gas in the muck. It looks like a mist. One breath and you're deader than a doornail." I reflected that although Stan's methods were harsh, they were probably necessary, considering the dangers of the job. I dutifully kept my hose elevated after that.

Several weeks later, back with Old Pete again, I felt thirsty. "That okay, boy. You go to station, you take it drink." I walked half a mile along the drift out to the station, a hollowed-out cavern where the cage, the mine elevator, would occasionally whiz by. There was a hose there, attached to the mine water supply by an extremely rusty valve with an old wrench sitting on the valve stem. I struggled with the wrench but couldn't get the valve open. Finally, I bashed the wrench with a hammer and the valve reluctantly opened. Water jetted from the hose with tremendous velocity. I drank by cupping my hand, catching some of the spray. When I was done, I let the hose drop and concentrated on the valve. It took a minute or two to close it again. When I turned around to go back up the drift, I got the shock of my life.

The station was filled with a grayish mist. Thanks to Stan, I knew exactly what it was. Poison gas. There was a distinct "click" in my head. I went into panic mode, filled with self-pity at the thought of dying so young. When I realized that I would not be the only one to die that day, I ran to the phone board on the other side of the station. My breath came in short gasps, I called the emergency number by cranking the phone: Two short rings followed by one long ring. An authoritative voice answered: "Mine office!" "There's poison gas on 1400-Poison gas on 1400," I screamed. "Stay where you are!" said the voice. The phone clicked off. The grayish mist had now thickened almost to a smoke. Whimpering, I took off my woolen vest, soaked it in water, and placed it over my mouth as a kind of filter. I lay down on a wooden bench by the phone to conserve energy. I would probably be dead before the rescue team arrived. I wondered dully whether they would put up a memorial plaque to me on the mine head-frame.
The poison gas had begun to thin somewhat and I was barely conscious when the rumbling of the cage echoed down the shaft nearby. It squeaked to a halt at the 1300 level. I could hear bellowing, shouted instructions, and the sounds of men's feet on the shaft ladder. They emerged into the station, finally, two of the mine's roughest, toughest men. Paddy the Irishman and LaFramboise, the French Canadian. They wore gas masks and were hung with every variety of rescue equipment, ropes, picks, prys, hammers, first aid kits and blankets. "Where's da gas?" LaFramboise wanted to know.

From my supine position on the wooden bench, I waved my hands vaguely about, indicating the nearly invisible grey mist.

"Jesusfuckinggoddamsonofafuckingassholecollege prickhead." It was the longest curse I had ever heard. I gathered that I had overestimated the danger. LaFramboise went to the phone board and rang two short and one long. "Dat's hokay on 1400. Hit's dat college guy. He seen da blasting smoke. "Oh, you poor, fucking bastard," moaned Paddy. "Have you not seen blastin' smoke before, lad? It's the mine ventilation system. It drives the smoke up from the levels below, sometimes. Och! You're goin' to get it tonight, I'm afraid!" He meant that I would be the butt of endless jokes at the cookhouse. He was right.

As I joined the line that evening, men turned and pointed at me, conferring privately on the idiocies of college education, laughing in sudden bursts. It helped them to feel superior. It also explained to them why the government functioned the way it did, so many politicians having university degrees. Old Pete was there in the cookhouse lineup. "Oh, ho! You thinkit water on muck makeit poison gas. Oh ho, boy. Nevermind. We takeit smoke."

KEEWATIN DEWDNEY
CHRISTMAS IN CAMP

With Christmas approaching there is an unsettled atmosphere in camp. This atmosphere will work to the disadvantage of your programme and classes unless you make a special effort to capitalize on the Christmas situation in camp for the benefit of your Frontier College programme.

You will find (probably you have already found) that there is a great exodus of men from the camps at Christmas and an influx of new men in the New Year. There will also be heavy drinking and can make a very great contribution if our initiative to give the men an alternative to a "lost Christmas." If you can make an even greater effort to promote discussions, to screen good films, to hold interesting classes in different subjects, (e.g. astronomy, electricity, science, a one night anthropology course), you may make Christmas 1967 a more enjoyable one for your fellow-workers.

We are sending to each instructor a quantity of Christmas song sheets. Use these sheets to create a bit of Christmas spirit in camp! Can you organize an informal skit or even a skit night? Remember that it must not appear to be organized, rather, it must seem spontaneous. Christmas is also a prime time to promote your library facilities.

In the past, many imaginative instructors have succeeded in gaining a vital place in the life of their camps by their efforts at Christmas. Many an instructor has gained respect from the men and also a new student or two by helping a man to recover from a drinking spree. When the new men come into the camp after Christmas you will benefit from the knowledge that you have stayed in camp with the men, and are now an established part of the camp.
In the 1960's, the College undertook a couple of experimental projects. One, at Elliot Lake Ontario, was a technological program. The other, at Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit) was about Inuit education.

Native and Metis communities and Newfoundland outports were not the frontier of bunkhouse labourers, but they were still the frontier, socially and economically isolated. Using a new term, "community education," governments in Canada were starting to recognize the needs of such places. In response, they set up a plethora of programs from the Company of Young Canadians (CYC) to the local Initiatives Program (LIP).

When Ian Morrison became Principal in 1971, he expanded Frontier College's participation in community education programs. Instructors were placed for longer terms and, rather than needing to be employed in industry, were paid for their teaching and community development work from government program grants. Along with male instructors, the College started to send out women and couples.
When reading this report, three essential qualifications should be borne in mind:

1) We were working almost exclusively with Indian people, in the context of a racially mixed community.

2) People using the equipment varied in age from 15 to 35, and the majority of them were under 25.

3) We imposed no censorship of any kind. (Consequently, there were numerous tapes of women talking, hips wiggling, etc., with appropriately obscene, breathy commentary).

We must stress that from early April to the end of June, due to equipment failure, the people in Armstrong had perhaps five weeks access to operational VTR. This report, then, should be taken in the context of that extremely limited time span.

For the first week or so, the VTR was regarded as an exciting new toy. People quickly got used to seeing themselves on camera, and impromptu interview-type shows went on without cease. Several people began to develop their natural "ham" abilities.

In the next two weeks, the transition from VTR as an entertainment device to VTR as a personal-development and community-development tool began. Simple projects were conceived and carried out; local softball games were taped, and an automobile tour of town was recorded (much to the concern of the Armstrong constabulary, who couldn't understand what that nasty looking camera was for). Although these projects were not scripted, the sound and camera crews would hold conferences before taping, making sure they were prepared for any eventuality.
In the next several weeks, people became more and more sophisticated in their use of, and reactions to, the VTR. We noticed that audiences viewing the tapes developed finer critical facilities—people would no longer sit through twenty minutes of boring 'interviews,' and would occasionally turn to the person responsible for them and suggest, quite firmly, that he find more interesting things to tape. During this period, several people took the lead and developed more complex projects. One fellow took the portable camera apparatus 30 miles down the CNR track and filmed the tiny town in which he was born. Brought back to Armstrong, his tape provided an interesting overview of life in a "bush" settlement. Another group of people took the camera and did an interview show with Hector King, the local Indian politico. This tape contained some radical statements, and when shown to both the community and outsiders, produced lively debate.

Just as Armstrong's use of VTR was coming towards its close, things began popping. A videotape exchange program between Armstrong and Aroland, Ontario (a town 100 miles east), was initiated, much to the interest of everyone. A similar exchange program with Hawke's Bay, Newfoundland, was contemplated. The Indian Association was in the process of purchasing a building in town for use as a Friendship Centre, and a taped report on the whole idea was planned. Another chap had arranged a series of interviews with key figures in the community (Chief of the Ontario Provincial Police, priest, Commanding Officer of the local Canadian Forces Radar Station, etc.) for taping. All of this, when the recorder went kaput and there was not enough time left to have it repaired.
Our feeling is that VTR can perform a useful community development function in the Northern Ontario context. Although we felt it was temporarily effective in Armstrong, we doubt that, given the short time it was available in the community, it had any lasting value. A longer-term project might be worth considering. Speaking personally, we found that although VTR was a tool that involved a gratifyingly large segment of the community, it took up too much of our time. And we must emphasize that a) either we had a uniquely accident-prone set of equipment, or (more likely) that b) VTR equipment needs to be more reliable before it becomes suitable for use in remote areas.

Summing up, we think VTR proved to be an interesting device that demonstrated some community-development value and promised much more; but that, in order to justify the time, energy, and cost involved, it requires further experimentation in the field and considerable technical development.

*BART and JULIE HIGGINS*

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Over the hundred years, a substantial number of Americans came north to work for the College; in the early days there had been active recruiting done at Harvard and Yale. The previous piece by Bart and Julie Higgins, is an example of Americans working as Labourer-Teachers. In the 1970's with the Viet Nam War a powerful issue, some conscientious American students found they had still another reason to look for things in Canada. In 1970 the following announcement concerning LTTomBomba appeared in "Chime," the College newsletter.

Tom Bomba, Benson Lake, B.C., was classified IA by his draft board shortly before the new year. A sort of oddball Christmas present from Uncle Sam I assume. Since then he has been freed from this purgatory and is safely back 'neath the shelter of his 2S student deferment. He wrote us that he should be smoking big cigars. We sent him the biggest one we could find in the United Cigar Store. Perhaps we are overly concerned about our people's health at the moment but we would like to advise Tom to heed the advice of my old Swedish grandmother and *avoid drafts.*
Colin Brezicki, Jim Byrne and I have just returned from visiting instructors on location and have coordinated our general observations on the present summer effort of Frontier College. This is part of what we found. By the time this bulletin reaches you, you will probably be experiencing what is often called the "midsummer slump" - a period of doldrums in your program, when your initial enthusiasm has worn thin and you are beginning to count the days until the end of August. Perhaps our observations will be of use to your program.

First of all, we found that there is no absolute formula for the ideal instructor, but there are important approaches that good instructors usually follow. Most important, the only effective approach to ascertain needs and recruit potential students is that of personal encounter. To be effective you must take the initiative, confront men who need your help and make your services known to them. In most camps we found that our instructor did not actually work on a gang per se or with a group of men who were at the same time potential students. This means that most instructors do not have sufficient on-the-job contact for recruitment purposes. While there are exceptionally motivated men in all locations, men who will take the initiative to find out what you can do for them, you can't rely on most men to come to you by themselves. The men who need our help most quite often have built up barriers in the form of inferiority complexes and defensiveness about their own inadequacy. They need confidence and motivation and the best approach is to seek out each individual privately to build them up. The "come and see me" approach thus usually fails to get out all the men who really need you. Generally in each location there are two variables you should consider: you have X amount of personal potential; on the other hand there is Y number of men, each with special needs. The relationship of these two variables must be kept in balance. You must be careful not to spread your influence too thick or too thin. If either X or Y is out of proportion, you must readjust your efforts to get the most mileage for your location.

In larger locations, the instructor should regard himself as a resource to the camp. Increase your influence by motivating others to handle less difficult parts of your program (e.g. - library, sports, films) and delegate authority. Use the natural leadership of the camp and use local expertise to supplement your teaching program. This multiplies your own time and lets you focus your efforts on the most important

By the 1970's, on the heels of the social tumult of the previous decade, the world of "doing good" was in flux and sometimes in turmoil. Under the pressure to examine and re-invent everything, Frontier College found itself at the centre of the maelstrom. Nothing was deemed beyond the bounds of scrutiny and debate.

The democratization Frontier College sought in education was manifested as well in the way the institution tried to decide its own course. Everyone, whether they'd been involved with the College two months or two decades, felt they had the right for an equal say in the course the college ought to take. Young people in dramatic and passionate ways voiced their feelings, their frustrations, their values and beliefs. An intense debate –like the following exchange between Ted Smith and Norman Meleod - circulated among Labourer Teachers, as well as the head office, via letters and the newsletter, "Chimo."

Following that exchange, the reactions to a letter from a Labourer-Teacher resigning his post showed that though the LT ethic in a changing world might be under strain, it could likewise be enthusiastically defended.
and difficult aspects of your program. If there are existing structures in the location (e.g. recreation committee, etc.) work with them, or through their connections, in setting up parts of your program. Don't work at cross purposes with existing structures, but try to redirect or motivate them into different roles if this is necessary for improvement in your location. Remember: they will endure long after your own short-term efforts are finished. While it is very important to be a motivator in your location, you should not be satisfied with being a catalyst only. A "good citizen" role, contributing to activities that are already going on, is not an adequate role for a Frontier College Instructor. Because of your short period of influence in your location, you cannot be satisfied with a low profile approach, you must provide the leadership initially in all your programs. You should carry the ball for the first fifty yards before passing it off to someone else.

We also feel that there must be a readjustment in the emphasis of many Frontier College programs. Most experienced camp-men that I have encountered have the impression that "Frontier College teaches English to D.P's" - and that's all. Teaching basic English is, of course, an important part of our total role. But we must be careful not to get stuck in the D.P. Rut. In too few of our programs are we coming to terms with the problem of the indigenous English- or French-speaking Canadian. It's a much tougher problem to get these men interested in adult education. Most of them have a built-in defensiveness about their educational need and consequently are much harder to reach. But they need the benefit of our resources as much as anyone. We believe that Frontier College is moving into an important supportive role in cooperation with Canada Manpower and provincial vocational institutions. Let's face it - we can't give these men the sophisticated technical training they may need to readapt and upgrade their skills so that they may really benefit economically. We don't have the resources, the manpower nor the expertise of government - nor vocational programs. Furthermore, we are on the job for a frustratingly short period of time. But because we are virtually the only organization going into camp situations, living and working with the men, we have an advantage that such agencies as Canada Manpower don't have. We are much better able to assess the real need of each individual; we can establish with each man the rapport necessary to give him the motivation and confidence he needs; finally, we can provide the necessary information about what is available and what can really help him. Most men will need an upgrading of their basic skills (mainly math and English) and this we can provide in our classes.
At present we are failing to develop this supportive role and if we are to be effective, we must concentrate more on this aspect of our effort. In your own program you should try to have as much vocational literature available as possible. Set up film-discussion groups on the present economic pressures facing the work force (unemployment, inflation, automation, etc.). Contact the local vocational and Canada Manpower mandarins in your area and get them to visit your location. (You may have to give them a good boot in the ass to get them to really help your men in a significant way.) Finally, do your best to help motivated men brush up on their educational skills. To be effective our efforts must be directed toward an evident attainable goal that will be of real benefit to the men we are trying to help.

