

# In Our Own Words

5<sup>th</sup> Edition



Art by Orca Wilson

In Celebration of  
International Literacy Day, September 8, 2010

## Our Learners' Stories

**Volunteer Tutoring Program**

A partnership between

Literacy Central Vancouver Island & Vancouver Island University

# In Our Own Words

Welcome to our fifth edition!

We are celebrating **International Literacy Day 2010**, with this collection of learner writings. All of the writers are enrolled in the Volunteer Tutor Program, which is a joint project between **Literacy Central Vancouver Island** and **Vancouver Island University** (Nanaimo Campus).

Some of our learners have seen their words published before and for others this is a new, exciting experience. We thank and congratulate all of our adult learners for their contributions. We also thank the tutors who encouraged their learners, helped them edit their work and assisted them in finding their voice.

Literacy Tutor Coordinators  
Margaret Ames & Jacqueline Webster  
September 8, 2010

Special thanks to Wendy Chapplow for her assistance with the publication

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## Learner Event 2010 - Celebrating Learning

### Crystal Carson



We started at Literacy Central. We had coffee, tea and muffins. We mingled with people and met new friends. We then got to go into different groups, to tour the museum and the coal miners' house.

In the coal miners' house, we learned what it was like when my mom and dad grew up in the depression. The coal miners, men and boys, were allowed to have an education and work but the women and girls were not allowed to have an education or work at all. The women were raised to be housewives and to get married to have children. The family consisted of eight people and lived in crowded conditions. The children took turns doing chores, bringing in the coal to keep warm, doing laundry, helping look after the younger children and emptying the pans under the beds. There was no running water in those days or electricity and they had to use outhouses. Their only transportation was horse and buggy and boats.

After the yummy lunch, Joel, a VIU student, talked to us about how he and his ancestors made and carved bentwood boxes.

I really enjoyed the tour of the library and the museum, learning about Nanaimo's early history.



Special thanks to tutor Bernice Ross



## Bullying

Dianne Burn

Pink

Anti-bullying day

Pink shoes, pink shirt, pink purse  
pink underwear

Kids. I hate kids

Grade 6 to grade 10 are the worst  
Teasing and bullying

Why?

"Because they're stupid"  
Peer pressure

Why?

Different  
Different colours, different accents, different hair, "older",  
Obese kids, disabilities  
A type of racism  
Unfair  
Makes you grow up with poor self-esteem

In the past: If you were a musician and you were black you  
had to enter from the back door.

Rosa Parks  
"A modern day Rosa Parks"

In the present: If you are a First Nations girl in Vancouver, you  
get treated like a prostitute.

Insecure, angry, feel like staring them down.

"What goes around comes around"  
When will it end!

Special thanks to tutor Linda Van Omme



## For My Father, Barry Shawn Richards



The rain had finally stopped coming down, an old car pulled up to an old house, in an old town, on an old street. Tired, the old man got out of his car and looked around. No one was around to see his head fall, as he saw the empty house with no lights on, he climbed the stairs slowly, almost painfully, with his head down. He reached his hand up towards the porch light and flicked the bulb with one of his fingers, it was not working. He then started to cry a tear for he was now alone.

His wife was finished with her fight against cancer, and she had left the earth that morning, in the hospital. He had been holding her hand the whole time, and watched her slip away.

He caught one of the tears from his face, and then put his hand to the door handle. Turning it he smiled, at last he thought she is home and he closed the door behind himself.



## A Day with Dad

Mary Thompson



Something I remember fondly from my childhood were those wonderful fishing trips with Dad. When the nice weather came, sometimes on Friday night, Dad would say, "Would you like to go fishing on Saturday?" I would always say yes. After dinner on those evenings, after Dad and I had done the cleaning up, we would get the lunch on the go for the fishing trip. Sometimes Mom would let us have the leftovers from that night's dinner.

Dad would always phone his brother Bob, and ask him to drive us, because we never had a car until I was 16. I thought my Uncle had lots of money because he had a car.

Fishing with my Dad and Uncle was always fun. My Uncle would sing to the fish. It always made me laugh. I sang too. I would sing, "Come little fish to my hook, to my hook, so I can eat you up."

