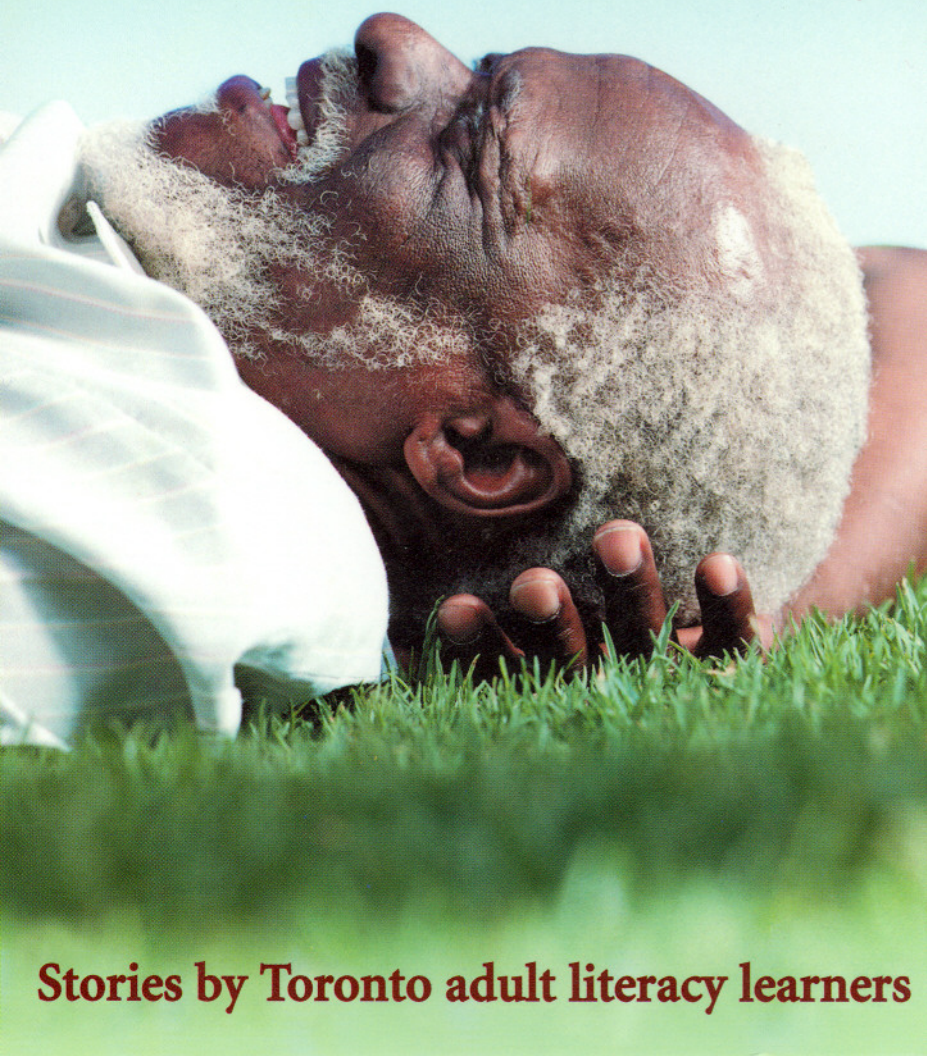


*from Self
to Story*



Stories by Toronto adult literacy learners

From Self to Story

WINNERS AND
HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Presented by The Word On The Street
and Toronto adult literacy programs

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Literacy Access Network

This collection of stories is the culmination of a project undertaken in 2004 by The Word On The Street Toronto in partnership with Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy and the National Literacy Secretariat, and follows up on the 2002 project pilot, *Land That I Dream Of*. Many people and organizations contributed to this project's success. At the top of the list are all the literacy learners who attended the creative writing workshops and submitted stories to the contest. With gusto and courage, they each took up the formidable challenge of writing a story from their own rich life experience, and chose to share it with us. Thanks, too, to all the literacy tutors who provide learners with untold encouragement and support. Working together, you have created a very beautiful book.

Our sincere thanks to Larry Loyie and Constance Brissenden for their two wonderful "From Self to Story" workshops, which inspired this year's contest theme. Larry's book, *As Long as the Rivers Flow*, is a favourite with adult literacy learners and was nominated for the 2004 Golden Oak Book Award - congratulations Larry!

For all their help and support, we would also like to acknowledge the multi-talented Colleen D'Souza of Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy and Joan Robinson of the Toronto Public Library's Adult Literacy Services; accomplished poet and workshop facilitator Sheila Stewart; and dedicated jury member Nancy Friday of Centre AlphaPlus Centre.

Thank you, as always, to our friends and colleagues who helped this book get published, especially Abby Gainforth of Gainforth Graphic Design; festival interns Wendy Bray, Julia Graham, and Evelyn Siu; and the good folks at Coach House Printing. Also, special thanks to Colleen O'Neill of The Word On The Street's national office; and the National Literacy Secretariat, for both the financial support and their continued appreciation of the value and effectiveness of small, local efforts like *From Self to Story*.

Finally, this September 2004, as we turn our minds towards celebrating our fifteenth anniversary in Toronto, we would like to thank all those who have contributed their time, talent, skills, ideas, and sheer enthusiasm to the festival over the years. We look forward to another fifteen years of coming together with our fellow Torontonians and visitors, on the last Sunday of September, to celebrate and discover excellent Canadian reading and writing.

Jen Cooper
Festival Coordinator
The Word On The Street



Trish McGrath
Executive Director
The Word On The Street



Adult Literacy in Toronto

Being able to read, understand, and act on written material and numerical information is fundamental in our daily lives. People need basic skills to accomplish everyday tasks at home, at work, and in the community.

Even amongst Canada's relatively well-educated population, forty two per cent of working-age adults - 8 million people - have literacy skills below the minimum level needed to cope with the complex demands of everyday life and work in our global economy.

In Toronto, there are approximately 500,000 adults who need assistance with reading and writing; yet, at any given time, there are only enough places in literacy programs for less than 1% of those who need help.

Help Is Available

A network of people and organizations supports adult literacy learners in the City of Toronto. The network includes the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML), community literacy programs, the Literacy and Basic Skills Program of the Toronto District School Board, and Adult Literacy Services of the Toronto Public Library. MTML is the regional network that represents publicly funded adult literacy programs in Toronto and York Region.

Who Do I Call?

Call 416-961-5557 and talk with someone who will link you to the adult literacy program closest to where you live or work. This is the Literacy Access Network phone line, operated by the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy with support from Canada Post.

Where Is This Phone Number Listed?

The Literacy Access Network phone number is listed in the Yellow Pages under "learn", courtesy of ABC Canada and the Yellow Pages. You can also find the phone number by calling Answer Line at the Toronto Public Library: 416-393-7131. In addition, you can call 211 for information about community, social, health, and government services, and ask about the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.

What Happens Next?

Once you meet with staff at a literacy program, a paid instructor or a volunteer tutor will instruct you for free. The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities makes this possible, along with additional support from local organizations and private donors.

How Do I Become A Volunteer?

If you are reading this book at The Word On The Street, drop by Literacy Lane and the Enbridge Gas Distribution Literacy Tent to speak with a representative from Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.

In the back of this book, there is also a listing of adult literacy organizations in Toronto, including contact information.

If you have access to a computer, you can go to the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy Website to find Literacy Access Network maps and a list of services: www.mtml.ca

Working Together

The stories in this book represent the remarkable journey adults in literacy programs have made from self to story. Their efforts reflect courage and determination to acquire basic skills that they can apply at home, at work, and in the community. They are able to share their stories as a result of many organizations that have worked together to obtain funding, offer writing workshops, provide instruction for literacy learners, and publish this outstanding volume, which is a tribute to the adults in Toronto's literacy programs.

These stories are a wonderful sample of the many stories that were shared by adults who attend literacy programs in Toronto. Everyone has a story to tell; some are sad, some speak of hardship, some of heroism, and some are filled with humour. All of these stories celebrate the transition from self to story in ways that are as varied as human experience itself.

Congratulations to the adults whose stories appear in these pages, and congratulations to the overwhelming number of adults in Toronto's literacy programs who took the time to attend creative writing workshops and write stories for The Word On The Street writing contest.

Joan Robinson
Adult Literacy Services, Toronto Public Library
On behalf of Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy

Family and Friends

My Grandmother's Chicken and Me

ANGELA HAMILTON

It was Sunday like all other Sundays, when my uncle comes home from the market, from the city. He would leave on Thursdays and come back on the weekends and bring back groceries for Sundays. Every Sunday it was a ritual. At 6:00 a.m. my grandmother would wake up the grandchildren, likewise my uncles and aunties and we were all out the house at 8:00 a.m. We would do what we had to do to get ready for church. When we were ready for church my grandmother would then get herself together.

It was like clockwork to see the family moving like robots, getting ready for that one thing that my grandmother believed in. On many occasions my grandmother would not let us even sweep the 'ard (that would be the yard) because it would take too much time. She would say, "you can be late for anything bu yu na ganna lae fa god words." What my grandmother was saying is you can be late for anything, but you should not be late for the words of the Lord

The ritual continued after church. We would come home at the same time every Sunday. I remember on a particular Sunday my grandmother went in the kitchen after taking off her good clothes and started to boil a pot with hot water. When I saw her boiling the water, the only thing that would come to my little girl's mind was my grandmother was going to make tea or coffee. However, as an adult I now know the water she was boiling was to help soften the chicken's feathers to make plucking easier.

I clearly remember that the day before, my grandmother was carrying a big white fluffy chicken under her arm, with the legs tied together so it wouldn't fly away. It was the plumpest a child could ever see. Its feathers were as white as snow. Its comb was bright red and felt rubbery to the touch. My grandmother placed the squawking, wiggly chicken in the fenced coup at the back of the house. I thought, like all the people living in the countryside who keep their chickens in a fenced coup, that it was to keep the chicken from going on other people's property.

I did not know it was our Sunday dinner. On that Sunday after church when I started to play with the chicken, I thought it was the family pet, and I would not get into trouble for playing with it. I thought it was my own little chicken pet.

Somehow I left the door open, and suddenly the chicken flew out of the coup and started to run down the gully. Being I was so little I started to call out to my grandmother saying, "mama mama the chicken is flying away." She said, "Wameck tha fowl fly if yu ne fait WI ie?" (That means the chicken would not fly if you did not touch it.) I started to cry as hard I could. She said, "What are you crying about?" She said that I should calm down and tell her what is the matter.

Everybody ran out of the house to find out what the commotion was all about. When my grandmother told the story to the family they were all mad with me mainly because they all knew that it was the only meat for dinner. And there was no more money to buy another one. Everything happened so fast and all the family members were running around trying to think what to do. They did try to find the big white chicken, but with no luck.

The money wasn't the sad part. It was that my grandmother couldn't get another chicken for dinner that late of the day. Because of the part of the country we were living in, supermarkets were limited.

Like all other grandmothers, she would never give up trying to find a solution, to make everything better and make sacrifices for the family. This one sacrifice she made was she walked about 2 miles to her sister's house to get green cabbage and salt fish for the dinner. No one knew she left to get the cabbage and cod fish.

In the end we all had dinner. Even though they were still mad with me, we all enjoyed the food that she provided that day, in spite of how it all started. My grandmother was always the hero, doing what she did best, coming through in the end. I can still hear my grandmother saying, "Don't you touch that fowl again when you come a da country again." (Don't ever touch the chicken when you come down to the country).

Pappy and Me

ANNMARIE - LEE

In the fifties and sixties children were strongly disciplined but for me, my father spoiled me. I was a spoiled girl. My brother even said, "Pappy had you like a little queen."

My father used to dress me different from the other children in school. At the school I used to attend, I wore a uniform which was a blue skirt and white shirt with white socks and running shoes. Pappy disregarded the rules of the school and would dress me like a little doll with silk frilly cancan dresses and pointed toed shoes with little heels. My teachers would not let me play sports because of the way I dressed. Any time I would try to play I would slip and fall.

I also did not have a book bag like everyone else, instead I had a briefcase. I was very proud because I was different from the other kids. Pappy used to comb my hair in four braids, one sticking out to the front of my head, two on each side and one to the back, and they all had different coloured ribbons on them. One day my friend Carol and I had quarrel and she said, "Look at you all dressed up and your hair style is like east, west, north and south." Everyone started teasing me from that day.

