

I'VE COME A LONG WAY



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Dedication

To Mom and Dad because I feel so grateful for their love and support to me always.





**At the Shriners Hospital in
Montreal, when I was six years
old.**

CHAPTER I

I was born in Campbellton, New Brunswick at the Hotel Dieu Hospital. I was a premature seven months baby and weighed only three pounds. You could put me in a shoebox. The doctors at the hospital didn't think I was going to live. I was in an incubator for a month. I was the first born in my family. I have three brothers and two sisters.

When I was six years old I had four operations to help me walk. I traveled with my dad by train to the Shriners Hospital in Montreal. I was there for fifteen months altogether; for six months I was in a cast and had to stay in bed while the bones set. The nurses tried to keep me busy. They taught me how to sew by hand such things as diapers for dolls.

I couldn't go to school because we lived in the country and the school was too far away. I couldn't walk to it and there was no other way to get to it. I did learn to do other things with my mother. I helped Mom wash and iron and bake. I liked doing that very much. To get around I used a small chair, by lifting it and putting it down again. People often tried to discourage me from trying to do things for myself, but I fought back.

I remember one Christmas when my sister Shirley was two months old, I went to a Christmas concert. I recited a poem. Dad was baby-sitting the rest of the family. We came home and he had the Christmas decorations up. He had paper ribbons and paper dolls - oh, I was so pleased. They looked so nice.

He'd go in the woods and cut our Christmas tree. I used to help Mum bake for Christmas. We used to make eleven different things. I'll never forget. Mum used to make homemade buns and

bread. That was my favourite on Christmas morning for breakfast. But she doesn't make them any more.

There were no other children for me to play with outside of my immediate family. When I was twelve years old, we moved to Matapedia, Quebec, and I had more friends my own age. We stayed there until I was eighteen, then we moved to Toronto. I went to the Toronto General Hospital for tests, but there was no more that they could do for me to make me walk any better.



**Tobogganing at Friendly Acres,
1959.**

CHAPTER II

Not long after I came to Toronto, I started to go to the Carlton Street United Church. Once a month the CP (Cerebral Palsy) Club held their meetings at the church. They were very friendly and had quest speakers and entertainers, such as barbershop quartets. We went to Friendly Acres on weekends, even in the winter. We went tobogganing; it was great fun.

Soon I went to work at a handicap workshop. I stayed for four years, then I left because I felt that they were using us. They didn't pay very much for what we could do. They said it was a school, not a real workshop. I was very good with my hands and I made stuffed animals and sanded children's wooden blocks, and waxed them and polished them. It was a lot of work for the money. They paid \$1 for twenty blocks, and \$1.20 for a stuffed animal. It took a week to make one.

I also did a lot of weaving. I finished a scarf and made a set of place mats. Then I worked on snow shoes made from T.V aerial wires. For that I got \$3 a pair, and very sore fingers! When you made a mistake you had to pull it all out again. I made more money with that, but I still wouldn't want to be with only handicapped people.

I feel we should be with all kinds of people, not shut away by ourselves. The one really good thing about the workshop was that I heard about swimming lessons at the Sunnybrook Hospital. I enjoyed swimming very much. I wish I could go again, but there is no way to get there.



Swimming at Sunnybrook, 1956.



Arriving in Toronto, when I was 21.

CHAPTER III

One day I met Tommy. He was a friend of one of my brothers. He used to go out with a girl my brother went out with. She introduced us. Because of Tommy I began to do things I never thought I could do.

On our first date we went to a drive-in with my brother, Richard, and his girlfriend, but I'll never forget our real first date. We were driving along talking and he went through a red light. Then we went to a restaurant and he spilled water over himself.

Another day not long after this, we went for a drive in the country and we stopped at the side of the road where they were selling apples, and on the way back the apples fell out of the bag and spilled all over the back of the car. We had a good laugh about that. Another time we went with another couple to a park. Tommy started to pull the car rug off the seat of the car and tore it badly. We had to have our lunch on a park bench.