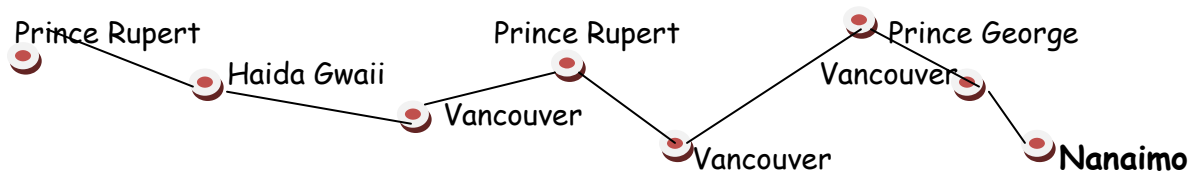
This fishing day was special, it was Derby Day, and there would be prizes for the biggest fish. I cannot remember what first prize was going to be, but I know I wanted it. So the three of us decided to go to Derby Day together.

It was late in the day when I got a fish. It was huge, but my Dad would not help me bring it in. By the time I got it into the boat all that was left was a huge head. We thought, maybe, a seal got it. On the way back in we putted around the back edge of Newcastle Island hugging the shore, so my Dad could jig for cod for Mom, her special treat.

Once we had the cod, and Dad always caught one, we headed over to the boat ramp, so we could check back in and hand in the time cards for the Derby. Dad and my Uncle won money that day. I got the booby prize because of my fish head.

Special thanks to tutor Sandy Hill

## My Journey Richard Stewart



I was born in Prince Rupert, a small town, about 30,000 people. In 1977 when I was seventeen I went to Haida Gwaii and I found out my grandmother was there. I didn't know who she was until then. I spent a lot of time at the beach with her and my grandfather. My grandfather had a smoke house, something new to me. I stayed there about a month helping my grandmother.

There was too much drinking on Haida Gwaii at that time, so I left and went to Vancouver to see my mother for the first time since I was a baby. I was really nervous. I just stayed there for a month, and then I went back to Prince Rupert, where I worked in a fish cannery. It was hard work stacking the fish in the icehouse, but I had to keep busy to keep warm. I was thinking about the job, not the cold.

Soon I moved to Vancouver and lived most of my life there. I went to Prince George to work in 1983, but I didn't stay too long because it was too cold in the winter. I was doing a lot of travelling at that time when I was 23. My friends had trouble tracking me down because I just wanted to see many places.

One day in 2002 my dad caught me off guard in Vancouver. It was then that I decided to change my lifestyle. My dad and my brother talked me into moving to Nanaimo. I thought for a while and then I phoned my brother and told him "I want to move". He got a hold of my sister-in-law in Nanaimo and she met me at the BC ferry when I got here. She didn't expect me to have so much stuff, about six duffle bags with all my music. That was the best move I ever made in my life.

My first place in Nanaimo was on Third Street. That was a bad place, but I stayed there for three years because I wanted my own place. I just kept to myself and only talked to one person there, the guy next door. I was angry at my dad for many years, but in 2002 we started talking. I wanted to forgive him for the past. Sometimes I still get nervous in front of him but not as bad as I was.

Over a year ago I decided I wanted to read, write and spell better because I wanted to get a job. When I was in school, I didn't have a chance to study writing and reading. I really didn't want to go to school, I was getting picked on because I was in a special class.

In 2005 I moved to Prideaux Street near the police station. I like this place because it has a patio and I can sit outside. I've been there since 2005, five years already.

Special thanks to tutor Barbara Johnston



## Recipe for Spring Rolls Laiwan Lam



**Ingredients:** bean sprouts, cabbage, onion, carrot, wrap, sesame oil, salt, sugar, pepper, oil for frying, flour, water.

**Methods:** Cut the vegetables into small pieces, long and then mix them with sesame oil, salt, sugar and pepper

Put a small amount on one corner of the wrap, roll it up half way, fold the two corners to the center, put a bit of flour with water on the last corner and roll it up

Put the spring roll into a pot of hot oil and fry it at medium heat for a few minutes until golden brown

Take it out, serve it on a plate with plum sauce

In our restaurant, we make two hundred spring rolls ahead of time and freeze them, no longer than two days.