TED SMITH
This letter was written in response to Ted Smith's (page 75). It was written by Norman Mcleod, who was an LT working on a community education program.

Hawkes Bay, Newfoundland 1970

The whole point in writing this letter is to have it printed in its entirety in the 'Free Press,' as a start towards sincerely including the Labourer-Teacher himself in the dialogue over Frontier College programs, and in the overall evaluation process. To that end, here are some more specific comments on some parts of your article in issue #4.

1. Personal encounter: Yes, I agree that the only meaningful starting point for any real process of education is personal encounter; but I would caution that this means primarily listening, and not giving a sales pitch. If you're really going to listen to another guy's concerns, you have to be truly open to whatever you hear; and you won't be open that way if all you're really doing is trying to figure out how to get this guy into your already-conceived program. His felt needs may prove to be very different from your conception of his needs.

2. Who are the guys who need our help most? In fact, nobody needs our help. Everyone has needs, though, of course. The process of education is a process of finding better ways of meeting our own needs. If there's some guy you figure needs your help, stop for a moment: he's the only guy who really knows what he needs, and he's the only guy who can judge what's best for him. The job of the educator is to help him figure out how he can best meet his own needs: if you're meeting his needs for him, you're doing him no favour. I don't think you'll disagree with that, will you, Ted? But you see, as soon as I start judging for myself what's best for another guy, I cut myself off from hearing that his real, felt needs are. And when you talk about identifying the guys who "need our help most," you set yourself up for that kind of arrogant attitude.
3. Leadership: I disagree that Labourer-Teachers should conceive of themselves as "high-profile" leaders. The fact that you'll be leaving camp after a short stay is surely a very good argument against carrying the ball too far: you may do more harm than the good in the long run if all you leave behind you is a leadership vacuum. Surely you're doing people a much bigger favour if you can help initiate a program which will carry on without you. You might be able to help develop leadership.

4. Rocking the boat: Of course, you've got to be careful, as an outsider, young, with only a short stay, not to jeopardize your whole program by challenging the wrong people. But if there are real concerns, if a large number of people want something they're not getting, and you can help them figure out how to get it, if that rocks the boat, why not?

5. Advertising your availability: I couldn't agree more that the labourer-teacher should be absolutely and actively available to all the men. That is where the personal encounter comes in: you actively demonstrate your presence and availability by listening to individual men, and taking seriously their concerns. But signs and publicity are mere props and aids, and everyone has his own style of operating: it's actively getting out and getting to know people, whether by working with them or by visiting them or by just circulating, that counts. Right, Ted? And the hard sell, the carnival style, is not everyone's style, and that's just as well.

6. Classes, students and "recruiting:" When you talk about the "DP rut", Ted, you go on to talk about the "problem" of "getting these men (non- DP's) interested in adult education." To me, that implies a very mistaken idea of what adult education means. Again, if you approach these men with the idea that your job is to "get them interested" in a specific type of formal education, you're making an arrogant and unjustified assumption: namely, that you already know that what these guys need is a good dose of "larnin." Balls. What if they don't want it? Are you going to make them want it? Why not find out what they do want, if they're willing to tell you, and help them figure out how to get it. That's what I call adult education.

Let's not fall out of one rut, into another. The "classes" rut can be just as insidious as the "DP" rut. There are an awful lot of people in all our locations who don't seem to want to come to our classes; instead of being made to feel guilty that we're not getting them out, why can't we all have a mandate to find out what they do want, and help them figure out how to get it? I submit that a Labourer-Teacher might very well accomplish more in one location without any formal classes – perhaps without even a structured program - than another Labourer-Teacher might accomplish in another location with 200 registered "students."
That brings us to alternative roles for the Frontier College. You said in your letter to us that your description of a supportive role for Frontier College for such agencies as Canada Manpower was meant as a suggested alternative. Fair enough: let me suggest some other alternatives. One of these is to begin the Labourer-Teacher program with the broad view of education as a process whereby people gain increased control and influence over their own lives and their environment. The specific role of a specific Labourer-Teacher could then vary from that of teacher and counselor to that of social animator and organizer, with a varying emphasis depending on the location. There are plenty of other alternatives too, and anyone of them would require a different emphasis in the orientation program, a different type of supervisory service, and, quite likely, a different structure for the whole organization.

The point is that there is plenty of room for discussion of all these alternatives by everyone connected with Frontier College. More immediately, there are many alternative ways of assessing the work of each of the Labourer-Teachers in the field now: maybe my assessment of some of the camps you've visited would be very different from yours. Maybe another Labourer-Teacher in the same location would do something totally different. Maybe there are some places where we shouldn't go at all. What I would like to see - and I gather, Ted, that you'd agree - is a serious, open-minded, completely frank assessment by the Labourer-Teachers of their own programs. Not "Was I a good Labourer-Teacher, and did I do all the things that Ted Smith, or Ian Morrison, or Norm McLeod, or anyone else, said I should do?" but "What have I accomplished? What could I have accomplished? And what could we all the Labourer-Teacher, the supervisor, the head office, the whole program - do differently to really assist people in meeting their own needs?"

Your very truly,

NORM McLEOD
Benson Lake, B.C.
April 20, 1972

I decided on Wednesday to quit. The clearest reason I can give for this is that I'm bushed, exhausted, depressed and confused about Frontier's place here as well as being fed up with the lack of cooperation extended by Cominco and some of the organizations which operate in the North Island area. While I'm sorry to leave so suddenly and with no notice to Frontier, I don't really think this matters at all. What has been done here by Frontier at Benson Lake could very easily have been accomplished with more significant results by any member of the community here - if anyone stayed long enough to be bothered trying ...

Well things have been done, but my impression of work like this has always been that one should help people to understand the effective choices which are before them, not merely to present an anachronistic programme of folk singing and little-red-schoolhouse English classes; Christ, people drive XKEs here in camp, and yet we still insist on maintaining an ineffective and dishonest approach to 'problems' and situations. While anything is better than nothing in the eyes of many, the sanctimonious wishy-washy liberalism ushered in by the short and sweet letter of introduction to the company on arrival is wrong.

I seem to have been effective here so far, and am well-liked, but each day my fucking conscience hits me about the point of all this banal activity on my part. It's missionary work, that's what it is, just as destructive as the Salvation Army band playing "Shall We Gather By the River" at King and Yonge every Christmas. Frontier's effectiveness as an 'educational' enterprise is highly doubtful as well as being deceptive and illusory; it draws its results from a denial of the real difficulties and situation here. I'm absolutely sick and tired of defending such an obviously dishonest approach to those here who attack it, either openly or implicitly in the attitudes they display. (eg. tearing down signs.) Any initiative brought for support to those with some power and effectiveness in the camp has been turned upside down. I am disappointed, and it's a sad ego-shock to realize how futile this Frontier thing is. I'm also tired of being a saccharin madonna, a kind of butch Julie Andrews singing my nuts off for peace, hope and charity.

Naturally when I first arrived there was curiosity about the classes I'd set up, because no one knew of anything else Frontier had ever done. The curiosity was rather catty, back-biting and taunting, and what little there is left is of the same nature. It's a good reaction: according to everyone, classes have been a dismal failure in every case in the past. Frontier's efforts have met with the overwhelming reaction that they're innocuous but a little silly. If men go to Port McNeill to drink rather than to attend classes, it is obvious that in so doing they are expressing a preference. This should be accepted, and classes should be discarded. It is a fraud to perpetuate them when no other alternatives for free-time activity are present. It's an unreal choice - classes or boredom - as it stands now.
Feedback is impossible, since there is nothing to feed back. We have access to nothing but wishy-washy, impressionistic glimpses of alienation at work. Log books are trite and totally useless, for Board Members (do they really care anyway?) or anyone else. Whether or not they are actually read by anybody is probably questionable: they tell nothing of interest or importance, and are another sop thrown to the necessary conviction that something - anything - is being accomplished. The more the "work your ass off for us" line is propagated, the more ludicrously mock-romantic it sounds and is.

Well, I'm sick of this place and working underneath the conveyor belt. I asked for a better job a week or so ago, but was refused because my shift-boss apparently reported that I fucked the dog constantly; the best that could be done was a transferral to the same activity on surface. Fourteen weeks of the belts, alone, is enough, especially when I stay up until about 4:30 a.m. three or four nights a week trying to work for Frontier. The only means of transferral or getting help in this place is threats, and one works under them constantly as well.

_PETER FARNCOMBE_

**June 9, 1972**

Farncombe sounds like a cry baby to me. I wish I could buy his line, but I can't. I won't try to defend my position or Frontier's position, but to him, I say "Good Riddance ... and I hope you enjoy life in Utopia."

We could debate for hours with Peter on some of his remarks about "banal activity" and "missionary work," but judging from his letter, we would soon find ourselves in a shouting match, hurling obscenities at each other. Don't address yourself to any of the people (new Canadians or otherwise) across Canada who have been helped in some way by Frontier's work. I'd like to see you convince the guy who has just received his plumber's certificate, after having spent the first forty years of his life without knowing how to divide. Try to tell him that L.T.'s are "missionaries."

_PAUL STINSON_
I managed to plough off part of the lake for broomball only to be greeted by a monstrous thaw two weeks later. We played only 5 games - good ones too - and will resume if the ice stiffens up a bit. Perhaps by taking the broomball thing as a case in point, I can give you an idea of my basic modus operandi up here. Paul Lemay pointed out to me, (after my first week), that Conlin Lake had a broomball league and suggested that I start the same at Halfway. Well, I asked around camp and discovered there wasn't a soul who wanted to play. They looked at me with a look of utter shock when I suggested the idea: "Play broomball, Jesus Christ, I work my ass off in the bush and then you expect me to play broomball?"

The great majority of guys had never even played before. I remembered what the guy with the red beard (sorry, can't remember his name) said: "Respond to community needs, make sure you have a definite and real need before proceeding, etc." Broomball and related physical stuff didn't seem to be a need of the community. I waited for about a week trying to establish some justification for setting up the broomball thing and then (mainly because I myself wanted to learn how to play) I uttered those fateful words of homo frustratus "Fuck it!"

Bought brooms in town (at a sizeable discount - I'm a haggler you know) and began negotiating with the foreman and mechanics in earnest to let me bring one of the machines into camp and plow off the rink. Their hesitancy in granting permission was probably well founded as I was still pretty raw on the machine and it was close to a 45 mile round trip. But things got worked out and I brought the machine (skidder) in one weekend and did the deed. This caused a wave of mild interest among the men - comments on my abilities as a skidder operator rippled back and forth amidst the occasional mention of the word broomball. Finished the job Sunday. At lunch the men asked me "Are you going to play broomball today?" Interest was perking. But that afternoon I still had to walk from room to room rousting guys out - we had our first game. Since then its just been a matter of telling the eager ones there's going to be a game and the thing snowballs. There's an average of 15 guys out for the games now (including the foreman) and we have a ball.

Conclusion. Either this community is too docile to express its needs (directly or indirectly through dem' vibes) or I am too unperceptive to pick them out. If I believe something will work out I'll try it - needs or no needs they're going to get it. I try a lot of the things I read about in F.F.P. and use my imagination and intuition for the rest (thus the stag films, Owen). This gives me lots of opportunities to make colossal boobs but I believe, in this situation, it's the only method I'm suited to. Fortunately there are some of these "natural leaders" here who are very helpful in making some of the decisions.

SCOTTALEXANDER

Otherwise, it was business as usual. The first of the following series of letters from LTs out in the field in the mid 1970's, comes from Scott Alexander, who spent a winter cutting pulp for Churchill Forest Industries at The Pas, Manitoba.
Pine Point Mines
June, 1972

My English class is meeting twice weekly for about two hours a session. I hold them two times a week since the guys feel this is enough. I guess it's just an excuse so they can go to the bar for a few extra evenings. Presently we're doing reading and pronunciation. By using the Reader's Digests they can see a word, learn to spell it, and say it correctly. The Reader's Digests are also useful in enlarging their vocabulary since they increase in difficulty with each new story. Thanks for the dictionaries. I distributed them and taught a lesson on their use. The phonetic guide to pronunciation is quite useful to recent arrivals. My class size fluctuates something like the stock market. The most I've had is six, while the smallest was myself and one other person. A poor turnout can be very frustrating especially if I've spent a half-assed amount of time trying to cook up a good lesson.

GARY GOLDSTEIN

Fortune, Newfoundland
June, 1972

Only sore spot of situation is my living conditions. Much to our surprise, we discovered that Booth decided to find us boarding houses. Roman didn't get a bad deal - he is the only boarder with a family of 3, but get this, I'm in a house of the same size with two other boarders and a family of 7 (including a bad-tempered grandchild) - not only do I not have my own room but not even my own bed – and would you believe that while Alice and I are at work (yes, my bed-mate is female, at least) the bed is occupied all day by one of the other boarders who works the night shift, i.e. the room is occupied by 3 of us. I could go on and on listing the disadvantages of this place. Must admit it is one way to meet people - but if it is the only way, I never should have come. Anyway, I'm desperately trying to find another place - both Marg Mutch and Roman think I'm crackers to have stayed this long.