Thank God for this lady named Miss Jean who always rescued me from those bad hair days. She would stop me on my way to school and comb over my hair. Pappy heard about the teasing and thanked Miss Jean and sometimes he asked my cousins to comb over my hair.

Pappy made all those tasty meals made with curry. He made curry bread, curry dumplings, curry rice, curry meat and everything he made was curry.

He loved cooking with curry so much that one day he served me curry tea by mistake thinking it was cocoa.

My lunch bowl I took to school was badly stained with curry. My cousin and friends made fun of it so I used to skip school in the morning and go after lunch. Then Miss Jean rescued me again and started to give me lunch to go to school every day on time.

I had a doll that my father gave me for my 10th birthday. It was my first doll. I was such a spoiled girl that I wanted my doll to be christened in the church. Father More lucks agreed to baptize my doll and be a guest at the party. There were two godmothers, Carol and Gloria, with one godfather Eric. Two cars were hired and there was a big party with lots of food and drinks with entertainment from my Pappy's brass band. Lots of people came out for the free food. There was lots of gossip about how foolish the whole thing was.

Those happy days changed one day while I was having a conversation with Pappy and I could not understand what he was saying. He fell to the floor suffering a massive stroke and lost his speech and the use of his right side. Family and friends only came to visit him. I was left with all the personal care and I was only eleven years old. I had to stop going to school to take care of him.

When I had to give him a bath it was the worst time for him. I think he felt ashamed that his little girl had to give him a bath. He would cry and pull at his clothes and try to hide himself. I told him as a joke I would spank him if he didn't allow me to care for him. That broke the ice and he smiled.

I took care of him for three years until he was able to walk again but he never regained his speech. The night of June 10, 1969 he asked me, by sign, to kneel down in front of him. My father lay his hand on my head, looked up to heaven and said, 'Jesus'. I was so relieved knowing that after three years Pappy was talking again. After he did that he went to bed saying my name, "Ann", over and over again until he stopped.

I didn't know my father died at that moment. I let him sleep until ten o'clock the next day. My aunt thought it was strange that he was still sleeping. She went to look at him. She said, "I don't think Pappy is sleeping. I think he is dead."

Pappy was sixty-two years old when he died. Life without my Pappy was difficult. But I always remember what he said before he died, when he blessed me and said "Jesus". It has given me comfort and peace. I was fourteen years old. I believe God allowed my father to speak and he is still watching over me.

My Mother's Laugh

DWAINE L. McDONALD

The person who influenced me the most was my mother. During the course of her life, she went through so much tragedy and adversity. However, instead of becoming bitter or stuck in the past thinking what could've been, she remembered the fun times she had as well.

My mother was born in a small town. She had an older brother Gerald and a younger sister Mary. When I was young, my mother seemed like a private person. But sometimes she would open up. She once told us a funny story joking she was a "bastard child." She lived with a man who was her dad, but her mother was married to another man. She lived with her dad because back then divorce was out of the question. The funny thing was when grandma finally decided to divorce her husband, he died. This made it possible to marry the man she really loved. After they married, they had a third child, my mom's sister Mary.

Mom also told us about how her parents died. Her dad, my grandfather, on his fiftieth birthday, wondered if he would live another fifty years. He was a road worker. His job was to blow holes in rocks to flatten them out. He worked with dynamite. He would drill a hole in a rock, put a charge in, then he would take cover and detonate the charge. After this was completed, he would check the rocks to see if the explosion did what it was supposed to do. The day he died, he went over to the rocks trying to figure out why some of the charges didn't go off. As he was checking, the charges went off, blowing his leg off. He bled to death on his way to the hospital.

Her mother died tragically as well, though not as dramatically. But it was just as heartbreaking. Mom would start by telling us a little bit about Grandma. She was as round as she was tall. So was her sister Mary, who took after Grandma. On the day my grandma died, she and my mom were alone in the house when my grandmother suffered a devastating stroke. My mom ran for help. Then she ran back to my grandma and held her in her arms until help came. But help came too late. She died. My mother told us that Grandma was only in her forties, too young to die.

One of my favorite stories is the one that made my mother and aunt laugh so hard. My aunt told us kids about how my mother tried to kill her. She would laugh so hard telling us: it was just a joke. What happened was in the spring they would chop a chunk out of a tree. Then they would suck the sap out. As my aunt was sucking on the sap, my mother - using an ax - tried to chop a chunk out of the tree, right over my aunt's head. Instead of the tree, she accidentally cut my aunt's cheek. They both thought this story was hilarious.

My mother married by the time she was 16. My brother was born shortly after. My mother would often say that the first baby can come any time, but after that, it takes nine months. By the time she was 20, she had 3 kids. Widowed at 27, she had four kids who were under the age of 10. I was only seven when my dad died. Up to then, all the homes I lived in lacked indoor plumbing. There was one house that had 3 holes in the outhouse. I remember when I was five, my mother, her friend and I went there. My mom always took one of us kids when she had to go to the outhouse, since she was so terrified of snakes.

She and her friend hadn't seen each other for a while. They were laughing and talking back and forth. I guess they wanted to spend as much time as they could together. We were all sitting on the three holes, with me in the middle. That's where the baby seat was. My mother's friend joked about the toilet paper. It was the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue. My mom laughed and told us how to use it properly. She said, "You take a page out of the catalogue. Then crinkle it up and rub it until it becomes soft." Not many women could make using an outhouse fun. But it was typical of my mom; she saw the lighter side of life.

She remarried at 32. Once more, she was widowed. She was married only ten months when my stepfather died. At 36, she was married again and expecting twin boys. Unfortunately, she miscarried and lost them. The marriage dissolved after 10 weeks; She often joked that her next marriage would probably last only 10 days.

Over the years, my mom would tell us funny stories about her childhood. One of my favorites was when she was quite young and their preferred mode of transportation was a big red pig. She and her brother would ride this pig all over the farm. Another story was when my uncle and mother were playing with matches. They only meant to set fire to tree stumps, but it developed into a brush fire. One other time, her brother was teasing her as she was getting ready to go on a date. She threw a shoe at him, which cut him over his eye. In school, boys would dip her long braids into inkwells.

Her many stories over the years made me laugh or cry but always they fascinated me. But, there's still so much I can't remember. Or things that happened my mom didn't tell me.

I realize how important it is to know as much as you can about your parents, and if you're lucky enough to have them, your grandparents. As well, write them down in a diary or journal. Anything you need to do to remember. Keep their legacy alive. By sharing my stories with you, it's keeping my mother close to my heart. She died two years ago, but she and her stories will always be kept alive and well through this story.

My Family History

J. JACOBSON

I hope that everyone will enjoy reading about my family history. I do not know about my birth family, so I am going to tell you about the family that adopted me.

My dad, Sydney Longford, was born on February 18, 1913. My mom, Rosa Hargreaves, was born on March 20, 1914. I do not know much about my dad's family, but I do know about mom's great, great, great, great grandfather. His name was James Hargreaves. He was born in Lancashire, NW England. He was an illiterate weaver and a carpenter. In 1764, he invented the Spinning Jenny, which was named after his daughter. In 1768, his house was broken into and co-workers destroyed the frame. He moved to Nottingham where he ran a spinning mill. He continued working in the mill until his death in 1770.

My parents first met in Manchester on April 1, 1934; my mom used to say, "What a fool I was to meet your dad on April 1st." My parents dated for 21/2 years before they got married on September 21, 1936. My parents never went on a honeymoon, because my dad worked in a green grocer's which his parents owned. He could not get any time off from working in the store. After the wedding, my mom went right to work in the store.

My parents were married for 14 months when my oldest brother, Sydney, was born on November 19, 1937, and on April 27th, 1939, my oldest sister, Rona, was born. On October 27th, 1940, my second oldest sister, Barbara, was born.

My dad joined the army in 1940, and my mom was left alone with 3 small children. My dad was away for about 3 years before he came home to visit. Then on February 5, 1945, my second oldest brother, David, was born. My dad used to say that if he was around more, he and my mom would have had a football team. When the war was over in 1945, my dad came home for good, and my sister Barb said, "Who is that man!?" My mom had said that if she knew that his attitude was going to be different after the war, then she would never have married him. Eight years after my dad came home from the war, my 3rd oldest brother, Rick, was born on March 13, 1953.

My Aunt Ivy wrote my parents and asked them to come to Canada, because she was lonely and really needed them around. In May of 1954, my parents and brothers and sisters decided to move from Manchester, England to Canada. The first house that they bought was at 223 Kitchener Road in Scarborough, Ontario. My dad's first job in Canada was working for the City of Scarborough Roads Department. His job was cleaning the drain pipes in the sewers. It was a dirty job, but he needed it to support his family.

I was born on November 22, 1957, in Toronto, Ontario. For the first six months of my life I lived with my birth mother. When I was six months old, my real mom decided that she could not take care of me. In May of 1958, I was taken into the care of the Catholic Children's Aid Society. I was very lucky because the Longfords took me in and gave me a very loving home. When I first came to them they had to feed me every two hours, because at 6 months old, I weighed only eight pounds. I was very underweight. The doctors did not expect me to live.

Growing up I have had to always struggle with my life. With the love and support of my family, I have overcome a lot of obstacles. I now have some education, I have my bronze medallion in swimming, and the best of all is that I know a lot more about computers, as I just finished a computer course. I learned Windows, MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Internet skills. I hope that one day I will be able to get a full time job in computers.

I lived with the same family for sixteen years before they were allowed to adopt me. Finally, when I was 16 years old, my parents were able to adopt me. My parents were such wonderful people that I was one of 52 babies and 16 teenagers fostered in their home over the years. One of which I still call my brother. My Aunt Ivy was also fostering babies. My parents and my aunt loved kids and wanted to help them.

My family is bigger than ever; I have 4 brothers and 2 sisters, 16 nieces and nephews, and 17 great-nieces and nephews. I think that not too many people go into a foster home when they are a baby and stay with the same family for 46 years. I FEEL LUCKY!

My Childhood in Grenada

JENNIFER B.A.

My life began July 31, 1968. When I was born my blood mother and father were always fighting over me. My mother thought that it was best to give me up for adoption. She thought that was the best thing. A couple by the name of c.c. decided to take me and raised me. Mister C. had lots of land and animals. He had cars and vans. We had to work so hard for a living. We had to go in the garden and pick oranges and grapefruit. We had to cut bananas and bring them on our heads for Mrs. C. to get ready for the market. We also had to feed rabbits, goats, pigs, and dogs. There were lots of other animals on the farm.

I can remember four girls and three boys. Mrs. C. used to go from one country to the other every Tuesday. Mrs. C. wasn't a nice woman. She only pretended. Mr. C. wasn't a nice man either. Mr. C. hurt those girls physically, emotionally and mentally. Mr. and Mrs. C. used to beat a drum and sing, "Bogotum, bogotum, boss tomorrow, boss, boss, boss tomorrow." When Mrs. C. beat that drum, they wanted one of the girls to dance, but she didn't want to. They beat her to make her dance. The girl cried. All she wanted was to go home and meet her birth mother. My mother used to visit the farm sometimes on Sunday. Then Mr. and Mrs. C. make things look like we were cared for.

Mrs. C. had two children on her own. Mr. C. had lots of children with other women.

This is my life. I had to get out of bed at six o'clock in the morning and feed the animals.

After feeding the animals we had to make breakfast before we got ready for school. My dream was to become a nurse or a police officer, but at the age of nine my life became a disaster.

I was forced to sleep with my stepfather. We had to sleep with him by turns. My sister and I were very close. We used to hug each other and cry. I told my sister I would like to run away. Mrs. C. refused to sleep with Mr. c., so the girls had to sleep with Mr. C. Sometimes we used to stand in front of the sink to wash dishes and Mr. C.'s hands were always under our clothes. Sometimes we used to pretend that we were sick because who wanted their turn? Nobody. Mr. C. used to drag me by my foot in the night just to sleep with him.

My life was in a hole. I went to school, but could not concentrate. Everybody in my classroom found I was different, but I only cried. I just cried.

When the situation just started I felt it was wrong, but after a while I thought it was right. I could not learn anything at school. We were not allowed to have friends over or to go visit anyone else. What did I do wrong? I am still searching for an answer that I never find.

When my Mr. and Mrs. C. got a divorce I did not understand why Mrs. C. had us suffering so. My sister and I ran away to go back home. We were no longer welcome. At the age of fifteen I had two children. Sometimes I think we were searching for a safe place inside the mind. Some people find a safe place inside their mind.