Special thanks to tutor Nicki Westarp

## Trip to Mexico

Lily Lee

April 12. It was Monday. We went to Mexico for one week holiday. We had to get up early in the morning at 2:30 a.m. to catch the ferry. The flight was leaving at 12:30 in the afternoon. When we got to Mexico it was 8:00 o'clock in the evening.

When we got outside at the airport it was raining. The next morning before lunch the weather was nice and hot. Everybody was enjoying the sunny day but in the afternoon it started to rain then every day after that it rained heavily and was windy.

We went on a bus tour to see some Mayan ruins. Because it was a long way to walk we hired a pedicab to get to the ruins. It was good there. The rain stayed til Thursday. Friday was nice for half a day. After 4:00 o'clock it started to rain. The next day we went to the jewelry factory. The factory gave everybody a small gift. I bought a pair of earrings and a necklace. Everybody bought something and the next day we went shopping. I bought a pair of shoes and a small suitcase and bought some gifts for the family. The last two days before leaving Mexico the weather was very nice and hot. I enjoyed walking on the beach and sitting on the beach. In Mexico every night at 9:30 we went to see the show. Every night the show was so good.



Monday we left the hotel at 5:00 pm for the airport. We caught the 9:30 flight to Vancouver. Tuesday early morning at 1:30 we arrived at the Vancouver airport. We caught the 5:15 ferry back to Nanaimo. We really enjoyed the trip but it was still nice to be home.

Special thanks to tutor Penny Cameron

## White Rapids

Larry Gallant

You drive down Nanaimo River Road to White Rapids Road. Turn left onto White Rapids Road. I think it's actually someone's driveway. A guy with the name Dave Little John has a log cabin there. He ran the Boys and Girls Club of Nanaimo way



back. He would bring kids up there for a night or two. He had a hot tub and at night we would sit in it. The rocks all around the cabin had holes in them about 2 ft wide and 3 ft deep which would fill up with rain water. Pretty cold. After a little while in the hot tub we would go and sit in one of the holes. Very refreshing.

Down below the cabin was the river, a very big rapid which it got its name from. When I was 10 or 11 I would stay the night every now and then. The sound from the big rapid was almost hypnotizing. It was trying to drag you to it. The spot on the river itself is very beautiful. You walk down some rocks to the river where there's a big circle pool with deep, very clear water. You could climb up and cliff jump. You can climb pretty high. Before the pool there's a little waterfall where you can sit and let the water fall over you. You have to be very aware of what you are doing. You can't get too close to the big falls; they'll suck you down. At one point someone tied a rope across the river, so if you started floating that way you could grab the rope. The big water has taken a few lives. The big rapids are very noisy. Standing by them you have to talk very loud to each other so you can be heard.



Even if you took away the big rapids it's still a very beautiful place. In the fall you can go there when the water is running a lot higher. You can sit and watch the salmon trying to swim up the river. It's hard for them because the water is running very fast and hard against them. Somehow they make it up those big rapids. It's amazing.

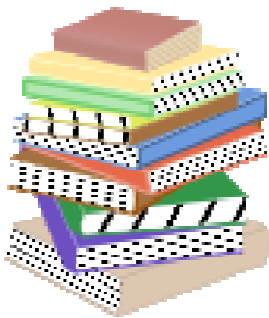
Special thanks to tutor Tacey Lawrence

## Beating Boredom

Marcel Kemp

One of the main problems in jail that people have to deal with is boredom, and there are many ways to beat the boredom. Some people like to go to the gym. Other people like to shoot pool. Others prefer to sit and play cards. These are all good ways to beat boredom. I prefer to better educate myself and do hobbies.

Education presents many challenges for me. Take math, for example. I would get a formula like  $A=P (tr/n)$ . This is like a puzzle to me. It can take some time to figure out but it's a lot of fun to do. Another example is writing an essay. I would have never been able to write this paper without the proper education.



Hobbies are another way I like to beat the boredom. I can spend a lot of time doing ceramics. One piece of ceramics can take days to do. You first start by cleaning up the piece. Then you send it to be fired. When you get it back it's ready for painting or glazing, whichever you prefer. I prefer glazing. I think it looks better.



There is no guarantee that you won't be bored in jail. I have found a few ways to escape the boredom. There are many other ways, some good, some bad. It's up to the inmate how he chooses to beat the boredom and maybe, just maybe, learn something.