DEBBIE SCHAEFER
I encountered what may qualify as one of the problem situations we were asked to discuss in the briefing sessions:

The Canadian cook on the rail gang can't communicate with the Portuguese bull-cook, as he speaks little English. The cook prepares excellent meals and the men are very happy with her. The foreman fears that she might get frustrated with having to explain everything to the bull-cook (and then his not understanding it after it all) and quit. He replaces the bull-cook with an English-speaking labourer and puts him out on the track with the others.

My solution, and I'm sure it is the right one, was to do nothing at all. The bull-cook is in my English class and is very interested in learning English. I could have given him special tutoring and drilled him in the basic words and phrases he needed as bull-cook. But the real matter is that the cook would still have to labour over communicating to him the "regular" duties plus anything that was new to him. Now this cook is very good and works extremely hard at her job, baking all kinds of goodies that aren't on the menu and which she is not required to do. I don't feel she should have to contend with what is for her a struggle such as the one she was dealing with ... The bull-cook did not get fired (otherwise a different matter) and this way everyone is happy. I think the foreman made the right choice and I left it at that.

GORD QUEEN
Sail Lake Mannix Co.
Churchill Falls, Labrador
29 juin 1971

Les débuts ont été assez difficiles, jusqu'a que les hommes s'aperçoivent que j'étais ici pour eux. Tout le monde m'appelle "son" ou "français", je suis à la veille de me faire assimiler.

Avant chaque projection, je dispose sur une table de la cuisine les cent livres que je me suis fait envoyer de St-John, et j'ai la vive satisfaction de voir les livres d'histoire, de géographie et de science se lire aussi bien que les romans d'aventure. J'en ai malheureusement déjà perdu quelques-uns.

J'avais commencé un cours de français qui allait bien jusqu'a ce que deux de mes élèves soient transférés de nuit et que trois autres soient mis à pied. Le terme en suggérant que la séance d'information soit portée à cinq jours et soit davantage axée sur des méthodes pédagogiques ainsi que sur une étude beaucoup plus poussée des matériaux mis à notre disposition comme les films de l'O.N.F. de façon à ce que les anciens expliquent aux nouveaux et s'expliquent entre eux le contenu et l'utilité des films qu'ils ont projetés!

Il serait également très souhaitable qu'on établisse des schémas de cours comme français, anglais, histoire, physique et chimie usuelle, et qu'on nous explique quelques expériences simples propres à intéresser les hommes. Je me suis rendu compte que, à Sail Lake du moins, il était faux de prétendre (comme on l'a fait) que l'ouvrier-instructeur n'a pas l'initiative et le choix des matières à enseigner. Je crois que s'il présente des cours bien structurés et attrayants, il y attirera les hommes et qu'il ne doit pas attendre que ceux-ci manifestent des gouts particuliers, ce qu'ils ne font pas, ici du moins.

FRANÇOIS TERROUX

Port Hardy, B.C.
March, 1973

For a bunch of do-it-yourself teachers, we have very little exchange of teaching ideas. One which has stood me in good stead is I find it helps to become very conscious of the way in which we manipulate our mouths when making sounds. This concept has come in very handy when helping students with heavy accents. The idea is to try to imitate a given sound as the student makes it, noting mentally the position of your tongue, teeth, and lips while performing the sound. Repeat this while making the sound properly, again noting mentally and detectable differences. Now, using both yourself and diagrams, explain the correct way to the student. Nine times out of ten this will solve any pronunciation problems. The tenth time is often an Oriental student. I have found that if you ask him to speak in a deeper voice, his pronunciation will be improved.

JIM PELTIER
Island Lake, Ontario
May, 1973

It seems to me that I was told a long time ago (in the midst of a briefing session) that I could, if I saw fit, set up crafts classes for the women and children of the town I was about to enter. Let's have more discussion on the topic of crafts!! I feel it should be given its own little time slot in the course of a session. After all, look at all the time that's devoted to video tape. Some might shy away from the subject - especially the ones who are going to rail gangs (the origami paper objects would surely get ruined once the train started rolling). But if you're going to a place where there are children and young women you'll have a good time if you set up simple craft workshops. A "simple craft workshop" can be anything from an open fringes-painting session (what a mess) to making valentines cards. We did quite a few of them at Island Lake - they were all very spontaneous and nonchalant. A few of the married women were very interested in simply reading the Lewiscraft Catalogue. Remember - if you can teach English, or cut the heads off fish, you can also do crafts. A craft session has definite advantages – people enjoy themselves; some of the little boys who run about causing trouble turn out to be unusually creative; people are proud of what they can make with their own hands.

JANET GIBSON

Fort St. James, B.C.
August, 1973

I lost almost all my students a little while ago - the Immigration Dept. showed up and promptly five Punjabis let out into the bush. They didn't have their papers, as they came to Canada as visitors and then applied for jobs. Four of the five were regular students of mine, another student got transferred to another camp, another student took a two-week holiday, leaving me with a grand total of one! I appreciate the lull, for it gives me a chance to concentrate my time on a Greek fellow and the Portuguese and try to see if I can be of any help there.

JOHN McCAFFREY
Tasu, British Columbia
December, 1974

After 3 days in Vancouver digging up contacts, etc. I arrived at the ABC Employment people, took my medical, was given plane tickets, and wished a happy trip to Tasu where I was to be the first and only female worker in the mine site! As it happened, the other women who had applied had for one reason or another not been hired, and I found myself in the position of being the history-maker, standard bearer or whatever here in Tasu. Despite my apprehensions (which were slight to begin with) on that score, I thoroughly enjoyed the trip up - especially the last hop from Sandspit, in beautiful weather on Sunday, complete with that heart-stopping ride through the mountain pass in the bush plane.

... By this time, of course, I'd met some of the guys in the bunkhouse and was greeted with great cordiality (to say nothing of interest) by everyone. Despite the friendliness, however, walking into the cafeteria for breakfast on Monday morning at 7 a.m. was perhaps the most harrowing experience I have yet had: evidently there was a stunned silence, but I was so scared I didn't notice, my hands merely shook and I could hardly get words out of my throat. Everything else that has happened since seems mild in comparison.

... As for the work, that too, is a funny story. On Monday I really went at it (shovelling rocks falling from under a conveyor belt onto it, in the capping plant) because I felt that I had to show I could work. Little did I know that I was establishing a reputation as the female wonder: one of the old miners at breakfast Tuesday morning advised me to take it easy as rumors were flying thick and fast around camp that I was doing the work of two men. This had been repeated in one form or another over the past couple of days, but I wonder if people aren't just trying to be encouraging. But I think you can understand the pressure I feel under (or perhaps it's self-induced pressure?) to prove that I can work just as hard and produce just as much if not more than the men. Perhaps the old adage about women having to work twice as hard to get half as far is applicable here! (only at least I'm getting equal pay). Naturally, I am regarded as something of a freak, but my working and social relations with the men are very good.

As the sore muscles ease and the blisters turn into calluses (which they seem to be doing with remarkable speed) I am gradually getting things organized for teaching. Already 4-5 people have spoken to me about starting classes in the evenings and I have to get ahold of another person whom I've heard is interested. Tuesday night went to see the school principal and I'll be starting French with the 8's and 10's next week, an hour a day for only 2 days per week (but nevertheless a brief reprieve from the man!)
Some of these guys (more accurately, most) are just dying to talk to a woman and I think it will be an entirely good thing if the company can get more of us up here (to say nothing of the fact that that will relieve the strain on me!) funny how revealing some people are early in the morning over breakfast, but one of the bull-cooks told me this morning that he felt it was a good thing they had a woman in the bunkhouse - it seemed to increase morale among the men, spruce them up a bit, etc. Of course, I have no doubt that the novelty for them will eventually wear off, and then we will really get down to the nitty-gritty. So far, of course, everyone is on their "company behavior."

JANE HENSON
So far, I am still the only single female in the bunkhouse, though there are now 2 of us in the mine site workforce, the other being the wife of one of the engineers. Since the departure of my good friend, the nurse, this means that I am the only woman eating in the cookhouse as well. My greatest disappointment of all is to realize that after 4 months and all my efforts to blend in (ha!) I am still regarded as a conversation piece, to say nothing of a freak, probably and am still constantly watched. It is this watching, the constant unwanted and unavoidable attention that is the hardest of all to cope with. It has taken me this long to realize, much less accept the fact, that my private life can not be my own, that comings and goings at work are open to question by absolutely everyone, and that I am in a position of great emotional vulnerability. Perhaps the last needs a bit of explaining.

It seems to me that I am emotionally vulnerable because of my personal relationship with the men are constantly changing, and it is I, who has to make the adaptation. Come to think of it, it is this adaptation too constantly shifting ground that causes the greatest emotional drain. As an example, one hour say Saturday night at a dinner, I can be buddy-buddy with the guys as we eat; two hours later at the sing-along or in the bar, I have to relate to them in a totally different way; and Sunday morning I have to play the role of Mother Confessor and grant dispensations to the hung-overs and still-drunks who beg my forgiveness for stepping on my toes at the boogie last night. And so it goes. It seems sometimes as if everyone in Tasu has taken shares into the Jane Henson Corporation - some hold preferred stock, others have first option for a renewal, and everyone has a controlling interest but me, I'm just the figurehead chairman of the Bonds who signs the cheques and makes the speeches as the occasion warrants. I fight to gain some measure of control over my life in Tasu but it seems impossible because I am constantly being manipulated by the need to respond - in any fashion at all - even to all the situations, incidents and personalities that clamour for my attention.

I think the central question - and I hope I'm not labouring the point is this: Just how much garbage does a person have to take because she is female and because she is vulnerable?

Four months later, in April, 1975, Jane Henson was in a position to have further insights into her position as a woman working among a huge group of men in a big mine. She would later become Western Regional Coordinator for Frontier College.
PART THREE
1974–1999

Education
and
Survival
In 1976, when Frontier College began a series of projects with inmates in the Manitoba prison system, the program was called "New Frontier." This was appropriate and prophetic: the old frontier, a physical, geographic place on the edge of the hinterland was disappearing; displaced, as much as anything, by collapsing distances, by revolutions in transportation and communications. People who lived and worked there, as letters and reports from the field began to point out, no longer were as removed from educational and social resources - or from the material comforts of life - as they would have been in an earlier time. Frontier College had seen a substantial part of its mandate fulfilled.

Yet there was still a frontier, a place isolated from the rest of the world where few wished to venture. Over a million Canadians, a report in 1967 had pointed out, functioned at less than a grade six level of literacy. In a world increasingly dependent on communications skills, these people were often impoverished, marginalized, and largely ignored. Many of them lived right in the middle of Canada's biggest cities. Their social standing, economic opportunity, and political power were frequently at low ebb as well. This was the new frontier into which Jack Pearpoint, who became president in 1975, and John Daniel O'Leary, who followed him in 1991, now wanted to steer Frontier College.

The College started to pour energy into the support of literacy programs for prisoners, homeless people, new immigrants, people with disabilities, and children. A program called HELP worked throughout most of the 1980's with inmates and, when it folded, was followed up in the Kingston area with a prison literacy program. Partners in Learning brought literacy programs to the workplace and Beat the Street worked with homeless youth in downtown Winnipeg and Toronto. One-on-one ESL tutoring and Independent Studies Programs worked with individual learners, while Students for Literacy matched thousands of university volunteers with children, teens, and adults in a variety of school and community-based programs. Thousands were offered the opportunity to read when books were distributed by Read Canada and other family literacy programs into the eager hands of children and young students.

The geographic hinterland didn't disappear entirely from view. The traditional Labourer-Teacher still went out to work shoulder to shoulder alongside his or her (increasingly Frontier College was now sending out women) students. But throughout the next twenty years, many aspects of that tradition would be in the process of change.
Grey River, Newfoundland
October, 1975

Within the space of twenty-four hours we: came, used a real toilet (a surprise), met everybody, rang the church bell, led the singing of the hymns, saw our house (I cracked my head on a door – blood everywhere - don't send any six footers in the future to River - I'm only 5'9" and I've broken five light bulbs already), went to a real shotgun wedding plus the reception complete with 'white' rum from St. Pierre, slept in a real feather bed for one night, shook the hand of every man in River, had salmon steaks for breakfast ... the people of River went out of their way to welcome us. "Do you like it here?" "Do you think you'll come back next year?" - hard questions to answer after less than a day, and what a day!

What We Been Doing With Ourselves: The pace from the beginning has been hectic. People come to the door at all hours of the day and night - just to visit, to bring a loaf of bread or a piece of moose meat, to ask for the frizbee, to borrow matches or a cardboard box, to ask if we'd like to came up the bay berry picking .... It has been a major adjustment for both of us, who are used to a large measure of solitude.

Teaching has occupied us both, for most of our waking hours. Lynn is teaching the grade ones (eight kids) in our kitchen every morning. And in the afternoon she comes up to give me a hand with the grade two kids - most of whom do not even know their alphabet, let alone spell or read even the most basic words. I am teaching English to grades 2-8, but since the school is not completed yet (won't be before January) we are holding classes in the church. This means that only one group of kids can be taught at one time: every morning the grade 5-8's came from nine to twelve; every afternoon the grade 2-4's come from one to four; every Tuesday and Wednesday night the older kids come from six to eight; and every Monday and Thursday nights the younger kids come from six to eight.

