

Canada Post Literacy Award 2007



Gordon Hope

My Journey to the Learning Centre

I was born in Montreal and lived in an orphanage until I was adopted at the age of two or three. My parents lived in Franklin Centre, Quebec on a farm. They had dairy cows, horses, chickens, pigs, a dog and cats. They also grew apple trees and had a sugar bush. Life was good on a farm but hard for me because I was just a small boy. I learned to do chores, feed chickens, gather eggs and give milk to the calves. I filled the wood box in the kitchen even if it was two sticks at a time. When I was about five, my father had a neighbour come with a saw and cut wood for the winter. That's when I was told to bring the wood to the shed and learn how to pile wood.

I didn't have much schooling, I would go one day a week and some times two or three days a week because I had to stay at home and work.

I learned very young how to milk cows by hand; it was hard at first but after some practice it got easier. I also learned to harness the horses but I had to use a stool to reach their backs. The horses were used for many jobs; to bring wood from the bush, cutting and raking hay, ploughing the fields and gathering sap in the spring.

To cut wood, I had to use a two handed saw and an axe. Later my father got a chain saw which made work a lot easier and faster. We cut wood for the furnace, kitchen stove and sugar shanty. I remember it well because one time I woke up in the hospital from being knocked out by a five or six inch branch.

My parents had a large garden. I didn't like pulling weeds and hoeing it. My mother also had a half acre of raspberry bushes, which was another chore I did not really enjoy because they were picky.

My uncle was a game warden; he gave me a job raising pheasants and partridges. He set me up with an incubator, pens, eggs and food. The eggs had to be turned every so often. I had to move the chicks to different pens as they grew older before being released into the wild.

There was a stream running through the middle of the farm; it was a wild raging river twelve feet wide in the spring. In the summer, it was just a trickle; there were more stones than water.

There were two events that stand out in my mind. One is when a deer came into our barn and made it his home; he trusted us and would follow us around. One time, he even went into the house when Mother had made fresh buns and had them on the table to cool. I guess he liked the smell and wanted to check them. The deer attracted a lot of visitors; people came from all over to see it. The second event was at sugaring time. There was a family from Ottawa that came to visit. There was also one person from the government that worked for Northern Affairs and what made him stand out was he lost his fingers on his right hand when he was a young boy, but that did not stop him from helping me gather sap and do other chores.

As I grew older I got stronger, so my father bought another farm that provided hay for the animals which gave me more work. I also started working at other jobs, picking up garbage once a week and working at a sawmill to make money, because my father didn't give me any. He figured a roof over my head, a bed to

sleep in and food to eat was my pay. Later on, because of the stress, I started two bad habits: smoking and drinking. Because of those two bad habits, I had more problems: it was expensive...

Later my father decided to sell the farms and move to Ormstown, so I had to find another job. I looked around for three weeks. One night when I was helping a neighbour working on his antique car, I mentioned to him that I was looking for work. The next day he called me from Zephyr Textiles and asked me to come down for an interview. I started to work at seven p.m. that night. I had ten drawing machines to run. I didn't have much reading or writing to do at work so if I had some important letters or documents I would bring it to the secretary to help me. I also did many other jobs in textiles including: oiler, mechanic, welder and run a lathe, worked with a plumber, an electrician and a watchman. I knew the welder and the lathe operator so they taught me how to do their jobs. I had a chance to take a mechanic course at C.V.R. high school but the textile plant didn't allow me to go, I was already a jack of all trades and if I got a diploma they would have to pay me more. The company went bankrupt often; they laid off people and reopened again. I kept going back until my doctor advised me not to; he said I was burnt out so I ended up on social aid...

I decided that it would help if I knew how to read and write. As I was looking through our newspaper the Gleaner one day, I saw an advertisement about the Huntingdon Learning Centre. I went over and met Carole-Anne Lachaine and she arranged an interview with Roger and I started attending school the next day. It is called the literacy program. It helps people to learn and improve their reading, writing and maths. Roger helped me with my spelling, looking in the dictionary and working in a book called Challenger. Now I like to read stories and go to the Little Green Library of which I am a member for the last two years.

Before I could read I mostly just looked at pictures, but last year I did a project on the history of Huntingdon the town that I live in. I spent about 120 hours in research and writing.

The Learning Centre also provides us with volunteers that give us private tutoring in math or reading.

I also had computer courses which were given by Nickie. My neighbour gave my wife a screen and keyboard for a computer, then a little later I bought the computer and with the help of one friend who is a computer specialist we got it going so I was able to practice what I learned in school. I now have some computer skills; I work with Microsoft Word and Excel program, change my desktop and screensavers, clean my disk drive and send E-mail to my brother and another friend who works on a ship. I like to surf the net for medical problems, plants, animals and research for stories that I write.

Other great events at the Learning Centre which were very interesting were: two students that came to talk about their experience in Nicaragua: the way they built a school and how the people live there. We also had a veteran that came to speak about his training and experience going to world war two. His job was building bridges, finding mines to deactivate them.

We had some activities: we had a pumpkin decorating contest; a consumer group came and gave us advice on how to make a budget and protect our rights; there was a lunch and gift exchange at Christmas and we played bingo. We learned to make chocolate Easter eggs, ducks and rabbits. One day Roger took us to the Ormstown Career Centre's open house, they displayed landscaping projects, carpentry, technology courses and health care. The Centre also had a recreation

day: the students prepared a social luncheon, played darts, shuffleboard and pool at the Huntingdon Legion. We watched a couple of documentaries and movies and also went bowling.

I really enjoy coming to the Learning Centre; it gives me more confidence in myself, I am able to express my opinion on different subjects and sometimes use a little humour. I enjoyed meeting new people from other counties such as El Salvador, Mexico, Argentina, Peru and Senegal. I learned about their weather, customs, activities and their working experiences.

Another important benefit of going to the Learning Centre is being able to help my wife with her Challenger book, she only had grade one or two; she didn't have a chance to go to school any further because of her nervous condition. Now today she has two certificates: Challenger one and two.

My message to all the young people in school is: do not drop out because school is an important part of life. If you want to be a doctor, a nurse or have any other kind of job or career you need your degree. As you read this you can see all the benefits I gained from coming to the Huntingdon Learning Centre; you are never too old to learn.

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