Special thanks to tutor Dale Lovick

## Becoming a Dentist in Canada

Nahed Abel Alla



My name is Nahed. I'm originally from Egypt and I was a dentist there. My long term goal is to be a dentist in Canada, which requires me to return to the university. Before I can do this, I have to pass an International English Test. Because I have two children, I can not attend a full time English class at VIU. Fortunately, my friend told me that I could have a free tutor from Literacy Central. That is why I went there and I met a helpful group who is working there. Then they introduced me to my wonderful teacher. I like my teacher's way of teaching. She has taught me lots of grammar and corrected my writing.

Volunteering is such a good giving job and it has many benefits. When someone helps and supports others, they improve their communities. Another benefit is the social aspect of volunteering. People have the opportunity to meet and know each other. The most important benefit is to see who you help feel better and happier. For these reasons, I really appreciate being a part of this association and I hope that I can help this group after I pass my test. Actually, I'm looking forward to taking my test.

Special thanks to tutor Darlene Patrick

## Escape to a New Life

### Grace Yang



I was born in North Korea. When I was five years old in 1950 the Korean War started. The United States Army came to North Korea. One group of about twenty soldiers stayed in our house during the cold winter.

They were looking for Communists, my mother told me. The American people were nice and had good manners. My mother got water from the well and four Americans washed, together in the one was basin.

I still remember they gave us lots of chocolates, biscuits and cans of ham. We didn't communicate as no one spoke English, but my family liked them. They had two nurses and one of them spoke a little Korean. They stayed about one month.

When the Chinese Army came into North Korea, the United States Army was pushed back to the South. The two nurses told my mother "We will take your daughter and we will take care of her. When the war is finished we will find you and we will return your daughter." My mother told her "No!"

When they left, they gave us lots of canned ham and other things, too. We were thankful. When the Communist Army came my father and my older brother had to escape from our town, because my father was a Democratic Party member.

Three days later, in January, in very cold weather my mother was carrying my baby sister on her back. Holding me with one hand and holding a singer sewing machine on her head with her other hand, we walked day and night.



Lots of people were on the street, so if I fell down I wouldn't be able to get up and people would walk over me. It was very cold; minus 35 - 40. I walked day and night until my legs couldn't move. I remember my mother telling me "Don't fall asleep, keep walking."

I said to mom "I can't walk." My mother put her arm around my neck and she continued to walk for three days. Along the road some people gave us one frozen rice ball each.

My father and my mother met at the wharf called Hung Nam Budo. They waited for an American ship. It had five decks, and we were on the fourth level. There were lots of people and we were told if we left our spot we would lose it.

I don't know how many days we were in the boat but we finally arrived at the South Korean Island of Ge Ja Do where we were taken to a public school. All the women and children were put into rooms. All the men had to stay outside in the playground.

I was extremely sick and I did not eat. So many days spent walking with cold weather had made me very weak. My body had stopped moving. My mother called outside to my father and she said "Our daughter is dying." She cried and she carried me outside to the playground, where my father looked for his friend who had toasted soy bean powder.

My father found his friend and received the toasted bean powder. My father found three stones which he put in a triangle. He got a little weed to make a fire and made soy soup.

He tried to open my mouth but it wouldn't open. My body was slowly shutting down. My parents forced the soup into my mouth. Only half went in, the other half of the soup spilled down my chin. My father put his coat over me. He put me at the corner of the school, and he said "Now it is up to you whether you live or die."

About twenty minutes later my older brother saw the coat move. "She is alive mom" he shouted. My father opened the coat and held me. My face was sweating. My brother said, open your eyes. I did open them and they all asked "Are you okay?" My mother gave me more soup.

My life had started again!

Special thanks to tutor Brendan Roy

## Nature and Nurture

Marion Roper



I was just a little girl when my *Grandpa* began my journeys into the woods. What I remember most clearly lay under my little, rubber-booted feet. The ground was ever-changeable, so I had to keep my eyes on what came next. Now, a smooth, dry, well-trodden path; now, tree roots weaving through and over the soil, like ropes waiting to ensnare my scrambling feet. More often we traversed the meandering cow's path, curved and rutted, too narrow for us both and often too unpredictable in its contours for me to manage without help.