The kids are keen to learn but are way behind - grade three kids can identify (just barely) mind bogglers such as 'the' and 'went' ... Lynn and I get excited, frustrated, elated, and deflated - a continuous cycle which makes us love teaching one minute and hate it the next. We have learned to measure success with a centimeter yardstick - one that measures smiles of accomplishment when Bill or Charlie can say what 'the' spells three times out of five.

Our evenings are spent preparing work sheets for the next day. The text books are usually worse than useless (List 5 Safety Rules for crossing busy streets etc. - which the kids can't read anyway). The picture that I've painted looks pretty black - it's really a bit better in reality. The kids really want to learn! That is something I really appreciate.

DALE and LYNN PETERS

In the 1970's, community-based education became established as a specialty of Frontier College. The following letters recount the settling-in of instructors to new postings in Newfoundland, the Northwest Territories, and British Columbia as well as to the college's first placement in a minimum security prison camp in Manitoba.
Igloolik, North West Territories
August, 1976

Settling ourselves into our house has been less of a hassle than we expected. The house has been
redecorated since the Denker's departure. Although we were told in Frobisher, on our way through, that
the Bay and Co-op in Igloolik were out of everything, provisioning ourselves until the sea lift arrives has
proved to be fairly easy. The caribou and char are delicious. Our house is the best in town - at least it's the
best located. So even if we are not involved in a whole lot yet, we are in a key situation to watch much of
what does go on - on the beach, in the Territorial and Hamlet offices, at the post office, and the Anglican
Church.

In our first few days we did the rounds of most of Igloolik's officialdom - territorial and hamlet offices,
churches, school, nursing station, etc. So we are known to, if not really acquainted with, most of the
young persons who hold positions in these institutions. We have yet to find opportunities to meet the
older elected leaders of all the committees which make Igloolik tick.

We have had to spend a good deal of time cleaning up the Adult Education Centre which had been
without supervision or good locks for five months. It isn't "Federal-Research-Station-spick-and-span" yet,
but it is comfortably ready. We have sought and received approval from the Department of Education to
hire a part-time janitor for the period of the BTSD course.

In cooperation with the Manpower Outreach officer we have advertised our BTSD course on the radio. A
week or so ago, eleven persons had registered. Several others have told us they intend to do so. So we
should be able to utilize our 15 places allotted by Manpower and the Territorial government. Unless a
number of men come forward at the last minute, the group is going to be almost all mothers. Of those
registered so far, two have had no previous schooling, one has completed Grade 9 and the rest have
attended previous Adult Education courses. We are looking into the possibility of conducting a
programme with a Grade 10 equivalency for the advanced students. The BTSD programme will start in
the first week in October when most people will have returned to the settlement and we will have returned
from Frobisher.

I have asked Joe Iyerak to give me a couple of hours of Inuktitut instruction each day, however, since I
made this arrangement, Joe has been out hunting.

We have worked on arranging further training outside the settlement for two people - Moses Kalliraq, an
officer with the Hamlet Council, and Ika Irngaut, a secretary-bookkeeper with the Co-op. This has given
us an opportunity to meet most of the people in these two offices.

Barbara has approached the secretary of the radio committee about becoming a member, and she has also
been "warned" that she will be approached by the ladies of the Home Management who evidently have a
problem.

We are off tomorrow for Frobisher for an in-service training/adult educators meeting. When we return
Igloolik should look and feel like home.

PETER HOFFMAN
Heavy drinking and violence have been the order of the day for the past three weeks. In the south village (Sesame Street) there have been several beatings and property damage, with of course the children being neglected. In the north village (Gas Town) it has been even worse with shooting, arson, rape and an accidental death. This set the ball rolling where we almost lost complete control here. It has taken ten hectic days to bring this situation to a point where we finally have order and can now continue with the business at hand.

The accidental death of a nine year-old native boy, who strangled himself on a home made swing, happened in the midst of all this confusion. The events that followed this incident caused some of the agony suffered by this community. The RCMP sent the body out for an autopsy to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory; after which it was left for the family to return the body for burial. The family being on welfare did not have the funds. The community raised the money to bring the body back, but, with interference from the Ways and Means this delayed and the war was on. Several events took place, to numerous to mention, and after it was settled the boy was finally buried ten days after his death. (Note: This was the first time our new church has been used for any type of service.)

The shooting and arson resulted during a heavy drinking spree. The husband threatened to shoot his children and shot the house up. The mother took the children to safety and returned and set the house on fire. The husband got out, so no one was hurt. The whole thing is under investigation by the RCMP.

The attacker in the rape has been apprehended but, the authorities are afraid the victim will not give evidence in court. One other resident has been flown out to Whitehorse hospital in critical condition as a result of a beating, etc., etc.

Well on the brighter side of things. Believe it or not through all this we are really making some headway. I arranged a meeting between the Natives and the local Conservation Officer. He explained the rules and regulations as they pertain to Natives. This was done as the Natives did not understand their position with reference to hunting and fishing laws. The meeting went over good, and the Natives expressed their thanks and commented that no one had ever taken time to explain the laws to them. All they ever got was harassment. As a result a good line of communication now exists between the Natives and the local officer.

The teachers at the public school are a great help with problems here in the community. They have set aside a two hour period on Friday afternoons for resource development. People in and out of the community are invited to use this time to provide information or demonstrations on any subject that may be beneficial to the students. I gave a talk and slide presentation on the differences between the Natives here and in Ontario where I come from.

GEORGE HOLMAN
Spence Bay, North West Territories
December, 1976

This second stint in Spence Bay was even more enjoyable than the first, though I had a rather rugged time with my "class" - all of four young women, two with nursing babies in their amantoks, one with two pre-school children hanging around.

My school-teacher host in Baker Lake, teaching a nominal grade VII - kids 14-16 - tells me that half the class don't turn up till the afternoon and the other half are too dopey from staying up half the night to be of much use when they do attend! Parental discipline is almost unknown here. Still, my remaining activities with the LEAP craft shop, run by a couple of highly capable and dedicated women, were most enjoyable, and while we averaged a 55 hour week for the three weeks, the time simply flew. I think that, knowing the hours I had put in, they were a little sceptical when I referred to it as my Spence Bay "holiday," but compared to some of the problems of Baker Lake, it was just that.

Baker Lake is a very different cup of tea, and sometimes a rather frustrating one. If I were a high powered executive, I would be climbing walls, and even as it is, I sometimes wonder what I'm achieving. I think it's fatal to try to apply Southern standards of efficiency, but the problem is always how far to let things go, especially when you feel they've gone too fare already. The problem is that there is often no alternative solution. Thus, the young Inuit manager I'm supposed to be training, is quite articulate and intelligent, excellent command of English, but doesn't turn up about 30-40% of the time, and I'm not exaggerating! He's reasonably effective when he does, though not with a terrible lot of initiative - I don't think I had much at that age either, now I come to remember.

I think we are making some progress, but in the Arctic where supplies come in once a year by barge, otherwise air-freight, and there's no pool of skilled labour, everything is an effort. Just two examples, we need an electrician to hook up some power tools and give us a better light in the office, at present graced by a single naked bulb - but try and find an electrician; we need a little more plywood for displays - try to get it, and so on and so forth! However, we have our small triumphs and surprises, a forthcoming brochure with photos taken locally promises well, and wonder of wonders, the Tax Dept. are not interested in our income (or rather, loss) until we incorporate! They even wrote a half-human letter ... "we don't want: a tax return ... " instead of something like the more usual, stilted "It is not the Department's policy to require ... etc ... "

HENRY GREEN
I never anticipated how difficult it would be to explain Frontier College to the people I'm supposed to be "helping." How do you say it so that it doesn't sound like an insult? These guys don't like some new guy coming into camp saying, "Well, I'm here to act as an educational facility and resource person, and I'm hoping to be able to organize educational or recreational programs here." I mean, I'm not even qualified to do this stuff, and this really mystifies them. I can't even offer them any ideas or examples of what I might be able to do, as I am as yet uncertain of my limitations, and to say that I can help them with access to retraining programs and to learn to read and write when I'm not sure they want or need anything like that might be a bad move. Anyway, I've kept Frontier very low key for now, but already I have a few ideas that might be a good start. First of all, there's definitely room and probably quite a demand for a library here, and I have another idea I'm going to start on as soon as I feel accepted enough to start proposing recreational projects.

QUENTIN STRUB

Bannock Point Rehabilitation Camp,
Seven Sisters Falls, Manitoba
January, 1977

I have been here for three and a half weeks. The initial difficulties of meeting people, settling in, of seeing and being seen, seem to have passed. I encountered a certain amount of suspicion upon arrival ... who is this guy ... why is he really here ... etc., but this was expected and it was easily overcome as I became known around camp. That is, everyone now knows who I am and what we're trying to do; it does not necessarily mean that they'll support the programme. Such support will depend on the quality of the work we do.

Most of the men who have come forward are young, and interested in continuing with school after their time here is done. There are not very many men in the rehabilitation camps over 30, so we can expect to be working with people of a regular high school and university age level. The men seem to like the idea of Frontier College (our not being attached to the Ministry of Corrections). The staff have been kind.

There may be difficulties with other types of programmes that I've planned. But for now it seems wisest to establish a good working relationship with the staff, and avoid any disputes. Camp discipline and the daily routine are sacred. I have been reprimanded for making my bed improperly, and for wearing my old jeans. It is a matter of pride with the staff that the camp is an efficiently run institution. This accounts for my apprenticeship in rules and regulations. Obviously it would be pointless to incur the administration's wrath over some wrinkled sheets, so I've been appropriately submissive.
There are nine people now involved with the educational programme. Six of them are taking correspondence courses towards completion of high school; one is working on basic reading and writing skills; one is a Quebecois who is learning to speak English; one is taking a business course for personal interest. We are using a vacant lounge as a class. Classes are being conducted each evening and on weekends. One of the happiest aspects of the programme has been the assistance I've received from two residents. Together we have formed a teaching team and we meet regularly to discuss students and courses, make plans etc. Each of them works most days with one or more of the men, and their efforts will make the programme much more effective. One of us is always available. There will likely be some administrative resistance to my request that these men be granted certain privileges related to their teaching (access to classroom; correspondence, etc.). We are now preparing classes for the new year, including a metric course for both residents and staff.

Plans for the future include: live entertainment ... there are local groups that provide music, dance, etc. for those living in institutions, and I'd like to get them here. This idea will almost certainly go over like the fabled lead balloon. This project will require some delicate negotiating. Native peoples' projects ... though there is always a large number of Indians here ... if it were approved, I'd try to bring in Indian speakers, films and cultural groups, etc. Local needs ... I'd like to look into the possibility of a role for Frontier in the local community. One of the men at work has talked with me about upgrading. There may be a need here. And is there a way to improve relations between the camp and the community?

There was a problem at work with the guys on my crew. They were never told why I'd been hired or what Frontier was doing. They thought it was odd that a man would be hired now, when others have been laid off, and before long suspicion was growing and rumours were circulating (at one point I was reported as being a spy from Ottawa). For four days no one spoke to me and I ate lunch on the floor ... no chair being provided. I then spoke to the foreman and to the union steward (who was taught English by a Frontier teacher many years ago) and it was all cleared up. I would suggest that in all our other placements out here, the local people should be adequately briefed.

"Eternal Spirit of the chain less Mind!
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty, thou art,
For there thy habitation is the heart ...
»
Lord Byron

*JOHN O'LEARY*

*John Daniel O'Leary would later become President of Frontier College.*
I've been working mainly on the track with the rest of the gang. This was good, because it's on the track that the best rapport is possible. I've also been working a little as timekeeper, but this took up little time. Then last Friday, I was pulled off the track by the foreman and made to stay in camp. This is absurd. Timekeeping usually takes about 2 hours a day. This leaves me with a lot of time to do nothing. I help out in the kitchen occasionally but they have little need of me there. The effect of all this has been to cut me off from the men to some extent.

The foreman is a rather miserable man in his late fifties. He doesn't talk he growls or shouts. He is rarely pleased. I've come to the point where I want to run every time I see him. He has nothing but criticism for me. To make matters worse, as the timekeeper, I have to share a bunk car with him and sit across the table from him at meals.

I feel as though I'm being systematically stripped of all my dignity. Any attempts on my part to say anything about my position have been shouted down. I've been told that if don't like it I can quit. That's all.

Anyway, I let all this get to me at first. It was crushing. I've found a little spark of hope deep inside, however, so I'm not ready to give in yet.

My one student (prospective anyway) to learn to read and write told me yesterday to forget it. I suspect he doesn't want to be related to the flunky. My position has become pretty ineffectual.

I feel a little empty right now, but think that with a little time I stand a chance of turning things around. I'm starting to get a different perspective on the situation. I'm not totally caught up in it. (That's part of the purpose in writing this.) I'll keep working on the foreman.

Of the gang itself I've never seen men take so much bullshit. The foreman continually screams at them. They can do nothing right for him. Half the labourers that were here 25 days ago, when I started, are gone. Our cook cracked up and has been replaced. The workers are quitting next month. They can't take the constant intimidation by the foreman.

*Dick Graham*
It's a nice feeling being here— the mountains are all about me, the trees are on top of me and the air is in me— it's a great feeling. The mountains goose the clouds (which tends to tell you where my head is at). The mountains must be monuments to something— perhaps to God— I prefer to think of them in such terms rather than a fault in the earth's crust that erupted by glacier pressure da-da; da-da. Aren't we romantics disgusting?

The gang is divided quite evenly into lifers (perennial gangmen) and young people with little other opportunities; of that group you have dopers, "drinkers" and those middle class people that want to see some country. The old timers are immigrants to a small degree (Cubans, East Indians) with whom I hope to pursue English lessons. The bulk of frontier work will be to set up some sort of make shift library and recreation activities (games, etc.) and interact within that gap of generations as best I can.