My brother became an alcoholic. I hated myself so much that I was always running away. When I was sleeping my father was always there. I had no regrets the day he died.

When Mrs. C. went to another country she also had people working with them. There was a guy who used to drive Mrs. C. to the docks. He knew what was going on and he asked me, "Is this man sleeping with you girls?" At that time I didn't trust anyone. I felt afraid and I also wanted to speak to someone. I didn't have any of my family members to turn to. It all started when he said to me, "I know a lot about you girls." My eyes were full of tears. Then I knew. That little silence was no longer a secret.

Then we sat in that field. I looked straight at him and asked him, "If I tell you the truth will you help me?" He replied, "Yes." When I began to tell him, he promised to stay quiet. After three years we became good friends and started going out. I trusted him. He was my only friend. We spoke about everything and anything.

I felt he knew my whole life and I believed that I was safe. Little did I know.

I then ran away with Mister Right. Everything seemed good. But everything was too good to be true. At the age of 13 we were living together. I could not speak or comb my hair the way I wanted. I was not allowed to wear the clothes I liked anymore. When we went places I could not look at anybody. He got angry.

Sometimes in life you may need a shoulder to lean on. Always skip the first one.

I had no nothing, not even a job. Mister Right bought me lots of clothes, and food. No money. I was happy for some time until I got pregnant. Mister Right walked away. I never, never saw or heard anything about him. I gave birth in November. Mr. Right married another woman in December.

It doesn't matter what Mr. Right did to me I just could not say no. I was so weak and helpless and I also felt alone. Sometimes I could not eat or drink. Other times I could not speak. I was missing a big part of my inside. I felt empty for years, and I had a very hard time dealing with men: looking at them, to speaking with them, moving around them, even sleeping with them. Why did I blame myself? I blamed myself because I felt guilty for many years.

Sometimes I just want to be alone and when that time comes it doesn't matter what I am doing. It doesn't matter who I am with. I always need to split. Or sometimes if I don't get my silent moments I get angry. Or if I am angry I just scream. I know what I am doing but sometimes I cannot control myself. I have a hard time listening to people and speaking to people. I cannot concentrate. I cannot see anymore. I know that I am living but I don't know why.

Sometimes I feel like screaming, other times I feel like bawling. Sometimes I feel like there is a fire burning inside me. I sometimes lock myself up inside my house and let it pass.

A Mother's Prayer

ANONYMOUS

O, make me a better mother for my family. Teach me to understand my children, to listen patiently to what they have to say, and to answer all their questions kindly. Keep me from interrupting them, talking back to them, as I would have them be to me. Give me the courage to confess to them when I am wrong and ask forgiveness, when I know that I have done them wrong.

May I not vainly hurt the feelings of my children. Forbid that I should laugh at their mistakes or resort to shame and ridicule as punishment. Let me not tempt them to lie and to steal. So guide me, hour by hour, that I may demonstrate by all I say and do, that honesty produces happiness.

Blind me to the little errors of my children and help me see the good things they do. Give me a ready word for honesty, praise and let me treat them as I would those of their own age. Allow me not to rob them of the opportunity to wait upon themselves, and to think to choose, and to make their own decisions.

Forbid that I should ever punish them for my selfish satisfaction. May I grant them all their wishes that are reasonable. And to have the courage always to withhold a privilege which I know will do them harm.

Make me so fair and just, so considerate and companionable to my children, so that they will have a genuine esteem for me. Fit me to be loved and imitated.

With all these gifts it will make me a better mother for my family. So give me calm, poise and self-control.

My Journey to Canada

JOHN DOUSE

I was born in Thatchwalk, St. Ann, Jamaica. The first school I attended was Clarksonville. The distance from home to school was about six to ten miles. I had to walk back and forth every day. When I first attended school, I did very well. Eventually, my father wanted me to work with him and so then my attendance at school became poor. My education fell apart for me at this early point in my life.

My father passed away when I was twelve years old. He appointed two people outside the family as the executors of his estate. We lost most of the estate to them. I went to live with them. I attended school, but it was not a good experience. At seventeen, I went to Kingston to look for a job as a gardener. I met a first cousin and talked to him about jobs. He was working in a machine shop as an apprentice. I asked him if could learn a trade at that shop too. About one week later, he told me yes.

It was a Monday morning when I went to look for work. There wasn't an opening in the machine shop, but there was one in the paint shop. I went for it. After three weeks on the job, I received one shilling and six-pence for my bus fare. My oldest brother, Rupey, owned a grocery store where I worked part-time, too. My brother and my sister took care of my eating and living expenses.

At the grocery store, I was very friendly with the customers. One man was named Carlton. I told him about my job in the paint shop. About one week later, Carlton and another man named Wally got me a job at the Kingston Industrial Garage.

Carlton had attended an electrical school to learn his trade. I worked with a journeyman. I didn't get any pay from my first week on the job, so Carlton gave me two shillings and a sixpence. After ninety days on the job, I began to earn two pounds and ten shillings every two weeks.

About four months had passed and then something else happened to me. The year was 1963. It was a couple of months after the American president, John F. Kennedy, was assassinated. A man by the name of Muddy, from the C.T. Company, came to my workplace at about 12:30 p.m. He saw me working through my lunch break. He asked me to come and see him. I dropped my spray gun and went to the gate to wait for him. From 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., I earned three pounds and ten shillings. I went from making two pounds and ten shillings every two weeks to making 12 pounds a week! One week, I earned 36 pounds! That was a shock for me. This job lasted for two months because the guy I was filling in for came back for his position. After this, I bought some equipment and went out on my own.

A few years later, I met a man named Nevel. I lent him my compressor when he needed it. In 1967, he went to Canada. He wrote to me and asked me for a favor for his cousin. We started corresponding and we talked about Canada a lot. I decided to apply to the United States instead. I had about 700 pounds in the bank, three insurance policies for my three kids and a policy for myself. I got a letter from the Jamaican ambassador that said I could not go to the United States because I was not yet married. I had been turned down three times. Soon, Canada came into the picture. I was sent an invitation letter from Canada.

I landed in Canada on April 26, 1968. It was like arriving into a different world! The trees were bare and looked like they had been through a forest fire. The snow and cool temperatures were no surprise to me because, in 1967, on television I had seen an ice storm in Toronto. I remember because that was the year the Toronto Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup.

I had a visitor's visa. Back in those days, if you wanted to see someone from Jamaica, you would go to the WEFF Club located at College Street and Brunswick Avenue. My first Canadian address was 214 Humberside. In those days, \$10.00 worth of groceries would fill your cart. TIC tickets were five for a dollar. You could thumb your way home and not be scared. There were no bank hold-ups and no shootings in the streets.

Nevel got me my first job. I was so fast that they called me "Speedy". I agreed to work every other Saturday. On one Friday, I finished my two jobs and I was to be off for the weekend. My boss asked me to start another job and I said no. He dismissed me. I still applied for permanent residency in Canada, as a painter. My application was denied because they did not know what kind of painter I was. I decided to go back to Jamaica.

I went to a barber named Colin, who had a shop on Harbord Street. I told him to cut my hair because I was going back home. He told me to appeal the denial to stay here. He gave me Joe's number and told me that it would cost me \$350.00 to appeal the case. A friend took me to Ottawa and I won the appeal based on humanitarian grounds.

That day, I learned what the real problem had been: I was a member of a "prohibited class." My father had nine children out of wedlock and I had three.

About a year later, my partner, Veronica, arrived in Canada. They put her case together with mine. They re-examined her application with mine. In 1969, they called us back again and said that we could not stay in Canada. Veronica was six months pregnant. After the baby was born, we went back to Jamaica.

While we were there, we had someone fighting for us here. A member of the N.D.P. Party called Immigration for us and explained that Veronica had had her baby here and that they should look at our case again. About a year and a half later, we received a letter telling us that we could come back to Canada and stay here.

At that point, I started a new chapter of my life in Canada - but that's a whole other story.

Waiting For You

GARFIELD E. FRANCIS

The following poem has a lot more to it than people might think. Let me explain how I came to write this.

I was just sitting by my window and thinking about the way I was feeling. And what brought me to this moment in my life. Then I started thinking of everything I have put myself through since my wife was killed on me, back in 1991. And how I walked in and found her on the floor at 5 in the morning, and how guilty I was feeling for not being there to save her. Ever since, I lost my sense of worth. I did not care what I had; I just wanted to get through this life so I can be with her. I had wanted it to be me instead of her.

She was and still is the most wonderful person I have ever met. I was only 14 when we met and it took me six weeks to even kiss her on the cheek. She was so special to me. Then, back in 1989, we got mixed up with the drugs and because of that she was killed on me, and I lost all my will to go on. I just stayed in my own world, waiting, hiding, fighting, and just getting by. I lived with self pity as I waited to some day be with her.

I lost myself as well as her that day. I no longer had direction or hope in my life. After all these years, I am now learning other ways to deal with my loss. I do now know that no matter how hard I try to rush things in life, I will not get there any sooner or get done any faster, so I am going to try to get through life the best way I can without drugs and booze. But I will always have my hand out waiting for the day she can help me up and take me away to the Paradise where she now lives. She was and still is my angel in the sky. I gave her my love; she gave me her life.

With these thoughts of loneliness, I wrote this poem. The truth of it all is, I will never forget or be without the feelings I shared with Lisa many years ago. I am 37 years old now and learning to read and write for the first time. And I have more to write about than I could have ever said.

So look out world

"Because"

I now own a pen

And I am learning how to use it.

Waiting for you!

The first time I met her, the woman I married, I reached out my hand to her and said: "Hello there, Miss, my name is Ed. What are you doing for the rest of my life? Would you like to spend it as my pair of ears? Help me up and I will tell you a little about myself.

"I was born in a small town on the way to another. There only one day, then onward with my mother. Spent my whole life with my head in the clouds. I was kicked out from school early in life. Tried to find work but got laughed off the site. I could not get government funds."

"No address," they said, "just sleep on the street."

"So with these tattered clothes and nowhere to go, I ask you now my dear do you still want to know. With these tears in my eyes and my head in the sky, I ask you one more time. Would you like to spend the rest of my years by my side? I can't give you much, but my friendship is yours. I have a box on the corner with room for two. With blankets inside and a pillow for you."

She reached out her hand and with a small sigh she said, "Mister, I have spent all my life looking for that special someone to share the rest of my days. I had found me a rich man; he wasn't so kind. All this because I failed to find a partner that's a friend as well as a man.

"Come home with me now, I will tell you what we'll do. Leave your box on the corner and your pillow too. You're too good of a man to live in this zoo.

"Hello," she said, "My name is Lisa. How do you do? And to answer your question: Yes, Ed, I do want to spend the rest of my years caring for you."

Many years have gone by and still to this day as I look in her eyes, I hear those words once again that built up my pride: "Yes, Ed, I do want to spend my whole life caring for you."

As we grow old next to each other, I reach out my hand to her and said, "Thank you, Lisa, for giving me more in life than I ever had."

Now my box is long gone, my pillow too. Lisa, my friendship, I have shared it with you. I love you so, but soon I'll have to go. God is now calling. But I will be waiting on that heavenly corner with a box and still room for two, my hand reaching out, and a pillow for you. I will never forget that day that we met. The tear is still there, I love you my pet.

As I take my last breath with her by my side, I said, "Lisa, my love, we all have to die. I'll be waiting for you on that curb in the sky.

"I love you, my dear, this is not no good bye."

Christmas

MINA G.

In Ghana, the weather is nice on Christmas Day. You can wear a short-sleeved dress. It was my favorite day of the year. We would first go to church and then come home and have fun with family and friends. We would have a big dinner of chicken and rice. We would wrap pieces of chicken, onions and tomatoes in leaves and cook them over an open fire. For the rice, we would add sliced onions and oil and cook it over the fire, too. I've never tasted anything like that in Canada.

When dinner was all cooked, we would share it with family and friends. Everybody would bring more food to share. After dinner, we would sit in the living room and listen to music and talk.

Eight years ago, I moved to Canada. My first Christmas in Canada was terrible. We had no friends to go and visit. It was just my sons, Michael and John, and me. We went to church in the morning and then we came home. We had no food to eat. One lady in the building where we lived knew that we didn't have food, so she gave us some on Christmas Day. She gave us chicken with rice and potatoes. We ate dinner alone in the apartment. I felt very sad.

Christmas last year was very different. It was wonderful!