*Grandpa* was my *Guardian*: I trusted him so. His calloused, brown earth-hewn hand etched by farming gripped mine securely as I stumbled, skipped, and scurried along. I never fell when I was with *Grandpa*: he was my rock. Belt high, I would gaze up at him adoringly. My coveralls would match his soft, denim blue ones, I had insisted. Bees buzzed, cow flies swarmed, mosquitoes sought our long-sleeved shirt-covered arms. His shirt was cobalt blue with large, white checkers - they matched his piercing eyes. Mine was bright red, just like my scrunched, tightly pulled string hat. *Grandpa's* hat shadowed his face, its brim finger-grimed with grips from the past. But his face shone out for me: aged, dark brown, and laugh-wrinkled at the corners of his eyes and mouth.

To me *Grandpa* glowed *God-like*, his greatness unchallenged. He knew everything, I believed, because my questions were endless. With *Grandpa*, I learned that life could be gentle and free: that I could soar and screech with the red-tails, scamper and scurry with the squirrels. My joy was invincible. Together, we were magical and limitless.

Special thanks to tutor Ron Bonham

## The Best Present Ever!!

Diane Gibbons

It was a very cold December night. I had just finished my supper and there was a knock on my door. It must be my friend, Glenda, I thought as I walked to the door. I was just about to enter the hallway when I saw something moving. It was the cutest little black and white puppy I had ever seen. She was trying very hard to get down the couple of steps into the apartment. Where did she come from? Was she mine? Was she the same one I had looked at a few weeks ago and then found out had gone to another home? As this little puppy fell over the last step and landed on my feet, I knew we were going to be best buddies.



My door opened again and Glenda came in, "Surprise", she said. "Do you like your Christmas present? I got her for you. Isn't she just like Blackie."

"Yes she is," I said. Blackie was my first dog and I had lost her over 6 months ago in a tragic accident. "Are you serious, this one is mine? She is just like Blackie. I am so happy, thank you. It's the best present ever!!"

I picked up my new puppy and wondered what I would call this bundle of energy. I could hardly hold her. She wanted to get down and explore this new place. The first thing she did was pee on my floor. I didn't care, I was so happy that she was mine. She ran from one room to another, smelling everything. I think she liked her new home. I loved her at once and I had the perfect name for her, Pretty. After all she was the prettiest thing I had every seen.

We became best buddies over night. We did have our ups and downs but for the most part we had a long and happy life. We did many things together. We went on holidays, sometimes by car and sometimes by boat. We liked to walk around the park. Pretty learned to sing but she loved it when I sang to her. Her favorite was the "Ice-Cream" song; she knew that ice cream usually followed that one. She also liked "You are My Sunshine" and she would dance around whenever I sang that one. I would change the song to be all about her. Pretty learned to do lot of tricks: rolling over, shaking paw, getting her leash and my shoes when she wanted to go out, and bringing her water bowl when it

was empty. She loved being around people but mostly me. She always wanted me to be in her sight; she always had my back.

Pretty was the most precious thing I had ever met. She was shy with strangers and liked to be the one who made friends when she was ready. She lived a long and happy life and we had many, many, memories. I have so many stories about our adventures together, mostly funny ones but we did have a couple of really scary ones.

One of my favourite memories was a little scary. We had travelled for about four days to get to our final destination, the south coast of Labrador, Newfoundland. We had all our supplies: food clothes, gas, oil and anything else that we would need for our month long trip to a very remote place called Tub Harbor. We were using Bill's fishing boat and it was pretty full with everything in it. It was a sunny day and we were making good time until Pretty decided to walk off the boat. Yes, that is what I said, we were cruising along at a good speed and she just walked off the side. As she landed in the cold water of the Atlantic Ocean, she wasn't sure what had happened. I'm not sure what she thought would happen but that wasn't it. Her eyes got as big as the top of a cup. For someone who hated having a bath this was huge and scary. But her instincts kicked in and she started to swim towards the boat. This all happened so fast that by the time I got Bill's attention and he got the boat turned around and headed back to her, a few minutes had passed by and that water was cold. We finally got her back in the boat and wrapped in a blanket. She was shivering for the rest of the ride. She had this look on her face that seemed to say, "I'm never getting in a boat again". Pretty was a little shook-up from the swim but she was okay. The next day when she realized that the boat was the only way to travel, she got over her fear too. We were all going fishing and she didn't want to get on the boat so we told her she would have to stay home by herself. We started to leave and she ran and jumped aboard and found a safe spot at the bottom of the boat. I learned a good lesson from Pretty that day, never let your fears hold you back. We had a really fun holiday and we did lots of boat trips. Pretty came on all of them but she always chose that safe spot at the bottom of the boat.