The roadmaster must work on a commission basis because each day is long and the men are literally worn out, so Sunday is indeed the day of rest.

National Film Board movies go over like a punctured whoopie cushion, so the major movies from paramount distributors are the answer - I'll soon get a reply from them. Recreation is around soccer and football both of which take their injury toll when played in work boots. Language aid is mostly done to the Cuban workers (2) that pronounce English as it's spelt - you can imagine the confusion!

My most crucial assistance to date was the swaying of a youth entering a tattoo parlor—he wasn't sure if an eagle or a parrot would be distinguishing enough. I convinced him either a chess board or a map of the world would be more practical although the tattooist wanted $100.00 for a chess board and over $300.00 for a map of the world. So I said that I'd do it – it worked out badly - seriously he didn't get one which made me feel dandy. I find the most pressing thing is to spend at least ½ hour talking to each and every person and so far it's worked well – needless to say it comes easy talking for a couple of hours yet even when people are difficult to speak with usually the next day is easier and when you show interest in them (more than ten minutes) they respond very well.

DAVE NEIL
Tasu, British Columbia
October 14, 1977

If one briefly scans the previous reports of former LT's in Tasu one thing becomes quite obvious: the role of the LT is firmly established. By this I mean that for all intense purposes he or she is considered primarily an instructor of English for those who need second language training. Certainly one is not solely confined to this alone. For example, subjects such as French and mathematics have also been taught on a regular basis in the past. Yet the LT is still fairly restricted in the type of activities that he or she will perform. I don't mean to belittle this for it is of course an important gap which has to be filled. My point here is to show that other possible areas of Frontier such as community development are not really needed. The reason behind this is quite simple. There are a number of very capable people in Tasu whose jobs pertain specifically to community development.

Mr. Terry Ford, the recreation director handles everything from movies to camping expeditions - to a wide variety of sports programs. As recreational director he devotes an enormous amount of time and energy to planning social and community functions. Along with this - there is a very active Teens Club which also helps sponsor and organize special events - such as fishing derbies and fairs for the children.

In essence then, Tasu has a well established sound framework which the LT must fit into.

Probably the most constructive recommendations I can make for future LT's concerns the use of language tapes to enforce their English Teaching. Tasu is an ideal situation for this type of facility, since there is a permanent classroom in which some sort of tape recorder and library of tapes maybe kept. The citizenship office which publishes Carson Martin English texts has also developed accompanying tapes for Books I and II. In addition to this other tapes can be found, and an LT may even make his own tapes as he needs them. I believe this would be a big help to many of the people now in Tasu.

The second recommendation I would like to make concerns the actual need of a Frontier College LT in Tasu at this time. The number of foreign workers and their families has been declining substantially in Tasu over the past six months. They have been replaced by a younger - English Canadian social group which have little use for Frontier College work. I think it is important to keep track of our utility in places like Tasu, and that the services that are being offered are actually used. It is wrong to be in a certain place just for the sake of being there. All that I can say is that I observed this decline in the foreign population of Tasu, which is after all the major stimulus for Frontier activities. This is not to say that this situation will change once again - I am only making an observation based on our experience at this time.
I have spoken a lot about "them" or "this", but little about myself. I learned a lot about my own inadequacies as an LT this summer. This is especially the case with my experiences in teaching English as a second language. Someone once said that teaching is an art: (I think someone once said this!) it requires a great deal of sensitivity to others' problems as well as a good deal of spontaneity in order to treat each class as a new challenge. It is very easy to get bogged down if you are not careful.

Three and one half months is really just too short a time to see any results. Relationships are established not on the basis of longevity (I'm here like you are for awhile) but more on the fleeting notion of just passing through, I found that my relationships with certain students grew as my stay in Tasu drew to a close. The safety valve of time was I think the reason behind this.

As I look over this report, I can see I have omitted a lot. The small things have been left out - the conversations, the small talk which I learned from. This summer I was once again confronted with the problem of swallowing my pride. If the foreman yelled at me or if it was done in a little bit more sophisticated way - I was affected by it. I hope that some day I will be able to turn the other cheek and take all this sort of thing in stride.

IAN SHORT REED
The following, segments from a general letter called *A Look Ahead*, by College president Jack Pearpoint, heralded a shift in the way Frontier College wanted to work in the 1980's and 1990's. The College was ever mindful of its limitations, both those of size and resources, but also strictly imposed limitations as to its purpose.

If the College was small and felt limited, however, this might also somehow be its strength. Pearpoint observed that Frontier College enjoyed the luxury of Flexibility. Throughout a long tradition, its volunteers had become among the best anywhere in the world, one might argue, at becoming self-reliant. Frontier College had a strong tradition, but that tradition was itself somehow a vehicle of liberation; it was not the type of stultifying tradition that would freeze the institution into inaction.

Two years later, the weaknesses of that structure became evident. Because they knew their regions better, the co-ordinators gradually began to explore more complex long term placements which resulted in increasingly unrealistic demands on them. They needed more time to develop their special placements, more time to respond to requests from fieldworkers who now expected more, and an increasingly broad range of skills to cope with demands - from counselling on a rail gang, to running a small business development workshop. The strains increased as the jobs became more unrealistic as time went on. Various attempts have been made to lessen the load and improve effectiveness, but each change seemed to make the frustrations of the jobs more acute. A special recruiting co-ordinator was hired to relieve some of the pressures. The result has been better handling of all applicants, and with it a greater expectation from fieldworkers for more professional support and resources. We have worked to create local life member associations to add support for fieldworkers and co-ordinators. They have, but they have also increased demands. Regional workshops for fieldworkers were attempted. They have been a success, but they have to be organized and increased follow-up is required. In short, the job of regional co-ordinator has become impossible as presently constituted. The problem is not how to maintain particular jobs. Rather, it is how does Frontier meet the support requirements for fieldworkers in order that they may carry out their work with less advantaged Canadians more effectively. Clearly regional workshops, life member groups, and recruitment co-ordinators are moves that enhance support. The problem is how do we maintain field support in key areas and increase support in areas in which we have never been able to provide it.

**July 17, 1978**

**FRONTIER- A LOOK AHEAD**

I am writing this letter to inform everyone associated with the College of staff changes, new structures, and future plans for Frontier College. Change is never easy, but change is always inevitable. When some people leave, new faces appear. This letter will introduce you to one new face, and will tell you about an exciting new plan for yet another phase in the history of Frontier College.

A brief historical perspective is essential to put events in order. When I joined Frontier College just over three years ago, there were no regional coordinators, and part-time personnel did their best to respond to requests from the field on the basis of "who's available." There was no organizational memory, i.e. records, other than a collage of incredible stories collected by individual staff members. To make the jobs more feasible, and to ensure that the organization learned from its successes and failures more efficiently, the concept of regional co-ordinators was introduced. These positions greatly improved our responsiveness to field requirements, as there was now a person who knew the region and the people more than superficially.
This brings us to the present and future. I do not believe that any answer is permanent, but clearly the time and opportunity for a shift within Frontier has arrived. Your feedback and suggestions will be critical in maintaining a good process of communication which will keep the College alive and relevant. Frontier has not survived for 79 years by being brittle; it has been flexible to the times. It has also retained its essential role as an educational institution with limited goals and objectives. Those principles must remain stable.

Trying to look ahead and envision a structure that would maintain the principles and personal style of the College, and also add to our capacity to support you and meet the needs of individuals and communities, several thoughts were prominent. First and foremost, Frontier College is an educational institution - different than most, but still an institution. It pioneered the principle of working with people as teacher-learners, and learner-teachers. It is soundly based on the principles of equal rights and opportunities, and on the fundamental dignity of human beings. One of the ways the College has been able to maintain those principles is by staying relatively small. If the College grows uncontrollably, it will inevitably become like any other large institution. Instead, we have consciously encouraged each of you, by relying on your own resources, to build an ethos of self-reliance wherever you work. Thus, ideally, the College works with individuals, groups or communities for short periods, then formally phases itself out, leaving a core of self-reliance that can maintain itself. Clearly we have been less than fully successful, and it is for this reason that we are changing.

Two levels of change are required. First, in each of us personally, we must abandon the idea that working for Frontier College is a "neat, macho, summer job." The College is dedicated to principles, and if you work for the College and accept those principles, you do not pack them up and ship them back to Frontier at the end of a placement. Rather, you take those principles and try to implement them in whatever way you are best able, wherever you are, as long as you accept the principles. That is what the concept of "life member" means, and it is what I hope you become - whether you maintain a formal affiliation or not.

The second level of change regards our programme delivery. Historically, Frontier College had Labourer-Teachers. Today we have Labourer-Teachers and a limited community education programme. We have attempted to integrate them and treat them as similar programmes. They are related, one follows the other and they are not the same. The Labourer-Teacher programme is Frontier College Prontiere an excellent programme. It meets many needs that could not be met by any other programme and is excellent for both teachers and learners. It is the basic delivery system of Frontier College and should be strengthened and increased. However, community education programmes are also important and they have made increasingly complicated demands on the organization to which we were unable to respond effectively. Thus, the organization must move to a more formal recognition of the two levels of programme delivery: a general broad based Labourer-Teacher programme which requires one type of support; and a smaller, more specific community education programme which demands highly skilled professional backup. We must now build in an organizational capacity to provide that level of support. This means becoming more effective at gathering the resources and providing the skills to build real self-reliance, so that people really are taking control over their lives.

JACK PEARPOINT
In 1976, figures showed that the educational attainment of the average of Canada's 20,000 prison inmates was grade seven, and that 80 per cent had no skill or job training. Jails were becoming identified as communities of great need. Engaging a former CUSO volunteer, Neil Webster, to set it up, Frontier College took on a five-year pilot program with the federal and provincial corrections systems in Manitoba. "New Frontier" eventually employed twenty-five people working in seven different corrections facilities.

A National Parole Service official at the time described prison inmates as needing service at a very basic level. "By the time a guy falls into our system," he wrote, "he has already been through every agency and has failed at every program." Therefore, New Frontier tried to be both comprehensive and basic. It offered life skills - including driver education - to dozens of inmates. In the end, over its five years, it placed and paid one hundred and two ex-inmates in employment, and was responsible for the creation of three separate new projects each employing and affecting innumerable individuals.
TED STONE  
Job Placement Worker, New Frontier, 
Brandon, Manitoba  

When I came I thought that people didn't need just a job, but needed something that would make them feel good about themselves. So I tried to find out what a person had respect for. If it happened to be an occupation, then I would try to get them into that occupation. It turned out that almost nobody wanted to be on farms; farm jobs were the kinds of jobs they had always had. They were just labouring jobs that they didn't want to have anything to do with. Usually, not always.

By the end we had decided that the value of the program wasn't just in finding a career. In the few cases that people did want a career it was often difficult to work one. One fellow, Hector, wanted to be a plumber. He had something very definite to do. He's dependable as hell and he could handle the job. But it was very difficult to place him in a steady job in a rural area. The employers can't guarantee year-round work because there isn't enough work.

CHARLIE TANN  
Ex-inmate, 49, incarcerated for 20 years  
Employed through New Frontier job placement  
program to counsel juveniles in Winnipeg, Manitoba  

Rick Palmer at Stony Mountain told me to give Frontier College a call when I got out. So I phoned Neil Webster and I said my name is Charlie Tann and I just got out of the pen and he said, great, why don't you come on over and talk to me about it. And he gave me an application to fill out. John O'Leary came down, he was on a recruitment trip, and he said: "So what do you want to do?" And I said that I wanted to work with kids but in a different way. I think I have a bit of an idea what's wrong. Basically it's that people get stuck into a job working with kids and they get frustrated. They work once or twice with a kid but the kid buggers up and comes back and then they pass him on to someone else or get him up into the adult system. I think my frustration tolerance level is higher than most people's because I've been frustrated all my life, being in the pen, always trying to work out deals trying to get out and it never working. So he asked what kind of plan I had to work with kids. I said basically none. Just say to a kid, hey, I've been where you have been and part of me is still there. And like it or not, I'm going to help you. And then stick to it. I said it sounds simple and it probably is simple, but it can work.
PAT PIDLASKI  
Job Placement Worker, New Frontier  
Rossburn, Manitoba  

A lot of the people I placed went into jobs where they wouldn't have hired anyone otherwise. It wasn't that there wasn't work that had to be done. It's just that they couldn't afford to take another person on. In one case, the garage in Rossburn, they've agreed now that we've placed someone there that they will hire him on.

BRUCE COMRIE  
New Frontier Driving Instructor  
Dauphin, Manitoba  

A lot of times all a guy knows is that he has ten motor vehicle charges against him. Say three are speeding, four are drinking and driving and on and on. He wouldn't know how many points he has against him, he wouldn't know how those points come down, he wouldn't know how long he had been suspended for, he wouldn't know when he could get his licence back, how much it would cost him to get it back, how he could get a special licence for purposes of work, on and on. The fellow wouldn't know all the legalities around the licencing process. He would just know, "well I drank and I drove and I guess I'm in jail; now what do I do?"

I found there that many people wanted to get their licences but they would just have grade five or six, they would get hold of the driver handbook and find that it was geared to people with a grade eleven; they would get discouraged studying, would give up, and would just get in the car and go anyway. The majority of the people operated this way.