My friends at church gave me Christmas gifts and cards. We went out to dinner at Swiss Chalet with friends. After dinner, Michael and John went out with their friends. I was much happier. Now I feel good about Christmas again.

How Gavin Came to Be

JIUSEY CURRIE

As I walked the mile to my husband's work, I was careful not to slip on the ice. It was brutally cold that Thursday afternoon. I had talked to my mother earlier, and she tried to convince me not to go out on this particular evening as it was practically a blizzard. She said I'd have to be crazy being 8 months pregnant to even get out of bed, especially since I'd gained over sixty pounds. However, nothing was going to stop me from meeting my husband so that we could go out for coffee. We did that quite regularly, but tonight was especially important, I wanted to once and for all decide on a name for our unborn son.

At Tim Horton's, we were lucky to get a seat; the place was packed. Cameron and I took a seat next to the window. The snow lit up the sky so beautifully, I wished I'd had a camera. We sipped our coffees slow and barely said a word, I think mainly because we already knew what the other was thinking: "The baby's coming and we're not ready."

But I knew we would make good parents. Cameron knew it too. However, it had been just the two of us for so long; we were definitely going to have to get our butts in gear. I could see the panic on Cameron's face, and I think he could see it on mine. At that moment he grabbed my hand and smiled and said, "Guess what?"

"What?" I said, smiling back.

"I like the name Gavin."

"Oh," I said, after about a 15 second pause. "Yeah, Gavin's a great name!"

"So it's settled... Gavin it is," he said

On the way home I felt a little weak, which was normal because I was taking insulin for my gestational diabetes. As we walked towards the bus stop my foot caught on a piece of metal sticking out of the ground. In an instant I was face first in the snow; before I could get up Cameron was by my side.

"Are you okay?" he said, grabbing my hand and helping me to my feet.

"Yeah fine, I landed with my hands first, so I don't think the baby felt a thing."

"Well, if you're sure you're alright..."

"Yeah, I'm sure."

That night as I lay in bed I noticed the baby kicking more than usual. Cameron had fallen asleep, so I got up to go to the bathroom. In mid pee I felt this huge urge to push. I was in so much pain I could hardly move. It felt like the worst period cramps I had ever had. Could this be the baby?, I thought, but in a couple of seconds I was able to stand up and return to my room.

The next morning we had plans to go out to the mall, but I wasn't feeling well, so my mom took me to the hospital. The doctor did an internal exam and determined that it would be best if I stayed in hospital for the remaining month. I remember thinking, "This is it! This is really happening!"

As visiting hours ended and I said goodbye to my husband and my mother, I headed back to my room. When I got there my nurse took some blood, checked my blood pressure and felt my belly to measure the baby's size. A few moments later the doctor came in and asked me a few questions, then told me I would be having a C-section because of the baby's size. This frightened me.

"How big is he?" I asked.

"He's probably approaching ten pounds," the doctor said in a monotone voice. "We'll be taking him out early, so get some rest and try not to worry."

For the remainder of my stay, all I did was worry (well mainly). I couldn't afford to have a TV in my room, so I did a lot of talking on the phone, and I rather enjoyed the meals. (Oddly enough!) I had planned to do a lot of reading in my spare time but didn't. For the most part, I just laid in bed eavesdropping on people's conversations.

Well somehow I got through it and the day of the C-section finally arrived. I was so excited and nervous, but it would all be worth it in a couple of hours. My family and friends started to show up at around noon, because we had been told the birth would take place at 1 p.m. However the birth would really take place at 4:45 p.m. But at least it did happen that day.

They wheeled my bed down outside the operating room at 3:30 p.m. My entire body was drenched in sweat; I was so nervous I could hardly think straight. A doctor told Cameron to get his hospital outfit on if he wanted to join me in the operating room.

"Okay, Jillsey," the doctor said, "are you ready to have this baby?"

"I sure am," I managed to say. I gave my husband's hand a squeeze and we locked eyes for a brief second.

"I'll see you in there," Cameron said before the doctor wheeled me in. Cameron wasn't allowed to come in until after the anesthesiologist had given me the spinal.

They say that after you've had a baby you forget the labour pain you went through, and maybe that's true; I wouldn't know. But with a C-section you don't forget the pain. Especially not of a spinal, and especially not when the doctor does it wrong. When the doctor put the needle in my spine, he hit a nerve which caused my left leg to convulse. As if that wasn't frightening enough, the pain of it was unbearable. I don't care what anybody says, once you've had a spinal, you never forget!!!

After the spinal was complete, Cameron was brought into the operating room.

"Hi Pretzel" Cam said in a soft tone. I would normally have been embarrassed by that pet name being used in public, but considering the circumstances I thought it was pretty appropriate.

"Can you feel your legs?" Cameron asked. I shook my head no.

Now let me tell you about that experience. It's the weirdest feeling in the world to one minute feel your feet and wiggle your toes, and the next minute not be able to feel a thing and be unable to wiggle your toes. All of a sudden I began to shake violently. My teeth were chattering I was so cold. I thought this nightmare would never be over. Then suddenly and without warning he was out. I didn't even realize they had cut me open yet, it all happened so fast. They cleaned him off and brought him over to me.

I had barely got a look at him when they took him away to the special care nursery - he had low blood sugar because of my diabetes. Cameron stayed with me until they finished sewing me up.

When I finally got to hold my boy it was all worth it, but I told Cameron "This is it, I'm never going through this again."

And one year later at the doctors office I got the news, "Jillsey, you're pregnant!"

Learning

Me

WANDA MACLEAN

Shy ...
The me we all see
Isn't always the me
That I
Used to be.

Bullied ...
Small, petite and a
Slow learner too
That old me took
A lot of ridicule.

Trusting ...
I grew up believing
That this must be true
Because my informant was
A teacher in grade school.

Hurt ...
You're stupid and unteachable
On this we all agree
But little did they know
That this me would succeed.

Pain ...
Emotion filled with pain
Is coursing through my veins
But no one cared to see
That scared little me.

Hope ...

I became an expert

At hiding that me

Until opportunity knocked

And released me.

Optimism ...

I opened the door

And found you,

The learner in me

Just waiting to be free.

Knowledge...

Today the me we all see

Is the me that I have longed to be.

A lean, mean learning machine.

Freedom ...

I now believe that

I will succeed

And achieve my goals

Because I am a Somebody

I am

Me!

It is Not Too Late to Start Living

PETER RAMPERSAD

Coming back to school is maybe the best choice I have made in my life. This event has changed my life.

Prior to being in school my life was not too much fun. At times when I was faced with a challenge that required reading, writing or spelling, I would be the first to run from it. Going through life day by day and having to depend on people to do things for me can be embarrassing at times.

In the year 2002, I went on a trip from Toronto to Trinidad. In the time spent there, I saw my old friends and the life they had created for themselves; they all have nice homes, fancy cars and well paying jobs. One day on my visit to Trinidad I went to the bank to change money; it just happened the bank teller that I went to is a girl I have not seen in about ten years. On that same day the girl and I went out to lunch and with me trying my best to impress the girl, the most embarrassing thing happened to me. She suggested since my job is cooking and working in a restaurant that I recommend something on the menu. I tried to hide it as much as possible; I could not read one thing on the menu. That's when I sat and thought for a while. I said to myself that I had to do the right thing for myself and go back to school. It felt like it was the right thing to do.

After coming back to Canada, the first thing I did was to register in a school, which is the LBS program. Then, I was faced with the challenge of school, work, bills and some of the other commitments that I have in my everyday life.

In the earlier days of being in school in Trinidad, my teachers had me believing that I had a learning disability. In the early 80's Trinidad was still influenced by the English and the education system they had set up so that at the age of eleven we all had to write a test to determine the high school we go would to. If we didn't pass we would get thrown out of school at a very young age.

Unfortunately I was one of the people that did not pass, so my parents had no choice but to have me learn a trade.

Now that I have been in school for about one year my progress has been good. My reading, writing, and spelling have gotten so much better, it's like I have the confidence to reach whatever goals I set my mind to. In the time I have spent in this class my teacher, Miss Kathleen, has shown me that I don't have a learning disability. The teachers back home just did not take the time to help me.

For the past few years my goal has been to go to college to get my auto mechanic license. I used to think that would be the biggest obstacle I would have to overcome. Now with my progress and hard work in school my goals are so much easier and definitely possible.

In the time I have been in school, I have met a lot of people who had the same problem as I did. I think it was an inspiration to hear their stories and the effect school had on their lives. In my opinion if someone needs advice on if they should go back to school, I would say yes because school has made all the difference in my life, and it has made me the person I am today.

Have you ever woken up and started living?

My Secret

KATHY STUFFELS

I've been hiding a secret all my life. I would like to share my feelings and experiences with you. I had a normal childhood. I went to school every day, rain or shine, but it wasn't until grade five when the teachers realized that I had a learning disability. Nothing was ever done about it.

High school was too hard for me. Keeping my secret from my friends was even harder because I did not want them to know that I could not read or spell. High school was frustrating. I could not keep up with the work, so I dropped out. My mom would help me with all the reading and spelling. My mom helped me through her life, but when she passed away, there I was: lost and confused. I didn't know where to turn. It was time for me to get help. I was really afraid but I had to do something.

The first step was to get myself back in school. It was the best thing that I have done for myself in a long time. Our teacher Brenda gave me confidence in myself. She recognized that I have a learning disability. Brenda worked with me. Sometimes I asked Brenda the same questions over and over again until I got the hang of it. With the help of a very patient person, my teacher Brenda, and classmates, I have made a lot of progress. I feel good about myself.

I can read a book and understand what I'm reading. It feels really good. Reading and spelling has given me the feeling of independence, something that was missing from my life. I still have a long road ahead of me.

I believe I can do it if I apply myself and study really hard. I will reach my goals in life. Sharing my secret with you was really hard but recognizing my problem and getting help was the best thing I could ever do for myself.

The Continuation of My Story

BECKY HENZEL

My problems began when I was three years old, and escalated from there. By the time that I started kindergarten, my mother told me that I was unable to concentrate on anything for longer than a few minutes at a time. I was also becoming quite the discipline problem, both at home and school.

It was not until I was in grade two that my parents realized that I could not learn like the other children, even though I was the same age and was in the same class as they were.

I remember that I cried a lot because the other kids would make fun of my inability to learn things that, to them, were so easy.

My parents kept trying to tell my teachers that I needed special help, but the answer was always the same. "Becky is just lazy and could learn if she truly wanted to," was the most common reaction to my parents' worries. It was true, I used laziness as a mask to hide the hurtful truth of my inabilities.

So I plodded along, year after painful year. Everyday I was physically in school, but mentally I learned to turn myself off. If they all said I was 'just lazy' then it must be true. After all they were adults! Didn't they know a lot more than I did?

At the time I truly thought so.

By the time I reached grades 7 and 8, and after having the same teacher for two years, it was obvious, finally, that I needed some special help. I feel cheated that nothing was done for me when my parents became aware of my problems.

So many years wasted, but now a teacher had recognized that there was a need for intervention. It was this recognition that led me to begin grade 9...at High School. It was a terrible school, and I was frustrated all the time. I simply could not do the work, and eventually gave up trying. Instead, I became involved in a very questionable social life that led me into a maze of deeper and deeper trouble. My mother attempted to tutor me at home, which helped me a little bit, but not enough that I would ever get a job.

There were meetings with my teachers and guidance councilor, but they only repeated the same old worn out explanation: "She could do the work if only she cared enough to try!" I did try...! tried very hard! But no matter how hard I tried, I just could not achieve anything.

Finally, my parents said that it wasn't fair to me to prolong this exercise in futility and they allowed me to leave school.

It took us three years of phone calls, meetings, evaluations, medical testing and a lot of heartache and tears before we finally found The Adult Learning Centre-Literacy Council York South. And now, for the very first time in my life, I feel like I am learning something. It is still difficult for me, but I am trying hard, and this time I know that I will be able to accomplish a happy and rewarding future for myself.

In 1999, the adult literacy council published an earlier version of "My Story" in their book, *In Our Voices*, and when I read it today, I can hardly believe that it was written by me. The spelling is dreadful, the punctuation almost non-existent; How far I have come in those five short years!

Now I am 24 years old, and I think that the greatest obstacle I have overcome is knowing ...and accepting...my limitations and learning to live my life both around them, and in spite of them.