When I think about that day now I laugh and laugh and then I see her eyes again and I laugh more. What were you thinking, Pretty?

Some day I hope to tell more stories but for now I will say that I am still amazed that that little puppy that was at my door that night would end up being such a very dear and good friend.

Special thanks to tutor Dawn Stewart

## My Mom's Life Story

### Evelyne Gomes

She was born in the north east of Brazil in a very tropical place with lovely beaches. She is 67 years old on her birth certificate but she is really 69. All her 13 brothers and 2 sisters were registered two years after they were born. She loves to live close to the ocean. Her favorite place is Itamaraca Island, about 48k from Recife and Boa Viagem, which is the most touristic beach with white sand and the most popular beach close to downtown Recife.



Her father was a policeman named Galdino and her mother was named Julia. When she was a little girl she moved several times because of her father's job. Sometimes her mom would take their children from school because my grandpa came back home and said, "My job is transferred. Get the children at school and we leave today." He had a truck from the military service to move them to another province or city. Their children did go to school only sometimes because of the travel time or because they moved so much.

My grandpa was a very big white man with a European background. So fair, that to me he looked more red than white. He had this huge, nice mustache pointed at the ends and blue eyes. He had a very strong personality and I tell you nobody would mess with him he was so powerful a policeman. He never took off his two guns he wore on his belt except to go to sleep. The neighbours knew they needed to behave around Galdino.

Here is a story I heard from my parents every weekend:

At the age of 14 my mom met my dad Mauro. They were planning to get married and my dad told my mom he needed to meet my mom's family. My mom said, "Are you sure you want to meet my thirteen brothers and my dad?" He said, "I'm not quite sure but I do want to get married to you. Are you sure they will not kill me?" "I don't think my brothers could do that but maybe my father will try! I'll do my best to save you," she said. My dad was an only child. Grandpa scared him when he asked if he had a job or a house and my dad said not quite yet.

He invited my father to get out of his house as quick as he could before he lost his patience and told my mom, "I don't give permission for you to marry him until he has a job and a house." My mom dated my father for seven years. My dad decided to marry her at the age of 20. He didn't have a house yet but he had a job, but my grandpa was still not giving permission for them to get married. My mom told her mom and all her brothers and sisters she wanted their permission to get married and they said yes.

My dad's family paid for all of the wedding expenses. I saw the picture and they looked great together at the church. It was the most fabulous wedding in that era in that town. Her brothers and sisters and all the cousins and friends went to mom's wedding.



My mom gave birth to seven children, three died. My grandpa brought two children home who had no family. The boy he adopted and the girl my mom adopted. She gave her a name and a family, so now we were five children at home.

My father got a good promotion at the bank in 1968 and moved to Sao Paulo. My parents didn't like to live in Sao Paulo; they were missing their home town. Then a year later they came back to visit Recife and decided to buy a house. They were very happy but my father started to travel because of his job and missing the family and started to drink alcohol after work. I read all my dad's romantic letters to my mom. He loved her so much and his words were always very deep and very romantic. He was a natural poet with beautiful handwriting. He had a kind personality and helped many people with food, scholarships and helping them buy their homes.

At the age of 52 my dad got very sick and died at age 53. His death was very quick. My mom never re-married. She raised her family by herself. My mom is very proud of her three girls. She has helped my brother since he was 12 years old when he started to use drugs. He started to give problems for my parents since that age and ever since but she cannot abandon him. Plus she looks after my granny, dad's mom, who is now 100 years old.

There is so much more to my mother's story, about how at the age of 13 she started tutoring children at her house, and later started a school to help the street children, and about her on-going fight with cancer with so much courage and determination, but that is another story for another time.



## **My Story**

### **Shawn Richards**

I am pleased to share how my journey into literacy is changing my life.