At times I just wanted to chuck the whole thing. For example, I spent three months going through the advanced performance driver courses, I taught five of the courses before I realized that it wasn't doing any good. It was an excellent course but it just wasn't for the people we wanted to work with. It was too advanced in terms of language and all that kind of thing. But I didn't know that until I did it. We went through every single thing that the Manitoba Safety Council offers, that the Motor Vehicle Branch offers; we used all those resources and found that they were lacking. We couldn't use any of those things because they weren't geared to the people we were working with. We realized, "Hold it, we have to develop our own." But by then we could say with a fair amount of authority that we had gone every possible route to reach the people we wanted to work with.
The College is not a revolutionary organization but is primarily an educational resource which tries to provide individuals and communities in Canada's outlying areas with some basic tools with which to solve some of their own problems. It is self delusion to think that we can lead these people out of the land of bondage to the promised land.

Various groups which we are trying to serve, such as the Inuit, have their own leaders and ideas and are capable of sorting out their own problems. The College can provide some skills which may expedite solutions to these problems. Such should be its role. I honestly believe that these people actively seek their own solutions to poverty, ignorance, injustice and oppression. We have to have faith in their aspirations and the justice of their cause or sink into becoming missionaries. This was precisely what Rodney Soonias was talking about when he challenged the role of fieldworkers and the College itself at the Dawson Creek Regional Workshop.

There are approximately one million functionally illiterate people in Canada. It is indeed a formidable task to try and assist these people in acquiring some measure of control over their circumstances. Is this not reason enough for the College to exist? Our work in prisons and in community development is still at a seminal stage and it seems to me that we are still "feeling out" these areas. In time however, we will acquire depth here too. We cannot overlook the fact that much of the financial support of Frontier College comes from corporations, private foundations and individual donors. If the senior management personnel of the College were to issue a challenge to the system, there will be no money forthcoming.

PHIL FERNANDEZ *

*Philip Fernandez would later become a Senior Trainer with Frontier College.
February, 1981

Frontier College workers in Labrador, more specifically in the Indian communities of Sheshatshit and Utshimasit, find themselves facing and having to deal with a number of issues that can be significant in terms of how well they are able to do their jobs.

The first and most obvious of these issues is that of non-Indians living and working in Indian communities. Both Sheshatshit and Utshimasit have, in their brief life as communities (so-called), had many experiences with non-native peoples and for the most part, these experiences have probably been detrimental to the Indian people. Regardless of how well meaning a person may be, there can be an incredibly fine line between doing things "for" people and doing things "with" people, so they can then do for themselves. Generally most non-native people have been engaged in activities in which they were doings things for the people. The process in which people are taught things so that they can then do them for themselves, seems to be so much more laborious, time consuming, and perhaps even expensive, that most often non-native people will choose to do it for the Indian people.

Certainly it can be a painful experience to be a part of this slow process and that is why there is this invisible push by all parties "to do it for them." This is also complicated by the fact that there are so many non-native people acting in capacities in these communities where their mandate simply is to do
"for the people". There is no process at all whereby any attempt is made to transfer skills to the people and this has become the norm for the way non-natives operate and many Indian people themselves have expectations for this.

This issue is clouded even more if the non-native person happens to be a nice guy and is well liked by the people.

In these communities we, as field workers, do not speak the people's language, and the Naskapi-Montagnais language is definitely the first language of the people. Most people over the age of 30 speak little or no English and their language is the language of the homes and of their work. Most of us, upon coming to these communities, were almost completely ignorant of the unique culture and traditions of the Naskapi-Montagnais people. What makes this important when talking about the issue of non-Indian people working in an Indian community, is that knowledge of the language and of the traditions and culture, are critical to how well a field-worker can manage in the community and this knowledge takes time to learn in the community, which is really the only place to learn. Yet upon arriving in a community, the field-worker is expected to begin their job and it is at that point in time we have to begin to balance doing our job while lacking knowledge of the people and their place and trying to gain some of that knowledge so as to be able to do the job better.

The next issue which we face here is difficult to describe but it stems from the historical developments of the communities of Sheshatshit and Utshimasit. Both these communities could be described as "enforced" communities because there was no slow, gradual development of the community. Sheshatshit, for example, was a traditional summer resting place for people who spent the rest of me year travelling in me bush, but a community by name was created in order to deliver to me people certain services, i.e. school, health and social services.

This has created an incredible problem for the people in terms of their ability to live in a community and to think of this place where hundreds of people happen to live as a community. On the one level it is extremely difficult for the Band to even begin to deliver basic services such as garbage pickup and water delivery, but on another level, it is hard for neighbours to get along well, and be supportive of each other when this may be critical in terms of their being seen as a minority group by outside groups. The issue within this for the field-worker is how to deal with our perceptions of community and "community development," while working in a place where these perceptions almost assuredly are not shared by the people who live there.

There is another issue within this broader one of non-Indians working and living in an Indian community. This is related to the fact that Frontier College field-workers have generally taken their direction from local groups, whether it be a Board of Directors, or the Band Council, and not only has this been seen as unusual by many other non-natives, but it has been seen as problematic by other non-natives. There are two distinct groups of non-natives who seem to see the idea of taking direction from the local people as problematic. The first group are the non-native people of Labrador, i.e. the settlers, who are suspicious and distrustful and perhaps with good reason, but who, in general, have no use for the outsiders, which we as field-workers would be considered.

It is perhaps more problematic when other outsiders, generally in decision making positions vis-a-vis the Indian people, are distrustful and suspicious of field-workers. Usually these people are trying very hard to
stay clear of any kind of local control over how they make decisions and any people working in a situation whereby they are taking directions locally and having success are almost to be discredited and at the least, to be viewed as a threat and this has been the experience here.

At this point in time Labrador is an area rife with political and social issues and in itself this fact is an issue for field-workers. The people of Sheshatshit and Utshimasit have, for a number of years and are presently in the process of working on a "land claim," and involved in this process are decisions which have to be made regarding every aspect of life for the people here. This process is happening at a time when resource and industrial development of Labrador is a major issue. Consequently the Indian people in Labrador are constantly finding themselves in a position of reasserting the fact that they want a just settlement of their claim before any further development takes place.

This is an issue for field-workers here because it seems that it is necessary to use whatever skills we may have to help the people here assert their feelings about resource and industrial development and about the land claim process. In my opinion one cannot "not be political."

LYLA MacEACHERN

Lyla and several other Frontier College workers chose to remain in Labrador and make their homes in the communities of Sheshats hit, Northwest River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The communities in Labrador have experienced a great deal of change over the last twenty years. Even the language used to identify and describe the Aboriginal People has changed. Today, those who were once called "Indian" are known nationally and internationally as Innu. In their own language Innu means "Human being."
June, 1981

THREE YEARS IN RED LAKE

If you look on a map you will see that Red Lake is at the end of a Trans-Canada offshoot, Highway 105. Some people here say that as soon as they turn north on that road, they psychologically feel they are headed down a route that eventually narrows to a dead end. In my mind's eye, the road is viewed from Red Lake and I see it as my avenue out if I should so choose.

Knowing the people here is like getting acquainted with Canada's immigration policies of the past fifty years. The immigrant people here are fully cognizant that the extraction of Canada's natural resources was done by their hands. They also knew that the gold mines want strong backs and weak minds and, once injured, they will be discarded as quickly as possible. Worker's Compensation is no special friend either.

Our initial task was to do a six month needs assessment survey of the immigrant population. Upon its completion, it was easily concluded that English classes that met the working and domestic schedules of the students was the most glaring need. After a summer school course in teaching English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) we started an English programme. We are just now completing the second year.

The students of this programme are from Poland, Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia, Panama, Equador, Portugal, French -, English-and native-speaking Canada. Their education ranges from illiterate in their own languages to a grade 10 level.

Over the year we have had 60 students enrolled at one time or another but transience, illness, on job accidents, disinterest, acquisition of jobs, weather, etc. keep the figure in constant flux. It has made planning of lessons difficult but this is a reality of any adult education course.

With the help of student produced materials we are slowly acquiring reading materials and photos which are based on a Northwestern Ontario reality. Mines, the bush, long winters, local affairs, worker's compensation, ski-dooing, fishing - these are subjects of interest not readily available in prepared texts which are urban and southern oriented.

A new addition to the programme which started in February, 1981, is an E.S.L. in-the-work-place class. With the co-operation of the local Steelworker's union and the management, the classes were organized on the basis that the students be financially reimbursed by the mine for 1/2 of the time they spend in class. This programme has enjoyed moderate success (16 students) and we hope with further outreach, it will expand next September.
Monitoring attendance is a constant aggravation as our funding (from the Board of Education and the provincial Ministry of Culture and Recreation) depends on a minimum attendance level. Our base line philosophy is that literacy and E.S.L. classes are people's right, not privilege and, hence, student numbers should not determine the existence of a class. Naturally, the funding bodies don't share our views and we often find ourselves feeling like Truancy Officers. We do not like to put adults in that position.

We are only minimally connected with Frontier at this time. Our funding, as mentioned, comes from the province and the programme is run by the local Adult English Education Committee which is made up of students. Because of the Committee's lack of experience and unwillingness to handle a large budget, it was decided that Frontier be approached to handle bookkeeping and bimonthly payments of cheques to the instructors. This, so far, has been a satisfactory arrangement as the students (whose spare time is limited) attend classes to learn oral, reading and writing English skills, not budget management.

In the almost 3 years we've been here, we have seen a dramatic increase in the consciousness of women's issues. Recently there was a Northwestern Ontario Women and Health Conference in Dryden which was well attended by ordinary women (i.e. not all the local professionals).

I think what is most challenging in these "remote," "isolated" communities is the open invitation they offer. The rigidity of time has not rendered the institutions in the area immobile. There is still the excitement that things could change – you just have to be prepared to work very hard for it.

A UDREY ANDERSON and
RICHARD WHITTAM
The next two letters, sent from instructors assigned to rail gangs a decade apart, at the beginning and then at the end of the 1980's, represent the last breath of a huge chapter in Frontier College history. The last LT to work on a rail gang went out in 1991. By the 1990's labourer-teachers were working not in industry, mines, and construction, but on vegetable, fruit and tobacco farms where many of the workers are from Mexico and Jamaica. This reinvention was, in fact, barely a step sideways from Frontier College's long-time specialty. Nonetheless many former Labourer-Teachers could be excused a moment of nostalgia for the removal of the last Frontier College poster from the last CN or CPR bunk car.
CNR Prairie Region Gang 800
June 8, 1981

We were given a 20 minute lunch break once a day. Lunch was brought to us (usually 3 sandwiches, fruit, coffee, Kool-Aid) anytime between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. A lot of guys were concerned about the breaks or lack thereof. After lunch one day I asked the same assistant foreman, who thought he was a sergeant in the National Socialist Army, why we didn't have more time for breaks during the day. (Actually I believe I said "When are we going to get some .... in' regular breaks around here.") His response was that a 20 minute paid break was CN regulation. I replied that CN was mistaken in its interpretation of the legal requirements for break time (again, a bit of poetic licence on my part). Also I wasn't sure what the break requirements were because I was still trying to figure out which parts of the Canadian Labour Code applied to railroads. At that point something funny happened. One of the machine operators came up to me while I was still walking with the assistant foreman and said "Hey college boy, what are you taking at school anyway?" I told him I was going to Law School and he then asked if they could make us go back to work so soon after lunch. I answered "No" rather loudly. I really wasn't sure but I figured the assistant foreman didn't know either. The next day the same assistant foreman told us to take a 15 minute break twice in the same morning. (And who said bullshit never works.)

There was a fair bit of dope on the gang but I didn't see anyone stoned on the job. However, we still hadn't received a paycheck yet and that may have changed things somewhat. No alcohol was allowed on CN property and most guys obeyed that rule. A number of guys however went into town and got drunk pretty well every night. Again, nobody was drunk at work other than the cook and the back-hoe operator who was sub-contracted.

In terms of the usefulness of the College on the gang, the gang I was on was hard to work with since a lot of these guys went home for the weekend and so didn't feel the isolation as much as I'm sure many gangs do.

There was some value in the College's being there, though. Getting guys interested in setting up sporting events is something that needed initiating. I also found the resource function a need that wouldn't have been met without the College (some guys wanted to finish high school by correspondence and just needed someone to egg them on).

There was an older Polish chap on the gang who was the bullcook. The day before I left I'd had a bit of a chat with him and it seemed there was potential there. He didn't read at all because he knew little English and seemed interested in learning some. Supplying him with Polish reading material also would have been helpful. I think the most important function I could have served out there, however, was just to be a friend to the guys who either didn't seem to fit into gang life, or who were victims of the "kicking can" syndrome. There were a couple of guys there who were picked on regularly. I found that starting up a conversation with them would get them talking. Everybody wants to talk to somebody, and simply by coming up to them some day and saying "Hi, where do you come from?" will get them talking about a lot of things they want to talk about.

On my first day there the Program Supervisor introduced me to the whole gang as the man from Frontier College and said I'd be teaching there. As I got to know the guys I found that the first impression they had of me from the introduction ranged everywhere from an entertainment rep to a bible school evangelist. The bible school impression was eliminated the first time I uttered an expletive deleted when I missed the spike I was swinging at.
As somebody said at the orientation session, Frontier College is me. It's going to a work site as yourself, not as a teacher or anything but a labourer who happens to have some resources and some enthusiasm. I found that it was helpful to some people to try to be a friend to them, but that doesn't mean that you have to go in like some wishy-washy do-gooder. There were some guys there whom I thought were asses or big bullies and I acted toward them the same way I acted toward any ass I'd meet at school.

The environment is different but the Labourer Teacher is the same guy he is in the city. Except that he has a lot more to learn from the people he's working with.

One or two more points. The books are a big help. A lot of guys were asking about something to read - anything to read.