Five years ago I was a frightened and insecure little girl caught up in the strange surroundings of the adult literacy council. Today I am a student representative of the board, and often tutor new students. I play an active role in the fundraising functions, as well as help to co-ordinate the many social functions that take place each year.

It is my hope that I will always be able to contribute the skills that I have achieved to those who, like me so long ago, feel frightened and intimidated by the situation that they find themselves in.

I started the adult literacy council as a backward and insecure wall-flower. But today, I have blossomed into a fresh spring flower, holding my head up to the sun...and still growing.

Bridging to My Success

KAREN J. ESMAIL

My name is Karen Esmail. I am a deaf and visually impaired lady. I am 47 years old and married with 4 children. I work as a part-time ASL (American Sign Language) technologist.

When I graduated high school, I could not find a job because I did not have enough skills. For 11 years, I was home to raise my children. I got a teaching job at the George Brown College Intervenor Program for Deafblind Persons. I teach second year hearing students. I have worked there for 10 years. Presently, I feel it's not enough for me to work one day every week. I want to work more than once a week.

I came to the Deafblind literacy class at CNIB in Toronto to improve my English skills, and gain experience and knowledge in reading, writing and math. I also have opportunities to do public speaking awareness on Deafblindness. Last year at the Canadian Helen Keller Centre, I started to volunteer to teach sign language to people who recently became Deafblind. I did this for 4 months. Then I became a paid ASL instructor. Working with Deafblind students has increased my ability to communicate with people who speak English.

I am looking forward to finding a full-time job where I can put my skills to work. I don't want to only experience being a teacher. I want to have different opportunities for other kinds of jobs. My deafness and visual impairment do not stop me from achieving my goals. I want to show people that I am a positive person and more confident since being in literacy class and I can do whatever I set my mind to. I want to take a course before I get a job in the near future. When I get a job, I can support my family and get off government assistance.

L.D.H. Nursing Home

LAUREL D. HOUSTON

Hi, my name is Laurel. All my life I dreamt about taking care of elderly people. Some people do it because of how much money they can make. Well, for me, it was always my dream to do it. I think it's a wonderful job. It is a nice thing when you can make people feel very happy. I think that giving these people the care and the attention and also the love that they need can make a difference. Some people do not treat them like they are supposed to. I think that when they are hiring people to do that kind of job, they should make sure that the people are qualified, loving, patient and interested in doing this kind of job.

For me to get the job that I always wanted, I had to start attending school. I started going to school in 2003. My teacher's name was Miss Eileen. She taught me to read and write. Reading and writing was something I couldn't do. So, I had to start from scratch, but I had my teacher by my side. With the help of my teacher I can do it. Well, by the grace of God, I come and I finished schooling.

It was the day that I will never forget. It was hard but I completed the first thing that will get me the job that I always wanted to do. Well, I sat down and started to write out an application. Do you ever wonder how it will be to be able to write out an application? Well, it was a very good feeling for me.

One morning I was at home. It was my day off I planned to spend the day at home, not knowing something good was going to happen to me. On my way to the kitchen, the phone started to ring.

I thought it was a friend, but it wasn't. It was to do about the job I was waiting for and hoping to get. It was a miracle. I was so happy I could not believe it, but it was so.

On the phone it was a lady by the name of Miss Vicki. She was the owner of a hospital, the hospital of elderly people. An appointment was made for Monday the 13th of June, 2004 at 8 o'clock in the morning. The day finally came. It was good meeting with Miss Vicki. She was a great person to me. From the time Miss Vicki saw me she liked me and I liked her too. Well, we sat and talked. She told me that my application was very impressive. Miss Vicki was an older lady, so she was looking for someone to take over from her. She said I think you are the one and I myself thought so too. I was very happy. My whole life I wanted to do something like that and it finally came true.

A job like that is like taking care of a baby which is to say that they are older. My job is to make sure that my patients are always clean, fed and also happy. Remember, not anyone can do this job. Now my life is very good. I have the job I always wanted and am very happy. That's what you will call a dream come true.

Remember to always reach for your goals. This is my story. I got the job I love doing. You can do the same thing too. This is Laurel saying to one and all go after your dream. May God bless one and all.

Events

Ancient Old Oak Tree

ALICE ROGERS

I am an ancient old oak tree. My bark is rough with wrinkles. I am growing beside a river. There are birds in my treetop. They live there among my branches. I make sure they are safe from danger. There are squirrels that run up and down my tree trunk. They collect the acorns that fall off my tree branches. Squirrels run up and down my tree trunk all day long. I have seen so many things. I have so much wisdom. At nighttime I can hear the wolves howling at the full moon. I can hear the owls hooting to the moon. I can see the raccoons washing their food in the river. I can see the native spirit dancing around a fire. There are animals around the fire. When the morning comes up, the sun is starting to rise over me, the ancient oak tree. I can hear the loons in the river. I, the ancient old oak tree can hear the waterfalls by the river. I can hear and see the harmony around the river. When you go to the top of the ancient old oak tree you can see mountains in the distance. They are eagles that pass by saying hello to the ancient old oak tree.

The Worst Day of '91

ERIC ROSENVARD A.K.A. CHON LOVE

Living in Winnipeg, openly gay, plus doing drag 24/7 put me a lot farther out on the limb than I knew. At that time it was not safe for most of us in the Gay Community. If you were gay or in any way perceived as being gay (by the way you looked, acted or who you associated with), you could be in trouble, which I was about to learn first hand.

This is the true story of what happened to me one day in June of 1991 and how it affected me and the impact it still has on me today.

One afternoon I was walking home from a rehearsal for a special show I was part of. The show was dedicated to a special member of Metropolitan Community Church of Winnipeg; we were planning to perform the show two times on a Sunday, once at the church and then at Club Zoo. I felt very honoured to have been asked to be part of this show; but I was not fully aware of the risks.

I was walking home that afternoon; when I got about halfway I passed ten people who were partying and drinking. As I was passing them the name-calling started. Then a beer bottle went whizzing by my head and hit the ground. I could hear footsteps running behind me. They were still yelling and saying shit like "faggot" and I did not have the right to be living. I was a "pervert" and I was "sick". Those were just a few of the things they were saying. In Winnipeg it was very 'normal' to have this happen to you if you were openly gay. I was getting very good at blocking it out because it had happened many times to me before. Then things escalated rapidly.

Suddenly, there were two people in front of me yelling and then someone or something hit the back of my head. I could feel kicks and hits on my back. I tried to cover my face and neck as I was getting out my house keys. From this point on I do not remember anything till I got in the house. I was running on my adrenaline and that was all I had going for me. Five minutes later I realized what had just happened and I was shaking like a leaf. I did not go out for the next few weeks. I was so afraid that it might happen again and be even worse; I could be killed. As a result of this incident and all the fear that I had about it, I left Winnipeg and moved to Toronto. I have been here ever since and I WILLNOT GO BACK.

What I have come to realize is yes, I can blame the ten people for the name calling, hitting and the kicking but I will not put all the blame on them for why they did it. Where I have put most of the blame is on three major groups. They are religious groups, the government, and society for buying into all the crap that they have heard, read, seen or portrayed. In one of Malcolm X's speeches he has the line that says "see for yourself, listen for yourself, think for yourself." I think this is very good advice for every person in the world to hear. This way we are making up our own minds about people.

This gay bashing is still having an effect on me. For example, when I need to go some place that I have not been to before, I am totally nervous about it. At times I have panic attacks. When this happens I freeze and I am unable to think or even move. This is why I like to know the area a bit if I am to go by myself. This way I know where things are if I need to go into a public place or run if I need to. I also think that this is part of the reason I have a hard time in group settings.

There are a number of different reasons that individuals may commit crimes against others because they are 'different'. One of the reasons they may act this way is because they lack knowledge, which can cause fear in some people. If you are going to throw a punch or kick, stop and think. Why not throw a question instead. This way you learn that we are human just like you are. We do have feelings, we get mad, sad, happy, and yes, we do love. Another reason some people may act in this manner is that they may feel that their family values are being threatened because of the Gay, Lesbian, Sexual/Trans community.

Despite the hard time I went through in getting ready for this show, I continued to do it and would do it again in a heartbeat.

Food for Thought

If we are not afraid to shine some light in the world and you are not afraid to take a step into the light, what might the world be like?

My Favourite Shoes

CHERYL REID

I have a lot of shoes but none of them can compare to the shoes my mother bought me when I was eleven years old. I was just starting middle school. They were the Nike Tennis shoes with shell tops. They were baby blue and navy suede with white Nike symbols on the side. The toecap was made out of rubber and it was baby blue with navy lines running up and down the cap.

Everybody that was popular in my school had a pair. It took my mother six months to finally buy me a pair. Everybody used to tease me about my Bargain Harold shoes. They were flat with thin rubber soles with canvas tops. They had four holes for laces and they were two sizes bigger than my feet. They made my feet look like Ronald McDonald's, so when my mom finally bought me my Nike tennis shoes, I was so happy I was like a new person.

My attitude changed. I walked differently; I hop-stepped. I think I developed more of a sense of humour, I smiled more, and I even looked forward to going to school in the morning. I made new friends, but I also made a lot of people grudge me too, like Sheriffa and Tanya.

They did not like me too much anyways, because when we were in elementary school, we went to different schools and I beat Sheriffa and Tanya in track and field and our school beat their school also. I guess they were still carrying feelings towards me because I beat them. One day at school during gym I went to the change room to change into my gym clothes. I felt uncomfortable changing in front of people so I went into the washroom stall.

I took off my shoes and left them outside of the stall. When I was finished changing and opened the door to get my shoes, I noticed Sheriffa standing there. I looked on the floor and was stunned! One of my shoes was gone. When Sheriffa saw me she dashed out of the change room. I looked everywhere in the change room but I couldn't find the shoe. I sat down and cried for awhile thinking about how much trouble I was going to get in from my mother.

Then one of my friends, Karen, came running into the washroom and yelled, "Oh my God, Cheryl! Sheriffa and Tanya are trying to throw your shoe up on the roof!"

I bolted outside to stop them but when I got there, it was too late. My shoe was caught on the telephone wire! They were all standing there laughing at me. Words can't explain how I felt at that moment. I started to cry and my eyes looked like there was fire in them. I wanted to fight them for what they did to my shoe. My friend Karen told the teacher what they did to me, and he went and reported them to the principal. The principal suspended them for four days and gave them a detention for a month. I was happy for that at least but I was not happy that I had to wear a pair of shoes from the school's lost and found.

When I went home that evening I was so afraid to face my mother. I thought that she was going to bite my head off but she was totally the opposite. She was being understanding and she was concerned about the whole situation. She said, "I'll call the school tomorrow and talk to the principal." Then she gave me a kiss and said, "Don't worry, everything will be all right."

Every day after, when I went to school and I went outside for break, I would look up at the wire to see if my shoe was still there and it was. I felt so bad when I looked up at the wire and saw my shoe up there. And if people noticed me looking they would start pointing fingers at me and start laughing which made me feel worse. I felt like I should get revenge on Tanya and Sheriffa, but I knew it would just make things worse. My mother always told me, "Two wrongs don't make a right and if you're right, God is not going to sleep on it." So I decided out of the goodness in my heart to just let them be.

One day when I went outside for break I went to go see if my shoe was on the wire but this time it wasn't there. So I went to the office to see if they had found my shoe. They told me to look in the lost and found. When I found my shoe, I was horrified. There were holes in it, the colour had changed, the suede wasn't suede any more and worst of all it really stunk! I started weeping again because I realized I could never wear those shoes again. The principal came out of his office and saw me crying. He told me to come into his office so we could talk in private. The principal apologized for Sheriffa and Tanya's bad actions on my shoe. He also said he was in contact with their parents and their parents said they would buy me another pair.

As I was leaving the school the next day, the principal called my name over the P.A. system. When I got down to the office, there was Sheriff a and Tanya sitting with their mothers. Tanya and Sheriff a looked like they were sitting next to two big scary monsters that took their souls. The mothers made their introductions to me and then told me that they were to take me shopping for my new shoes.

On our way to the mall in the car, Tanya and Sheriffa were not being nice to me; they were giving me dirty looks and talking bad about me. Tanya's mother was sitting in the front seat and she could hear them talking bad about me. She turned around and said, "I can hear what you guys are saying back there. If I hear anything else happen to Cheryl, if you think your last punishment was bad then you don't want the next one that I'll give you." Sheriffa and Tanya were quiet after their moms said that. When we got to the mall we went straight to the shoe store. We went to look for the exact same shoe but they were sold out, so Tanya's mom said, "Pick out a shoe that you like that is in the same price bracket."