We went camping. At first we just had a tent, then we used a tent trailer and finally a house trailer. We had many wonderful camping trips together - first near Toronto but then we got a seasonal camp site at Cedar Creek Park near Brighton, Ontario.



**Camping with Tommy in
Algonquin Park, 1962.**

We also went on exciting bus trips. In 1967 we went to the Calgary Stampede, then to Edmonton, Alberta. We went out West three times. Also we took trips to the Gaspé and New Brunswick. We had a lot of fun. We met a lot of nice people too.



I shall never forget one little old lady from Quebec on a trip out West. She got on the bus the night before we got off. When she got on the bus we thought she was going to be difficult. She announced, "I don't want any lights on. I want peace and quiet!" Then she started teasing one of the young passengers: "You shouldn't be travelling alone, you should have your boyfriend along with you." She made us all laugh with her broken English.

Once we went to Tobemory on our way to Manitoulin Island. When I was on the boat to the Island I got seasick for the first time in my life.

The last trip we took together was to the Thousand Islands and Upper Canada Village. Shortly after that we broke up, after going together for almost twenty years. It was the saddest time of my life. I didn't want to do anything or go anywhere. But little by little, with the help of friends, I began to live again.



At school, December, 1983.

CHAPTER IV

I go a couple times a week to Donlands Restaurant. One night I met Martha. We got to talking about school somehow, and she offered to help me. I told her about how I used to go to evening classes at Jessie Ketchum Public School. Tommy used to drive me there and back. On the first night I went to the school, I said to Tornmy, "if I don't like it I'm not coming back!" But I did go.

Jenny Nice was my teacher. Before I went to Jessie Ketchum I didn't know what a school room looked like. With her help I began to learn to read and print. I went to the school for three years, but when Tommy and I broke up I didn't have the heart to continue the program, and I couldn't get anyone to drive me.

Martha got me involved in the East End literacy program. She made a tape of the sounds of the letters of the alphabet and that helped me a lot. I began to feel more encouraged to learn again. Then Olive took over and continued where Martha left off.

Now I go to adult day school at William Burgess School. I really enjoy it. I go in the afternoon. I go by taxi, paid for by the Board of Education and one of the other students usually drives me home. My teachers are Valerie and Meta. I'm now learning to write instead of to print. We are starting to read articles out of the Toronto newspapers. Our class also went to such places as the Museum, the Metro Zoo and Pioneer Village.

Next year I shall be going to school all day. I'm reading much better now and I can write. Before I could only print and I didn't think I would learn to write so soon.

CHAPTER V

My hobbies are knitting, crocheting, embroidery, weaving and sewing. I hooked one carpet. I take my knitting wherever I go, but now the bedspread I'm making is getting too big!

I like to cook, and I paint pictures by numbers. I sold two of them. The first one was for Linda, who worked at the Donlands. She was so glad about it, she bought it - she bought the paints and paid for the picture. She also bought me a necklace.

I do puzzles when I get the chance. Also, I like to decorate cakes. I'd like to go to a cake decorating class, and weaving. I've got a little loom Tommy bought me for Christmas.

I lived with Mom and Dad for forty-three years. Dad worked 'til he was sixty-eight at the Toronto Dominion Centre. He got sick before he retired. He has had kidney failure for almost three years.

My parents live in the West End now, and I didn't want to move there. I've lived with my brother for the last three years. My parents wanted me back again, but I have to have a life of my own. I sort of have to look out for myself.

I feel very good about my life. It is full of lovely surprises these days. In spite of many setbacks, I've come a long way.



East End Literacy is a small, community-based reading centre in downtown Toronto. Through one-to-one tutoring and small group classes, it aims to provide adults with a good educational alternative to the traditional classroom. Adult learners are encouraged to write about their own life experiences and interests. E. E. L. works with English-speaking Canadians and newcomers.

East End Literacy

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