MARK O’NEIL
Canadian Pacific Steel Gang  
Sparwood, B.C.  
Summer, 1991

My first day ever on the gangs, I was sent to work with the machine operators, who consisted of 10 Newfies and one little spike sitter, who was an East Indian. We moved 20 miles up the track and stopped for a break. The next thing I knew, the Newfies had blindfolded the East Indian man and duct-taped him to one of the machines. They proceeded to poke and taunt him. I was scared as hell, not because it was my first day, but because I had never seen anything like that before in my life. As soon as the Newfies had lost interest in their little game, I helped the man get untied.

* * * * *

My first spiking attempt was an absolute disaster. After a few days of doing scrap I had had enough. I finally grabbed a hammer and attempted (inconspicuously) to drive a spike. EVERYONE stopped working to watch the 'greenhorn' in action. After about thirty swings I had managed to take off a lot of rail, splinter beyond recognition a tie, and got a foreman yelling at me. I'll never forget his words as he ripped the hammer away from me: "Give me that hammer boy you're slowing down the whole gang!"

* * * * *

One of my proudest moments on the gang occurred After a long, hard day in B.C.. A rail veteran who had just been transferred to our gang got on the bus and told me to move from my seat. I lifted up my head and told him I was too tired and to go find another seat. He didn't like that idea too much and started tugging at me and telling me to move., One of the Newfies overheard what was going on and started yelling at the guy, telling him to find his own seat. The other Newfies caught wind of what was going on and started yelling at the guy too. Pretty soon, the whole bus was yelling at him and making cry-baby noises. Eventually the veteran gave in (although not before swearing and throwing his bag down) and moved to another seat. It's funny that something I found so childish three moths before now was very important to me. It felt good to have "earned" my seat.

* * * * *

I remember having a terrible nightmare somewhere in the middle of my second shift. I dreamt that I was in Saskatchewan all by myself with a foreman. All I could see was rail for miles and mile. I looked up at the foreman and he said with an evil laugh "Anchors, boy, anchors".

In my last shift in Saskatchewan, another worker and I put on 12 miles of anchors. The nightmare becomes real!

MIKE FARLEY
To be a Labourer-Teacher in 1999 is, in many ways, not that much different than it was a century ago. At nine o'clock on a warm June evening, Evan Rokeby-Thomas unlocks the door to the lunchroom in the middle of a compound of sprawling greenhouses and machine sheds at Dutchmaster nursery farms just outside Pickering, Ontario and clears a day's worth of debris away from in front of his blackboard. After a thirteen hour-long work day of weeding rows of saplings and re-potting hundreds of manchu cherry shrubs, he's had about forty-five minutes for a quick shower and supper. His students tonight, four Mexican men who want to work on their basic English, are just as weary as he is. But the opportunity is not one they want to pass up. Tomas, who is 38 and comes from a small village south of Mexico City, has been making the trip to Canada every March for six years in order to put in seven or eight months on a Canadian farm or nursery. The work is hard, the hours are long, but if he looks after his earnings carefully during his stay he can manage to amass ten or twelve thousand dollars to send back to his wife and four children in Mexico.

In previous years, Tomas admits, he did his work as he was best able to understand it. He never had the benefit of a foreman who spoke Spanish. And he, alas, understood no English. Until now. His posting this year, with twenty-one of his fellow countrymen, is on one of the increasing number of farms where Frontier College has been invited to place Labourer-Teachers. On this farm, it is Evan Rokeby-Thomas.

"What did you do today?" Evan writes on the blackboard and speaks the question clearly addressing Tomas, Victor, Jose, and Armando. This is a repetition of a method of instruction Evan's grandfather, Howard Rokeby-Thomas, might have used back in 1929 when Frontier College placed him as a "swamper" at the J. R. Booth lumber camp in northern Ontario. Or that Evan's father, Dave, might have employed on the CNR Extra Gang #351 in 1962. Evan, who is 32 and a music student at the University of Saskatchewan, is one of a handful of people who are second or third generation Frontier College volunteers. His commitment, however, is not specifically because his father and grandfather did this before him. It comes, he says, from an interest in literacy that was first sparked when he volunteered at a Saskatoon food bank. "I couldn't help but notice how the people who came there needed much more than food," he says. "Almost all of them had problems dealing with things in their lives, and a good many of those difficulties came out of being unable to read or understand things that our increasingly complex society was asking of them."
The literacy needs of the Mexican workers on the farm where Evan has been placed are not much different. After a session on work-related phrases, like "I want you to do the weeding on this row," they enter into twenty minutes practicing the sort of dialogue they will need to order dinner when they finally all go out together to a Canadian restaurant. At the end of the class another man, Roberto, comes in to enlist Evan's help with a more complicated problem; he fears that the transfer of his paycheck from the local Canadian bank to a bank in Mexico may have gone astray. He needs to trace it and he doesn't understand how to go about doing that.

There are currently some 12,000 migrant farm workers in Canada on a seasonal basis. Half of these come from Mexico. Mike Tillart, whose family owns and operates the 900-acre tree farm and nursery that is Dutchmaster, says he hires Mexican workers because they are reliable and hard workers. The same as immigrants have always been in the hard work locations where Frontier College traditionally found them. "At seven o'clock in the morning they are always there," says Tillart. "And they work until you tell them not to." They are productive workers.

To be among these workers, according to Rokeby-Thomas who shares a bunkhouse and kitchen with eight men, "reminds me to be humble. When I am with them in the bunkhouse, I'm the minority just as they are the minority in Canada. When I'm working with them in the nursery I'm also in the minority. I'm a music student who hardly knew anything about plants and horticulture. They teach me things." The reciprocity is appropriately humbling. The reciprocity has always been an important part of Frontier College's experience. It's always been a two-way street.
Coburg, Ontario
1991

It is a dark and cold early November morning. Daniela and I have just arrived on the farm. We have just gotten our first job in Canada. We are foreigners. We arrived from Europe just a month ago. We have no one here. No family, not too many friends. We learn quickly that we have to take care of ourselves to survive. Our English is limited. I am able to communicate, because I studied English in a refugee camp in Austria for a few months, but I don't feel strong in it. Daniela speaks very little English. Our choices are restricted. Our knowledge of Canadian laws is poor. We know that we have the right to work. We also know that we have to get minimum wage for our work. That is about all we know.

Then one day, a tall woman with dark, curly hair and sparkling eyes appears. We soon learn that her name is Erica and she is a Labourer-Teacher from Frontier College. We don't know yet what "Labourer-Teacher" means, nor do we have a clue about the mission of Frontier College. But we understand that Erica is here to help the Jamaican workers to cope with life and work on the farm and Canada in general. We don't understand yet that she is here for us, too.

When Erica moves into the old farmhouse with the Jamaican guys, we think about her as a very strong and brave woman. Other women working on the farm give her degrading names. They don't understand how she, as a woman, could move into a house full of men.

We start to work in the fields with Erica and very soon become friends. She is a beam of light for us. We are amazed she understands what we are saying without saying "pardon" after every word we say. It is miracle for us. Someone understands our funny English with its heavy European accent. We are feeling like human beings again. She engages in interesting conversations with us. After chatting with other people on the farm about the weather, suddenly we talk with Erica about issues such as education in Canada, literature, art, feminism and employment. We also talk about social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and literacy in Canada. We address issues of violence against women, child abuse - the list is endless. We are challenged, provoked and encouraged by these discussions. Erica listens with great interest to our emigrant story and asks questions about our life in Czechoslovakia. She knows how to ask questions and how to make us talk. We feel comfortable with Erica; her sparkling eyes, smile and encouragement take away the fear of talking with grammar mistakes and an accent. We ask questions about the meanings of words and expressions, and Erica explains. She has a gift of explaining everything in words we know. It empowers us. We feel good and safe with her.

Our world grows bigger every day. Erica shows us that there is a world out there, outside of the farm. She teaches us that the values people hold on the farm are not necessary values which represent all Canadians. Little by little we look under the veil of Canadian culture.

JITKA BERNARDOVA

This piece is from a student of labourer-Teacher Erica Martin. It is followed on subsequent pages by six reports from labourer-Teachers working in the 1990's on farms and in prison situations, the two locations where Frontier College still places its LTs. Things have come full circle from those early days in the Ontario lumber camps when Alfred Fitzpatrick found immigrant workers who spoke little English and who didn't have much to divert themselves from long days of toil.
Hay, Ontario  
1994

Because of the language barrier, communication between the farmer and the workers is fairly limited to a few work-related terms, well-established over years of repeating the same tasks: seeding, planting, hoeing, cutting...

Swear words also fit into this category (every guy who came to class asked me what 'chet' meant - you figure it out). To express work orders, the physical gesture is commonly used. Hand signals indicate 'speed up,' 'slow down,' 'left,' 'right,' 'coffee,' 'lunch'....

Hand drawn maps are also used by the farmer to explain where employees are to work. While these universal symbols (gestures, maps) are useful in facilitating communication, they can also prove problematic. Rather than improving long term understanding between the two groups, they replace it. The signals and drawings have become the established and accepted means of communicating, 'crutches' that the farmer and his foreman rely on to express themselves. It had been recognized early on that this method has limited success. A lack of clarity, detail, and the inability of the workers to respond in any way - to ask questions or otherwise indicate that they do or do not understand - are the limitations that members on both sides point out. Even some of the long standing workers have said that most times, they take equipment out to one of the various fields belonging to the farmer, and the specifics of what they are to do with the equipment are *puro divinar*, pure guessing. This common situation has caused a lot of wasted time, frustration and embarrassment.

*JOAN WARINGER*

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Burford, Ontario  
1997

August 1. A better day. My second day of priming tobacco. The first was hell. I have never done anything so physically and mentally challenging. I know now that those twelve hours would be hard to top in terms of difficulty in any job; tree planting included. It was very much like jumping a personal hurdle I had with extremely hard work. My experience with public works pales in comparison to this place. That was the kind of job where laziness and boredom were commonplace. There hasn't been much time to think while priming. As I write, I am looking at the dirtiest and most cut-up fingers I've ever encountered. Tomorrow there will be more work to do.

*MARK REDWOOD*
Brougham, Ontario  
1997

Being a Labourer-Teacher is more a life than a job. For me, I did not sense a division between work time and off time. You live the experience every day, all day. I lived this life with Mexican co-workers. In the bunkhouse you get fifteen minutes of privacy a day, when you lock yourself in the shower. When I was working, I did not consider myself a Canadian employee who lived with the Mexicans, although I think that is the way some of the other workers saw me. The Mexicans and I saw me as the "teacher," occupying a distinct place within the structure of the workplace. The way I saw the role of teacher was much closer to being a Mexican than a Canadian worker.

I avoided being forced into a boss or overseer role; instead I acted as a translator, respecting the fact that I often didn't have a clue. I saw the teacher role as one of translator, advocate, companero, friend. I tried to bring my experiences at the farm as close as possible to those of the men I lived with. I think this was key to gaining the respect and trust of the Mexicans. There is a real segregation that occurs on the farm which is a choice made as much by the Mexicans as by the Canadians. There is mingling and joking, but people stick to their own group. I was there to work with the Mexicans, not the Canadians, so I partially segregated myself. This is not to say I was unfriendly to the Canadians, I worked and talked with them and got to know some people very well. But when there was an activity that was Canadian and I couldn't convince the Mexicans to take part, I would fall on the Mexican side of the segregation line.

The gaining of my co-workers' trust and respect was a very different process with different people. With some it seemed almost instant, while with others it took almost the whole summer. The bond of working men is a strange thing; you can form a strong bond with someone by sharing an experience. But my experience and that of the Mexicans were very different. They were not there because they liked the experience; they were in Canada to make money, no matter how distasteful the work. They put up with indignities small and large and endured long separations from their families. For many it was not a happy time, it was a necessity. In the end, everyone was there for himself. Some guys had warm friendships, but others seemed to separate themselves and not really care about anybody else. This is a peculiar environment to live in, because as an LT, you are there to give yourself to other people.

Despite the lack of privacy, the constant barrage of hard-core porn, the 5:45 wake-up call, and watching Jose eat hot dog stew with gobs of mayonnaise, living with my Mexican co-workers was one of the best things about my LT experience.

ANDREW DAVIDGE
TOP TEN THINGS I LEARNT
1) How hard a lot of people work
2) How ketchup is made
3) How to swear in Spanish
4) How tiring it is to constantly defend your gender
5) How good a shower can feel
6) How boring hoeing is
7) That letters are better than a phone call
8) That I can work with my hands
9) One good female friend can make all the difference
10) If the oil light comes on you do not drive to the mechanic, the mechanic comes to you

TOP TEN ACCOMPLISHMENTS
1) Pushing myself to work as long and as hard as the guys
2) Surviving my one day in strawberries
3) Not punching Abel
4) Cooking three course meals on one burner
5) Doing more listening than talking
6) Helping Elizabeth see reading as a fun thing
7) Tarring a roof
8) Actually getting a monthly report mailed to Frontier College
9) Hearing both the guys' and my vocabulary expand over the summer
10) Getting Laura to know the difference between a Democrat and a Republican

EMILY HILL
Do not become a "messenger." It's very easy to relay messages back and forth between your coworkers and the farmers; it may even seem logical based on your possible role as a translator. However, this situation can get very ugly and personal. The best thing to do is to say to either party, "I am more than happy to translate this for you, but you will have to come with me and speak directly to that person." Decide what your priorities are. As well, what is your level of commitment as an LT? Where do your main loyalties lie? Deciding these will determine how much you will be able to benefit from the experience. If you feel loyal to farm management, your experience will be extremely different than the experience I had.

We Labourer-Teachers are not a buffer. I prefer to think of us more as a bridge or "window" for both parties. I think it's very important to always remind both management and your co-workers that a lot of the confusion between the two parties stems from the language barrier as well as cultural differences.