From grades 1 to 6 I was held back twice. Then I was moved into grade 8 with no introduction into high school like most grade 7 students. I really hated my first year of high school with all the learning disabilities. I lived in fear I would be centred out in the large class. Eventually I found myself so far behind I would not attend class at all. It was not long before I quit going all together. I attended an alternate school for a while but it was more like a babysitting service than a learning institution. The other students were lost like me and we suppressed all feelings with drugs and alcohol.

The rest of my life was spent doing manual labour; this was all I could do with limited knowledge and skills to enter the work force. My suppression of how my life was turning out frustrated me and I gave up on the mainstream of life. I felt there was no one in my corner. My addiction to drugs was the band-aid to my fears. My problems only got worse. I was homeless for years and incarcerated for a while. Then in Dec 2007, I got sick with pneumonia and had to be hospitalized. There seemed to be no bottom to my life.

Early in 2008 I finally asked a street nurse to help me get into a local treatment centre. During the intake they asked me if I could I read and write. They require a lot of reading for their program. I was scared to tell them I was unable to do either very well. When they finally found out I was treated in a way that demoralized me and I left on my own accord.

After I left the center I stayed clean and sober, but did not know what to do or where to turn. Luckily that street nurse, a close friend to this day, told me he believed in me and found me a John Howard Society safe house. The employees there showed me I could I learn to cope with my addiction problems and start to repair my life from the ground up. I learned to start taking healthy risks and putting myself out there, and asking others for help.

The John Howard Society counsellor lent me his personal recovery books on tapes. They were easy to listen to instead of struggling with reading. I would listen to them over and over and I had the books too, so I went along and things got a bit easier.

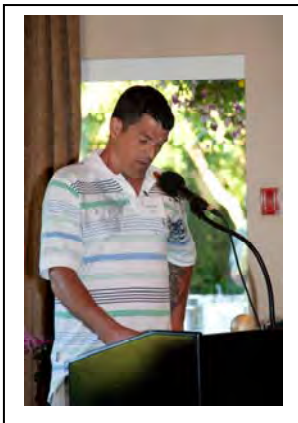
The counsellor also suggested I go to Literacy Nanaimo and ask for help. I was like a nervous child standing in their book store waiting to talk to a total stranger and ask for help reading books that I hoped would help save my life. I told the tutor coordinator at Literacy Nanaimo I was just looking for help reading a popular book on recovering from alcoholism. She was so interested in me, showed so much enthusiasm I will never forget her for the kindness she showed me that day. I was later tested to see where my reading

and writing levels were at. Then they assigned my first of two tutors. We worked only on the basics and I found after a few months things were coming back out of nowhere. I was starting to remember what I was reading, and I was really excited with the beginner's writing book they gave me.

Then my tutor coordinator asked me if I would like to try finishing school up at V.I.U. Once again I felt my eyes heavy with water and thought wow they believe in me. Most of my life I did not believe in myself. And with their help I got a good start in a great program up at V.I.U. Today I'm challenging myself in school and took an introduction course in counseling, and have been blessed with a part time job with the Canadian Mental Health Association. I really like my work, because I work with people who I know from the streets of Nanaimo.

My second tutor, David Payne, helped me not only understand reading and writing but helped me connect with Disability Services at VIU, plus many more things. We have lots of laughs and today I am really proud to call him a friend.

I will end with saying that I got a second chance because people took the time to believe in me, and for that I am grateful and today I believe that I can make a difference by helping others help themselves.



Shawn reading his speech



Peter Gzowski Jr. and Shawn



Lieutenant-Governor Steven Point and Shawn with his award

Tutor Coordinator's note: This powerful story earned Shawn the **2010 Peter Gzowski Invitational Learner Achievement Tribute Award**. The award recognizes exceptional progress in learning and personal growth. Shawn accepted the honour in Vancouver on July 13 in a ceremony attended by the BC Lieutenant- Governor and 200 community and business leaders. After hearing his story they reacted immediately with a prolonged standing ovation. **Congratulations, Shawn!** We are proud of you!

Special thanks to tutor David Payne

A publication of:

**Volunteer Tutoring Program**

A partnership between

Literacy Central Vancouver Island & Vancouver Island University