I saw a shoe that I liked. It looked even better than the shoes my mom originally bought me but it also cost \$15 more. I wasn't going to ask them to buy those shoes, but they saw when I put them on and they said, "Those shoes look good on you and if you want those shoes, you can have them." When Sheriffa and Tanya saw the shoes that I picked they started to get mad at their parents. They started whining and pouting. Tanya complained to her mom, "How come you bought her those shoes? When I wanted those shoes you said that they were too expensive." Tanya's mother responded, "Rude girls like you don't deserve expensive shoes because all you'll end up doing is ruining them."

I still have those shoes and eventually Sheriffa and Tanya became my best friends, but it took a grudge match and time before that happened.

My First Day in Canada

JAYAVATHANA KUGANESAN

I came to Canada from SriLanka in 2000. My first day in Canada started at Toronto airport. I will never forget that day. That day I felt very strange in the airport. There were so many people with different faces, skin colour, hair, clothes and languages. I met an immigration officer. He turned to me and said, "Welcome to Canada." I replied, "Thank you." I was very pleased to hear these words and he asked how do you feel. I replied, 'I'm happy and lucky.'" At that time my feelings were mixed. He understood my feelings. On my first day in Canada I had many experiences.

On my first day in Canada there were many surprises in my life. The weather, transportation, culture, medical system, taxes, houses and languages are different in my country. When I came to Canada, it was snowing in Toronto. That day was very beautiful. I had never seen snowfall. I was happy to be here but SriLanka is a hot country with no winter and no snowfall. Canada has different seasons and different weather.

In Canada transportation is very different from my country. Canadian transportation is very good and developed. Canada has many cultures and languages. On my first day in Canada I knew few English words. I like to speak with other people but I couldn't speak very well because I didn't know enough English. First I decided to study English and after that I would look for a job.

In Canada the medical system is very good. Canada has many hospitals and doctors. Canada has a health care system and we don't pay for medical care. My country has few hospitals and I paid money. In Canada the health care system is very good.

On my first day in Canada I went shopping and I paid tax for the first time. I was nervous. After I asked my husband and he explained the system to me.

In Canada there are different kinds of houses. When I came to Canada I saw houses and I was surprised. Houses in my country are very different from Canada. In my country, there are no apartments, no townhouses or basements. When houses are built in Canada, the government makes a plan. In my country, people make a plan.

My first day in Canada was full of many things. My feelings, my mind, and my life, these are changing slowly. I had many experiences on my first day in Canada. I like to live here because in my country there was a war. I think I live in Canada safely.

My Trip To The Movie

ANDREW SPENCER

Hello, my name is Andrew Spencer. I am twenty-five years old and I have a disability. I am in a wheelchair and I talk through a Dyna Vox. I live at home with my mom and dad.

I have a Hoyer Lift and I need it to help me get out of bed in the morning. I also have a walker. We have a wheelchair ramp so that I can get my wheelchair in and out of the house by myself. This gives me the freedom to go outside when I want.

Things that come easy for people without disabilities take a lot of extra planning and organization on my part, even something as simple as planning to go to a movie. I thought I planned it to work like a dream but it turned out to be a bad dream.

The trip to the movie went from bad to worse. The day we planned to see the movie, we went on the computer to get the time that the movie started. We booked the bus, which had to be booked two days in advance, to come at 12 o'clock. The same time that we booked the bus to take us to the movie, we also booked it to pick us up at 3 p.m.

That is where things started to get worse.

The movie did not finish at 3 p.m. and so the bus had come and gone. Needless to say, we did not catch the bus. We got angry and phoned the bus company to see when we could get the bus. The woman at the bus company told Lynn (my worker) that she could get a bus to us at 7 p.m.

We got even more angry. We ended up having to call my dad to come and get us. He was not very happy with me.

Footnote:

This essay took Andrew three weeks of effort on his part, using his voice output box, dictation book and head switch to type.

Apprehension

DEB

When I first realize that I have to go to a shelter, I am petrified. I'm not sure what to expect when I get there. I have only heard stories about them. What I have heard is not very good. I walk up to the front door, stand there for a few minutes, getting the courage to ring the door bell. When I do a young woman answers. I get this feeling in the pit of my stomach. I don't want to be here! I want to turn around and run away. The young woman asks, "What's your name? Come in."

It is supertime when I arrive so they say that they can do the intake after supper. "Go right in and join the group at the dinner table," the counselor suggests. I am so nervous. I go to the first seat and sit down. We are having pork chops for dinner and the girls seem like they have never had them before. I have never seen so much food disappear so fast. They gulp it down. I finish my dinner and put my dishes away. My nerves are so bad, I need to have a cigarette. However, I don't know where to go. I am scared, but I'm desperate so I ask one of the women, "Where do I go for a cigarette?" She says, "Come with me. I'll show you where the smoke room is."

Now it's time for my intake with one of the counselors. This is something else. The questions that they ask me. It's worse than being at a job interview. The interview is finally over and they take me down to this room where they keep the bedding and they give me sheets and a blanket and a pillow that looks dirty and smells musty. Then they take me to where I will sleep. There are 10 beds in this room, end to end, with only about a foot between them. Now my anxiety is mounting.

One of the residents yells, "Is she going to be sleeping here? What bed is she getting?" She is talking about me. The staff responds by saying, "Don't worry about it. Mind your own business," and show me to the bed right beside hers. Now I *am* worried. I hope that I do not have to stay here for very long as I start to get ready for bed.

The bed is hard with a plastic covering over the mattress. While I'm getting ready for bed the girl beside me probes me for information. "Why are you here? What's your name?" Before I can answer her she starts to tell me the rules as she sees them. "Don't put your clothes near mine. Don't touch my bed. Don't touch my stuff." I just go about my business of getting ready for bed.

The other girls are down getting ready for bed as well I am finally in bed and trying to relax. A lot of the girls are still getting ready for bed when I hear one of the staff come into the room and say, "Lights have to go out." Then everything is quiet for a few minutes and someone starts to talk to themselves and someone else is yelling, "Shut up," and another gets into it. "You shut up." I feel myself getting more and more tense. I have the blanket right up over my head I'm so scared. I don't want to move, to rock the boat.

One of the staff comes down and snaps, "Be quiet and go to sleep." Everything is quiet for a few minutes and then I can hear two of the girls talking and I can smell an orange. Someone is snoring and I cannot get to sleep. I am very tired but I am scared so I cannot sleep. I can hear something but I cannot make out what the sound is. Could it be mice or rats or bats I'm hearing? Calm down, go to sleep, relax. I have to put my mind at ease or I won't get any sleep.

Someone is dreaming now and someone else just farted. Someone is coughing and someone else is getting out of bed and now I can here what sounds like a washer going and I can hear people talking again. I don't think that I am every going to get any sleep at all here.

This night is going on forever. I just wish that I can get the hell out of here before I go crazy like some of the women that are sleeping here in this room tonight. How did I get myself into this mess anyway? I think that I am going to see if I can go and have a cigarette. Maybe if I have a smoke I will be able to sleep. As I get out of bed one of the girls starts to yell at me, "Leave me alone!" What is she talking about? I am not anywhere near her. She is making so much noise that other girls start to yell at me and at her to shut up but I am not saying anything to anyone.

The staff comes back into the room and tells everyone to go back to sleep and I am standing in the middle of the room and one of the staff asks me, "What are you doing?" I say, "I was coming up for a cigarette." She tells me, "You can't smoke after I a.m." I am upset and beg, "Can I please have just one cigarette?" Why is she being such a bitch? "No. You have to go to bed now like everyone else." So now I am back in bed crying because I am upset about all of this, being in a shelter and now I can't even have a cigarette. The women are yelling at me, "Stop crying." I can't seem to stop. The staff has come back into the room. "Come upstairs with me." As I start to walk towards the door someone yells, "Why does she get to go upstairs and we have to stay in bed?" The staff tells everyone, "Go to sleep."

When we get upstairs the staff says, "Go into the office and have a seat. What is going on with you?" "I am just having trouble falling asleep and I would like to have a cigarette and then go back downstairs and try and get some sleep."

They tell me, "Normally we don't let anyone smoke at this time of the night but because it is your first night and you are having problems you can have one cigarette. Then it is right back to bed." I am so grateful. They take me to the smoke room, unlock the door and tell me, "Make it fast."

I am back down in my bed now and I am still having trouble falling asleep. Someone is still talking in their sleep and another one is snoring and I am just feeling very upset and wish that I could get some sleep. I guess that I finally fall asleep sometime early in the morning because now I am awakened to people yelling. I don't like people yelling and screaming.

I get dressed and go upstairs and make a cup of tea for myself and go to the smoke room. When I open the door to the smoke room, I think: everyone in the shelter must smoke because there are a lot of people in here. I made it through the first night and I am wondering, how many more nights of this will I have to go through? I hope not many.

Melancholy

MARCIA M. FRINETIE

All of our lives are rich in experience. The story I would like to share with others is the story of my fears of loving and not being loved.

My heart was broken one day and shattered into many pieces. I don't know if ever it will be possible to gather those shattered pieces to make a whole heart again. If you shatter a vase, and then pick up the pieces to glue them back together, even though they are glued together and it appears to be whole, it will always be a shattered fragile vase.

I have this fear in my heart; it is a fear that cannot be done away with. Some say, "Take a chance in life; take a chance with love. If you do not take a chance, you really will not be living."

Who are those people to say such things?

Don't they understand what it is like to feel as though you do not exist, to feel invisible? Could they possibly identify with feeling as though you are inches from death? Can they comprehend the deep sinking, aching feeling that you have in the pit of your stomach?

It is a feeling like no other.

Don't they recognize what it is like to feel like an empty shell or a box with nothing inside? Aren't they capable of understanding the gripping fear you feel during each and every sleepless night with your hot tears flowing down your face uncontrollably? You experience the same emotions as though you were mourning the personal loss of your very own heart.

Is it possible for them to identify with the fear, the hopelessness, the frustration, the anger, the loneliness and the agonizing pain? Have they ever felt a deep hunger and a desire to be whole again? Have they ever reminisced about the past and wondered what might have been, if only, and simply wished? Did they ever have their heart's desire walk away and never look back? Have they been left in the dark, dismal, frigid abyss never hearing the words, "I love you?"

No. They could not possibly comprehend.

For those who have felt it know how unbearable it can be, and they know you cannot just go out in this world wearing "the shield" for fear of leaving yourself open and naked.

Those persons can discern that it would be impossible to take that chance in life to love again.

Shoe Box

BRIDGET SWEET

Just before Christmas of 1986, I had moved into an apartment building. It was just my oldest son, my daughter and me at that time. We had hardly any furniture since I moved in a moment's notice. I decided to leave everything behind. I just wanted to start fresh with my family. Too many bad things had happened in the old place so I tried to leave all the bad memories behind, which meant leaving all the old stuff. It was time to start a new and exciting life. The only things that I brought from the old place were a few bags of clothes for the kids and me, dishes, pots and pans, a few pillows, sheets and blankets. There was only one piece of solid furniture that I brought with me and that was a love seat pull-out couch. That's what we all slept on at night. The place was relatively bare.

With the move, money was so tight that we squeaked. Christmas was coming and I had nothing for my kids. I couldn't afford presents or even Christmas dinner let alone a tree. I had no knowledge of where to go for help since I was in a new neighborhood, and, because Christmas was nearly upon us, there would be nothing left for us as latecomers.

There I was, a young single mother fresh as a newborn in a new dwelling with no money to spend on my two kids for Christmas. I felt like the biggest loser there ever was. I was just no good and I didn't deserve the privilege of being a parent. My kids were so excited about Christmas that all that came out of their mouths was Christmas and what Santa was going to bring them. It killed me little by little as each day got closer.

Two days before Christmas there was a knock on my door. I had no idea who it could be. My children were at school so whoever it was could only be bringing bad news. I went to the door and peeped through the first-in-my-life peephole and saw a distorted figure of a man. With false bravado, I asked him who he was and what he wanted. He stepped back and looked straight into the hole and answered, "Star Box Ma'am."