You want to be helpful, but doing everything for your co-workers will not help them in the long run. For example, banking. Your co-workers will really appreciate you and like you if you set up their money wires for them. But what will they do when you leave? They will make you feel guilty, but explain to them that it is because you care about them that you won't do these tasks for them. Some of my coworkers would ask me, "Who will defend us when you're gone?" I would answer, "Yourselves, of course," and eventually I held a class on "defense in the workplace."

Practice a good work ethic. You will earn respect from both your co-workers and management if you put forth a sincere effort on the job. You may despise the physical work or consider it mundane, but try to do your best at all times.

Those people who live and work alongside of you - they are not "your Mexicans," they are co-workers.

When in doubt, always ask yourself, "If this person were Canadian, how would this situation be different?"

Empathize with your co-workers. Realize what is at stake for them i.e., the fear of not being asked to return the next year, the accumulation of lost wages due to having an hour lunch break versus half an hour, etc.

Avoid gossip like the plague.

Get to know your co-workers. Fund out about their lives/work in Mexico, their long-term goals, the activities of their families, the names of their wives.

KAREN STILLE
At the beginning of the tutoring, some mornings, one of the women would not feel like coming to class and so would come late or "book sick." As I got to know her better, I wondered if her shyness and reluctance to come were due to traumas she was coping with. At the risk of being accused of "enabling" or coddling her, I became more assertive about getting her to come and I would go directly to her cell to talk to her instead of speaking through staff and radios. I would sit on her bed and chat while she got ready, and she would show me her pictures, sketches, and a beaded lighter case she was working on. Other days I went to her cell when she booked sick, and I just sat on her bed and kept her company for a little while, my hand on her feet while she talked through the covers. Or, I would go to her cell to get her before the big full-day class started to see if she wanted to watch a video or participate in a writing circle, which she often would.

*SUSANAH SCHMIDT*
Within the shadow of downtown Toronto's skyscraper office buildings, behind a ragged front yard the sign on an old red brick house on Jarvis Street advertises "Beat The Street." Every morning Andrew, who is 25, leaves his rooming house and walks the two blocks to Beat The Street where he pours himself a cup of coffee and pulls a chair up to the table in the middle of the sunny, book-lined front room. There he sets to work on the writing project his tutor has assigned. Over by the window Jack, a middle aged man who lives in a single room and, except for a few-hours-a-week job stocking shelves, is long-term unemployed, is engaged in a game of Scrabble with Anton. Anton is a volunteer at Beat The Street. A young playwright from Washington D.C., he comes in two mornings a week. When he finishes his game of Scrabble with Jack, another young fellow named John who has just come in, will want help with his math.

Over at the reception desk Jayne Caldwell, the staff person on duty this morning, is helping Donald make a phone call. Donald talks erratically about how he can't understand why a collection agency wants to get $199 from him. Jayne agrees they need to try to get to the bottom of the perplexing bill and coaches Donald as he sorts his way through a jungle of voice mail recordings and banking system bureaucrats.

Further back, through the corridors of the rambling house, are rooms with computers, available to part-time students, and bulletin boards listing the addresses and phone numbers of a myriad of vital services. If you are downtown and on the street with no permanent address or money, this centre can direct you to shelters, welfare offices, employment agencies, and medical centres.

In 1987 Tracy LeQuyere, himself a former street person, with Rick Parsons persuaded Frontier College to put its support behind an initiative to assist the homeless youth he found gathered around him in mid-town Toronto. Since then hundreds have come through the doors of Beat The Street. The age range is 19-35 and 70 per cent of the clientele are men. But, as the next piece of writing by Jayne Caldwell shows, women are in dire need of the service too.
BEAT THE STREET WOMEN'S NIGHT

On Tuesday nights I go to a special, comfortable place, an honest place. Everyone is open. Though we're all from different places, we have much in common. We all have a strange past, we've all been victims of other people's madness and fear. We come in for friendship and reassurance that we don't have to be lonely in an ignorant, concrete world. We learn from each other in many ways. We feel strength in numbers. We have seen the best and worst of society reflected in our pleasure and pain. We know what hurts and why. We know how to give and take. We learn more courage daily than many others will ever know; by what we read and write, and by experience. This time is important on Tuesdays: a place to come to where we remember how necessary it is to make each other happy and feel secure, even if it is only for a few hours.

JAYNE CALDWELL
The following writings are the words of people who, in large part, have never written before in English or French. Along with Beat The Street, Frontier College in the 1980's and 1990's placed its umbrella over a number of groups and people - mostly in the chaotic centres of our cities - who had been left out, overlooked, shunted to the margins: people with disabilities, people in prisons, those with little power to make choices. These writings are expressions of their feelings and their thoughts, their observations and their frustrations.

The progress they've made doesn't mean that their lives won't continually pit them against formidable obstacles. Even after a hundred years, Frontier College finds itself still in a society that wants to retreat from those it thinks of as different. But articulation is the first step on many journeys; independence being only one of them. That's why when the staff and volunteers at Frontier College were asked what message or statement they wanted to use to end this book of the anecdotal history of our remarkable institution, learner writings came flooding out of everybody's collections. Here, to provide the last word, are some of those.
I feel good about the People First meeting. It was held at the Constellation Hotel near the airport in early July. I went there Friday night and came back to my home Sunday night. I stayed at the hotel for two nights.

In the morning I was up at 7:30 had breakfast and went to the meeting at 10:00 o'clock. The meeting was all day. I told my story in the middle of the morning. Denise came and helped me with my story. Denise is my friend and a worker in my group home.

I said "Good morning, everybody. My name is Dick Hewston. I came down this morning to tell you how I got out of Riverdale Hospital. One Sunday afternoon Kelly Ratchford came up first, my lawyer came up next and my friend came up last. They put all my clothes in green bags and took my clothes down. I went out to the desk and left a note for the nurses saying goodbye."

Then, I told the rest of my story about how I came to the group home up until now. After my speech everybody gave me a good round of applause. I felt good.

For the rest of the morning other people told their stories. We had a cold lunch. In the afternoon meetings we talked about group homes. I feel good about my group home and I like my group home. I have more friends now.

I went back to the meeting and we continued talking about group homes. We discussed how we could have bigger doorways, halls and bathrooms to get our wheel chairs in and out easier. People in hospitals want to get out of the hospital and into group homes. Sometimes there may be more group homes, but it may be a way down the road yet. I came back to my home at ten o'clock at night. I had a good time. I felt good.

DICK HEWSTON
I would like to thank Cheryl for teaching me how to work a computer, she has taught me things which I never expected.

I know this is only the beginning and I will learn many more things because she is a patient and easy person to work with. Cheryl has taught me how to do my resume and write a letter. In the process of teaching me how to do these things, I also learned how to do BOLDING and *ITALICS*. Spell checking, saving and printing my documents are also some of the things I have learned.

About a month ago I knew only how to turn on the computer, but thanks to my tutor Cheryl I may one day be ready to go out into the work force and get a job working with computers.

I am so looking forward to the many things Cheryl plans to teach me in the near future. I wish everyone could have the privilege I have with a wonderful tutor as Cheryl.

*ILONA BATA*

1999

Dear Dave,

We love the reading circle. We think its cool and fun. I come here every Thursday because I love to read! I come here looking forward to read. I think books are the best. I also love winning books. I've only won one but I hope to win more.

I love Fear Street books. I read them all the time. I think they're the best! I love horror books. I can read two a day. I won't read anything else.

So thanks for the Fear Street books. Keep sending them or other horror books cuz I love them and nothing else.

*AMANDA*

1999

I was born in Sarajevo (Yugoslavia). After I finished my education, I worked for twenty years as a puppet maker in the Puppet Theatre.

In 1995, I came to Canada with my family. The beginning was very difficult because I knew only a few words of English. But I was ready to start with the alphabet like a kid. When I got a tutor for English at Frontier College everything became easier. I got my first chance to show my skills in making puppets at Frontier College. The staff at the College asked me to make a presentation. My English still wasn't very good and I was very nervous and worried. I had planned to show people how to make a simple puppet quickly. I thought I wouldn't be able to make my demonstration interesting. But the people who were there were more interested in my work than in my English skills. That helped me a lot. I was very happy with my first public presentation. Shortly after, I was hired by the Santa Claus Parade. My life changed
rapidly. Now I'm satisfied with my life in Canada. I'm learning English very studiously. I hope one day I'll be able to say this sentence to myself: "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruits are sweet."

MISHO KLACAR

Quebec, Quebec
1999

Je m'appelle Mélanie et j'ai vingt ans. Quand j'étais au primaire, j'ai fréquenté plusieurs écoles, même des classes spéciales de TGA. Ce sont des petits groupes d'une dizaine d'élèves qui ont des troubles d'apprentissage. J'en ai vu de toutes les couleurs dans ces classes-la. J'ai été dans ces groupes pendant deux ans puis je suis enfin sortie de là.

Vers l'âge de douze ans, ils m'ont annoncé que je changeais encore d'école parce que j'étais trop vieille pour rester là. Ils m'ont envoyé à l'école Marie de l'incarnation pour faire des cours de cheminement particulier pendant trois ans. À ma dernière année dans cette école, mon professeur m'a dit: "Mélanie, tu vas aller à Wilbrod Bherer pendant deux ans pour apprendre un métier et faire des stages". J'ai suivi un cours d'imprimerie la première année et l'autre année c'était un stage à l'Armée du Salut pour quelques mois seulement. Je plaçais les étiquettes sur les chaussures et je triais les vêtements. À un moment donné, j'en avais plein mon casque parce que l'homme pour qui je travaillais ne savait pas ce qu'il voulait. J'ai lâché mon stage et l'école. Ce n'était pas facile sur le coup parce que mes parents avaient peur que je reste à la maison à ne rien faire, mais ce n'était pas mon intention.

C'est pour ça qu'après routes ces années d'enfer, j'ai fait des démarches pour aller étudier au adultes, au Centre Louis-Jolliet. Au début, j'étudiais à temps partiel mais après quelques mois j'avais des cours à temps plein. J'ai été classe en alphabétisation. Pendant deux ans j'étais à l'étape 3 et la c'est ma deuxième année en étape 4. Je vise le secondaire et j'espère que cette année sera la bonne. C'est pour ça que je travaille fort et qu'en plus de mes trente heures de cours par semaine, j'ai été cherche de l'aide individuelle. En fait, c'est quand j'ai commencé mes cours en alpha, j'ai demandé à un professeur si elle connaissait des personnes qui pourraient m'aider. Elle m'a parlé de Collège frontière. C'est la que j'ai rencontré Véronique qui m'aide depuis trois ans. Ça prend beaucoup de courage pour revenir à l'école surtout quand tu as toujours eu des difficultés à apprendre. Si tu veux réussir il faut que ça vienne de toi. Mais surtout il faut y croire pour être capable de ne pas se décourager par tout ce qu'on s'est fait dire au primaire et au secondaire.

MELANIE GOBEIL
I was busy in my room. I was in my washroom and there was a fight going on. I missed all of the action. Somebody got punched. Everybody got locked in for a couple of minutes. Everybody was talking a little bit about it afterwards.

I am doing good on the range, though. I have been charge-free for four months. There is more freedom on the range and there is more we can do. For me, I find it closer to work.

The range is very quiet. There are only three women with me on the range. When I am on the range and not working I am locked in my cell watching tv. I am also bored sometimes, so I like to go to work.

I like working in N and D. It is where they book you in and out when you enter and leave P4W. I work for Mme Petite and I like her, but I don't work there often.

CLAIRE LEDUC
Toronto, Ontario
1999

THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE AT FRONTIER COLLEGE

My first goal working with Frontier College was to complete my grade 9 math with the correspondence course with the Board of Education. My tutor and I tried to complete an assignment once every month, which we did. I also completed half of my grade 10 math course. I also studied grade 10 English which I completed.

I spent the first hour with my tutor working on my math course. The second hour was to write a journal on the things I was learning like writing letters and short stories about my dog. I would write in my journal and we would correct the stories together and then I would re-write the stories. I wrote short stories at first but then I asked my tutor to help me write longer stories.

In 1996, my tutor Diane and I started a writing workshop for the learners at Frontier College's Independent Studies programme. The stories that we wrote at the workshop were printed in the newsletter, News and Views. Diane and I are coordinators of the writing workshop.

MARY BAILEY
Conclusion

It occurred to me at one point during the summer, how much Frontier College has changed me, and changed the way I see the world. Between Students for Literacy and the Labourer-Teacher program it taught me to always see what is positive, and never to focus on the negative. One of my favorite parts of the training was the writing sample. The first sample was just scary the first time I saw it. But after we went through it and picked out what was good about it, the second time I saw it I actually saw the good points before I noticed the mistakes. I didn't see this as really having an impact on me until one day in May when I saw the time sheets belonging to one of the guys I was working with. We had been planting tomatoes, and on the sheet under job description he had written 'plantin'. My first reaction was that this was absolutely brilliant! That was exactly what we had been doing, putting the plants IN the ground. To me it showed such an amazing grasp of a language he hardly knew, and I was very impressed. I didn't even notice that it was technically a mistake.

They told us at the training that when they'd gotten us, they'd gotten us for life. It wasn't until that day that I truly understood what that meant. It was then I realized that truly belonging to a group doesn't mean having your name on their membership list. It means seeing the world the same way they do. That's how Frontier College gets you for life, they teach you to think the same way they do, and then there's no turning back.

GABRIELLE SHALLOW
St. John's, Newfoundland
1998

* Gabrielle Shallow was a Labourer-Teacher in 1997. She has also been a member of the Frontier College campus-based tutoring program at Memorial University.
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