"Who is Star Box" I inquired

"It's an organization that gives out Christmas presents to low income families, Ma'am. Your worker requested it for you. Almost everyone on this floor has received one today." I stood back from the door for a minute trying to recall any information about a "Star Box" in any recent conversation with my worker. As I reached for the doorknob I recalled that my worker had stated that I could use all the help I could get since I had just moved on our last home visit. The door opened slowly inch by inch and the person standing there was a visibly handicapped person holding onto what looked like two large person's shoe boxes tied up with string so that they stayed stacked, one on top of the other. He handed me the boxes and gave me a smile that warmed all of the deepest and darkest corners of my soul. I just stared at him dumbfounded until his cheery words, "Merry Christmas!", registered in my incompetent brain. He turned to leave and started to walk away pulling an unseen until now wagon loaded to avalanche level with adult sized shoe boxes all tied up with string.

I stared at this person's back while tears of bewilderment and gratitude slowly trickled down my cheeks. I started to say something but my throat was clogged with overwhelming emotions.

The man turned around, smiled a big toothy smile and said, "You're welcome," then continued on his merry way.

Reluctantly, I closed my door and walked into my empty living room, placed the boxes on the floor, sat down on the cold tile and untied the string. I placed the two boxes side by side and noticed that one box had a label that clearly read "BOY-7" and the other box "GIRL-4". One for each of my children.

Placing my hands gently on the BOY-7 box, I was trying to decide whether I should open it or just find paper and wrap it as is. Curiosity got the best of me and I opened the box. Inside was a black hat, a pair of red mitts, black sox, a red scarf, yellow sweater and a brown pair of cords all placed in layers. Underneath the clothes was a book and a He-Man figure. Stuffed in the side of all that treasure was a bag of candy and a candy cane. In my daughter's box was basically the same clothing items but in girly colours. There was a dolly with a pretty dress, a little girl's book of *My Little Pony*, a bag of candy and a candy cane. By God but my kids struck pay dirt! The mother load!

I decided right then and there that somehow, somewhere, I would find at least five bucks to buy some wrapping paper and a few shiny decorations. I tied the boxes back up and picked them up. I needed to find a good hiding spot so that my kids wouldn't find the goodies. My kids were like purebred bloodhounds when it came to sniffing out anything that was hidden and not to be found. They were amazing and it perturbed me greatly whenever they did find hidden things.

I thought about it for what felt like forever as I walked back and forth through my apartment trying to think of a good, had-to-be-practically-invisible spot. I must have looked like a mad woman carrying shoeboxes from one end of the place to the other repeatedly. Thank the stars no one was there to witness the insanity.

Baffled and flabbergasted I frantically searched until a fabulous idea stormed into my frazzled brain. Why not hide the boxes where the hounds would never expect something to be hidden. Right under their very noses, in their own backyard, so to speak. In their own bedroom, there was nothing but a few bags of clothes and boxes of discarded items. Nothing that would pique their interest, right?

I practically bounced into the allotted room, swung open the closet door and dropped the boxes precariously on top of the bags. They were in plain view. This was so simple it was brilliant. When I was satisfied with the deposit, I left the room...deliberately leaving the closet door open.

Oh, I was feeling fine right at that moment. The good stuff was warming my insides like a microwave oven on HIGH. Hope was filling in all of the voids and all sorts of ideas were creeping into my head as to how I was going to pull off Christmas for my kids. I still didn't have a chance in hell to find money for a turkey or all the fixins but there were ideas sprouting all over the place to make it not seem so lost to us.

The kids came home and everything went on like it was a normal day and evening. I had a perpetual smile on my face and I was even humming a merry tune every once in a while. Now that was something to behold 'cause I can't carry a tune to save my life, but I was doing it anyway. I did manage to find a few dollars. Well, to be truthful, I begged my ex boyfriend for ten dollars.

I didn't even care that he gave me the old song and dance about not being able to manage my money properly and yaddy yaddy yawn. I took that ten dollars and struck out to the dollar store and picked up a few essentials for my Big Idea.

Once the kids were in bed and finally sound asleep, I began building Christmas, Sweet-style. I pulled out the box of old Christmas decorations that my sister had sent to me through the post last summer and tossed them on the floor so that I could take an inventory of just what I had to work with. "Not too much," I was thinking. What the hell was I going to do with a bunch of glittering strings, tree balls and a whole army of knotted tree lights? Well, a few of those strings of glitter were the color green. Then there were a few red ones, a good silver one, and a blue one, too. Over in the corner was an old plant pot that I could use somehow. I bought a whole slew of tape so I could use some and not have to worry about not having enough to wrap the presents. So off to work I went.

I used the green glitter string to make the outline of a tree on the living room wall. I taped it there with so much tape that not even King Kong could pull it down. I then proceeded to tape up the Christmas lights inside the outline in zigzags; they ran all the way down to the bottom of my "tree". After I did that I wound the rest of the glitter strings into the light strings and it was beginning to look a lot like Christmas in this new place of mine. When I got all that done I dug into some plastic bags that were in the box and pulled out some Christmas balls. Some were smashed into unrecognizable dust so I tossed them aside with a flick of my wrist. "Out of sight, out of mind," I always say.

Once I found the balls that I wanted, I hooked them onto all of that glitter and light, and voila! Presto! There was a tree on my wall all decked out and looking fine.

Something was missing though. I stood back to figure out what it was and spotted it right away. I was missing the trunk of the tree. That's where the old plant pot came in. When I finished my masterpiece, I took the plug for the lights and plugged it into the wall. I quickly turned around without looking, crossed the room and turned out the apartment lights. Facing the opposite wall, it was pitch black except for this magnificent glow bouncing off my back. It was like a beacon beckoning me to turn around and revel in its glory. So I did.

When I slowly turned around and focused my eyes onto the apparition that blessed my apartment wall, I was nearly bowled over by a joyous feeling of accomplishment. I must have stood there basking in its glory for a good half hour, hypnotized by the tinkling and winking of the little lights, until I realized that I had so much more work to get done and not much time before those kids woke up. But first I thanked the Creator for giving me the gifts that She so graciously bestowed upon me.

I tiptoed into the kids' room and took the boxes out from the closet. I was chuckling all the way in and all the way out of that room. They didn't find a thing and I caught them rifling through every nook and cranny in that apartment for two days. Every nook and cranny except the ones in their room. A triumph that I will carry to my grave, and beyond.

Once I got the boxes safely into the living room, I emptied them on the floor and began to wrap every item individually.

Every sock, every mitt. One sock in one package, its match in another. I made sure my kids had enough gifts to open on Christmas morning. I made a few gifts look like a mountain of them. I was just going crazy with ideas to make a bleak day turn into a bonanza. It was something that I had to do. Not just for my kids but for myself as well to make up for the feelings of inadequacy that I had had earlier that week. By God it worked. Oh yessiree Bob it did.

Much later I could have sworn that I had just dumped my body onto the pillows in my kids' room; soon they were shaking me and yelling at the top of their lungs that it was Christmas and they knew that Santa had been there. With a groan and a moan I rolled out of the room on my hands and knees and followed the whoops and yelps of cheer. When I saw their beaming faces, I was filled with a whole new life force that took away all of the tired feelings and refreshed me no end. Those kids ripped through all those packages like a hot knife through soft butter. Paper strewn everywhere and smiling faces caressed me at every turn. It was the happiest morning that I will ever encounter. This day just couldn't be made better. Or, so I thought.

My brilliance just followed me all over throughout the whole day. I was given a gift and I was determined to use the hell out of it. Suppertime was growing near and still there was no turkey in sight and there wasn't going to be one. I knew it and I accepted it gladly. I was just worried that my kids might have a hard time with it. So I figured that we were going to have an adventurous dinner and that we were going to pretend we were hillbillies having Christmas. What do hillbillies eat for supper? Hell if I knew, so I made up a story. I told my kids that hillbillies eat beans shaped into a turkey.

Everybody knows that all hillbillies eat is beans. Beans and eggs. Yup, that's what they eat on Christmas and so would we. What? You never heard of hillbillies eating beans and eggs for Christmas dinner? Where have you been?

I cooked up a mess of beans and fried some eggs. I did manage to somehow shape the beans by squishing them tightly together into a turkey shape. Well, my kids thought it looked like a turkey. That's all that mattered at that point. The fried eggs were the stuffing. My kids got away without having to choke on some veggies that day so that was a bonus for them. Yeehaw!! A meal without veggies! Hot diggity dog!

We all dug into that special fare and enjoyed every morsel. The kids were happier than pigs in poop and that made me even happier. It's all that a mother could ever want in life. I even took out my fine champagne glasses and we toasted Christmas with a fine vintage of strawberry Kool-Aid.

You know, when things start to get me down about my ability to be a good parent or when I'm having a really hard time providing for my kids, I just look back on that day. It gives me a shot in the arm and sends me on my way with new strength and solid resolve. I know that I can survive no matter what life dishes out for me. I already proved that I can handle it and stuff it right back. I am a Sweet damn it, and on top of that, I'm a woman. That's something that I will always be proud of That's something that I will instill in all of my kids and grandkids but especially the females of my family.

A Hare- Raising Tale

JIM BUDZ

My name is Jim and I'm an adult literacy learner at the Malvern Library. Sometimes life can get very busy and I get delayed for my tutoring sessions. However, I always have a good reason for being late: either car failure or a late appointment or a delayed babysitter. But on May 23, 2003, I had an excuse that had my tutor and others scratching their heads.

That day I was driving on Neilson Road in Scarborough heading for my class. When I got close to McLevin Avenue, I saw some cars stopped. People were looking under a car stopped on the road and other people were running around it. I pulled over because I was curious to see what was happening. Suddenly, a small rabbit ran out from under the car. I chased after it along with three other people to try to get it off the road. Someone tried to throw a light coat over it, but it was fast and ran back under the car. I didn't want to give up so I lay down on the ground and used a short stick to try to get him out. Meanwhile, people were blowing their horns at the car and trying to get around it. Someone got mad and said we should run over the rabbit.

Finally, the rabbit ran off the road and through a fence. Now I was late for school so I hurried all the way there. When I told my tutor and the program supervisor what happened they all laughed at my story. "Did your dog eat your homework, too?" they joked.

To make it all worse, I did not have my homework with me. I knew I had it when I left home, so I realized it must have fallen out of my coat when I was chasing the rabbit.

Now it really looked like I was telling a big story. They kept laughing, even though I said it was true.

When I left school, I went back to where the rabbit was and, sure enough, there was my homework all rolled up by the side of the curb. The next time I went to school I was able to hand in my homework, which was a little mangled and dirty but still readable. To this day, they all laugh and talk about the day with the rabbit.

Author Biographies

Anonymous

The author of "A Mother's Prayer" moved to Canada from Guyana two years ago. She is the busy mother of two boys who insist she play basketball with them! Although she is self-conscious, her husband, teacher, and a fellow student have been instrumental in encouraging her to continue with literacy learning. "I feel really good about myself now," she says.

Jennifer B. A.

Originally from Grenada, Jennifer is a mother of three who first began writing so that she would better remember her stories. "I write how I think. Writing makes me feel so light," says Jennifer. She also enjoys reading history books and watching Unsolved Mysteries and America's Most Wanted on television.

Jim Budz

Jim has attended the Malvern Library Adult Literacy Program for one year. Born and raised in Toronto's Cabbagetown, he is married with seven children, four of whom live with him. Jim enjoys reading fiction and comic books. This is the first story he has written.

Jillsey Currie

Jillsey, a 24-year old mother of two, has been a student at the Literacy Council - York Simcoe Region since 2002. She enjoys writing because it is a nice escape from reality. "I have to write in order to get things out of my head," she says. Jillsey has recently chosen writing as her career path.

Deb

Deb vividly recalls her time spent in a shelter two years ago and writes about her experience like it happened yesterday. "I wanted to capture the first 24 hours," she says. Deb joined her literacy program in September 2003, but has always kept a journal. "My life is good now, it has come full circle," she says.

John Douse

John is 62 and very proud of his age. He declares he can work twenty-four hours straight, and enjoys writing because, "It keeps the brain going." John is a student in the Toronto Public Library Adult Literacy Program (Downsview Branch).

Karen J. Esmail

Karen is a deaf and visually impaired mother of four. She works part-time as an American Sign Language (ASL) Technologist. She is a student in the Deafblind literacy class at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

Garfield E. Francis

Garfield's literacy class has "done enormous things" for him, and he's now able to understand more words. Most importantly, he is able to express himself in writing. Garfield is currently writing his autobiography; as he remembers stories and moments from his past, he immediately writes them down so as not to forget them.

Marcia M. Friginette

A self-described "people-person", Marcia has studied at the Centre for Language Training and Assessment for over a year. She enjoys writing personal stories and says that, "Writing has the ability to change peoples' lives." Recently, Marcia borrowed a library book and became so engrossed that she could not put it down until she finished it at 5 a.m.!

Mina G.

Originally from Ghana, Mina is a student at the Toronto Public Library Adult Literacy Program (Downsview Branch).

Angela Hamilton

Angela came to Canada from Jamaica in 1983. She has fond memories of summers in the country with her grandmother, a strong and inspirational woman. A student at Literacy for East Toronto since October 2003, Angela likes to read mysteries and spiritual books. She's currently enjoying *Rapid Ray: The Story of Ray Lewis*.

Becky Henzel

Becky joined her literacy group five years ago. Her favourite books are true crime stories. She also enjoys listening to music, and does a great Shania Twain rendition at her weekly karaoke club! Becky proudly names her mom as the biggest inspiration in her life.

Laurel D. Houston

Laurel is a student at the Toronto Catholic School Board Adult Literacy Program. This is her first story. She doesn't love to write but her teacher encouraged her to submit her story. However, Laurel enjoys reading "anything she can get her hands on," particularly books about healthcare.

J. Jacobson

A student at the Regent Park Learning Centre since September 2003, J. developed a strong interest in true stories and biographies after reading about Rapid Ray Lewis, a Canadian Olympic hero. She never used to like writing but now that she's found a subject to write about - her family - she enjoys it very much.

Jayavathana Kuganesan

Jayavathana is from Sri Lanka and moved to Canada in 2000. She is a learner at one of the Toronto District School Board adult literacy programs.

Annmarie - Lee

Born in Trinidad, Annmarie moved to Canada in 1986 and supported herself for many years as a domestic worker. She began attending Literacy for East Toronto this spring. Annmarie enjoys writing personal stories because it allows her to pass on important knowledge and history to her children. Here she writes lovingly about her father, who passed away 35 years ago on June 10, 1969.

Dwaine L. McDonald

Originally from Perth, Ontario, Dwaine is a successful hairstylist and a literacy learner at Lakeshore Adult literacy. When he started writing down his memories and thoughts, he found the process to be incredibly therapeutic. "I hope I can teach others, especially young people who, like me, have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse, that healing can begin by writing about it."

Wanda MacLean

Wanda's reaction to receiving an honourable mention: "Pick me up off the floor!" Wanda hails from Toronto's east end and started attending East End Literacy in September 2003. She loves writing poetry because with poetry, "there are no rules."

Peter Rampersad

Peter has lived in Canada for II years. He started taking literacy classes in January 2003 and finds them extremely helpful. Currently, he is working hard to improve his spelling. Peter's story ends with, "Have you ever woken up and started living?" This is how Peter feels every day.

Cheryl Reid

Cheryl joined the adult literacy program at Literacy for East Toronto in September 2003. She loves her teachers because they always give her encouraging feedback. Cheryl says writing has helped her realize she is capable of doing whatever she puts her mind to. "It has given me back my confidence," she says.

Alice Rogers

Alice is 47 years old and the mother of three boys. She attends a writing class at the Parkdale Recreation Centre and has won two awards with the Bread and Roses Writing Contest. She enjoys writing poetry and short stories and someday hopes to write a book.

Eric Rosenvard a.k.a Chon Love

Eric has been a student with Beat the Street for about three years. He wants to become a writer and is grateful for the support of his tutor and literacy co-ordinator. "Writing for me is art... I hope that my writing makes people think."

Andrew Spencer

Andrew is 25 years old and has two brothers; one is a twin. He has Cerebral Palsy and is non-verbal, using a control rim switch to operate his power wheelchair and access his Dynavox and computer. A fan of sailing, electric wheelchair hockey, and watching TV shows on home improvements, Andrew would like to try Bungee jumping one day. He likes writing because, "I can tell a story and let people know what I feel and that I have opinions."

Kathy Stuffels

Kathy began a learning program at East End Literacy in September 2003. Learning has given her a sense of pride and a newfound confidence. "Returning to school was the best thing I ever did," says Kathy.

Bridget Sweet

Bridget has attended Beat the Street for more than two years and enjoys writing because it allows her imagination to run wild. A fan of fairy tales and historical romance novels, Bridget is a mother of six and grandmother of five. This fall, she has decided to finally take some time for herself and will attend George Brown College to study in the Assaulted Women and Child Advocacy Program. "I did the good mummy thing; now it's my turn!" she says.

Literacy Access Network

To find out how to get help with reading and writing, contact the Literacy Access Network (LAN) at (416) 961-5557. LAN can provide referral information on adult literacy programs in the City of Toronto and York Region. Information is also available on the website www.mtml.ca. LAN is a service of Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.

Adult Literacy Programs in the City of Toronto

Agincourt Church of God Youth Education Program
95 Nugget Ave.
Toronto, ON MIS 3B1
Telephone: (416) 321-3127

Alexandra Park Neighbourhood Learning Centre
101 Denison Ave.
Toronto, ON M5T 2M9
Telephone: (416) 591-7384

Alpha-Toronto
2 Carlton St., # 1009
Toronto, ON M5B 1H3
Telephone: (416) 960-9049

Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf
Adult Education and Training
2395 Bayview Ave.
Toronto, ON M2L 1A2
Telephone: (416) 449-9651 ext 109 (voice); ext 212 (TTY)

Canadian Hearing Society - Toronto Region
IMPACT - ASL Program for Deaf Adults
271 Spadina Rd.
Toronto, ON M5R 2V3
Telephone: (416) 928-2504 ext 231

Centennial College LBS Program
Ashtonbee Campus
75 Ashtonbee Rd.
Toronto, ON MIL 2N3
Telephone: (416) 289-5000 ext 7022

CNIB Deafblind Services
Literacy Program for Deafblind Adults
1929 Bayview Ave.
Toronto, ON M4G 3E8
Telephone: (416) 413-9480

Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
Native Literacy Program
439 Dundas St.
Toronto, ON M5A 2B1
Telephone: (416) 360-4350

Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre
Toronto ALFA Centre
1900 Davenport Rd.
Toronto, ON M6N 1B7
Telephone: (416) 652-3652

Dixon Hall - Regent Park Learning Centre
58 Sumach St.
Toronto, ON M5A 3J7
Telephone: (416) 863-0499

East End Literacy
269 Gerrard St. E., 2nd Floor
Toronto, ON M5A 2G3
Telephone: (416) 968-6989

East York Learning Experience
266 Donlands Ave.
Toronto, ON M4J 3R4
Telephone: (416) 461-2666

Frontier College - Beat the Street
425 Adelaide St. W., #701
Toronto, ON M5V 3C1
Telephone: (416) 979-3361

Frontier College - Independent Studies
35 Jackes Ave.
Toronto, ON M4T 1E2
Telephone: (416) 923-3591

George Brown College LBS Program
200 King St. E., Rm 488F SJ
P.O. Box IOI5, Station B
Toronto, ON M5T 2T9
Telephone: (416) 415-2434

Humber College LBS Program
205 Humber College Blvd., Rm K202
Toronto, ON M9W 5L7
Telephone: (416) 675-6622 ext 4326

Labour Education Centre
Adult Literacy Program
15 Gervais Dr.
Toronto, ON M3C 1Y8
Telephone: (416) 537-6532

Lakeshore Area Multi-Service Project (LAMP)
Lakeshore Adult Literacy Program
185 Fifth St.
Toronto, ON M8V 2Z5
Telephone: (416) 252-6471 ext 243

Literacy Options, Seneca College
Ontario March of Dimes
10 Overlea Blvd.
Toronto, ON M4H 1A5
Telephone: (416) 425-3463 ext 266

Native Women's Resource Centre
Native Adult Basic Literacy Program
191 Gerrard St. E.
Toronto, ON M5A 2E5
Telephone: (416) 963-9963

Parkdale Project Read
160A Springhurst Ave.
Toronto, ON M6K 1C2
Telephone: (416) 531-6308

Preparatory Training Program (PTP)
West Training Centre
5415 Dundas St. w., Ste. 200
Toronto, ON M9B 1B5
Telephone: (416) 239-7309

Preparatory Training Program (PTP)
East Training Centre
815 Danforth Ave.
Toronto, ON M4J 1L3
Telephone: (416) 510-3266

Seneca College LBS Program
Faculty of Continuing Education and Contract Training
1 Yorkgate Blvd.
Toronto, ON M3N 3A1
Telephone: (416) 491-5050 ext 4755

St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program
248 Ossington Ave.
Toronto, ON M6J 3A2
Telephone: (416) 539-9000

St. George's Adult Literacy Program
100 Ranleigh Ave.
Toronto, ON M4N 1W9
Telephone: (416) 484-3736

Street Haven Learning Centre
67 Adelaide St. E., 3rd Floor
Toronto, ON M5C1K6
Telephone: (416) 392-9230

Toronto Catholic District School Board-Literacy For East Toronto
Ralph Thornton Community Centre
76S Queen St. E.
Toronto, ON M4M 1H3
Telephone: (416) 392-6810

Toronto District School Board LBS Program (Central)
Bickford Centre
777 Bloor St. w., Rm. 214
Toronto, ON M9B 2C4
Telephone: (416) 393-1995

Toronto District School Board LBS Program (East)
Literacy & Basic Skills Centre
1641 Pharmacy Ave.
Toronto, ON M2K 2K5
Telephone: (416) 396-3347

Toronto District School Board LBS Program (Centre)
Burnhamthorpe Collegiate Adult Learning Centre
500 The East Mall
Toronto, ON M9B 2C4
Telephone: (416) 394-3809

Toronto Laubach Literacy Council
Telephone: (416) 752-2798
YMCA of Greater Toronto Literacy Services
Learning Opportunities Program
42 Charles St. E.
Toronto, ON M4Y 1T4
Telephone: (416) 928-3362 ext 4141

The Toronto Public Library Adult Literacy Program offers programs at the following branches:

Albion District Library
1515 Albion Rd.
Etobicoke, ON M9V 1B2
Telephone: (416) 394-5173

Don Mills Library
888 Lawrence Ave. E.
Don Mills, ON M4N 1S6
Telephone: (416) 395-5849

Downsview Library
2793 Keele St.
Toronto, ON M3M 2G3
Telephone: (416) 395-5724

Fairview Library
35 Fairview Mall Dr.
North York, ON M2J 4S4
Telephone: (416) 395-5765

Maria A. Shchuka Library
1745 Eglinton Ave. W.
Toronto, ON M6E 2H4
Telephone: (416) 394-1054

Malvern Library
30 Sewells Rd.
Toronto, ON M1B 3G5
Telephone: (416) 396-3668

North York Central Library,
5120 Yonge St.
North York, ON M2N 5N9
Telephone: (416) 395-5555

S. Walter Stewart Library
170 Memorial Park Ave.
East York, ON M4J 2K5
Telephone: (416) 396-3852

York Woods Library
1785 Finch Ave. W.
North York, ON M3N 1M6
Telephone: (416) :595-0810

Adult Literacy Programs in York Region

Adult Learning Centre Thornhill
Thornhill Community Centre
7755 Bayview Ave.
Thornhill, ON L3T 4P1
Telephone: (905) 771-7323

Chippawas of Georgina Island
First Nation Literacy Program
RR# 2
Sutton West, ON L0E 1R0

Labourers' Union of North America
Ambercroft Labourers' 506 Training Centre
1600 Major Mackenzie Dr. E.
Richmond Hill, ON 4S 1P4
Telephone: (905) 883-4268

Learning Centre for Georgina
90 Wexford Dr., Unit 3
Keswick, ON 4P 3P7
Telephone: (905) 476-9900

Literacy Council York-Simcoe
17817 Leslie St., Unit 12
Newmarket, ON L3Y 8C6
Telephone: (905) 853-6279

York Region District School Board LBS Program
Uplands Adult Community Learning Centre
8210 Yonge St.
Thornhill, ON 4J 1W6
Telephone: (905) 731-9557 ext 313

Seneca College LBS Program
YMCA/Seneca Employment Centre
16655 Yonge St., Unit 3
Newmarket, ON L3X 1V6
Telephone: (905) 898-6199 ext 228

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In the spring of 2004, The Word On The Street Toronto partnered with local adult literacy programs and professional writers to present a series of creative writing workshops for adults who are learning basic reading and writing skills. The goal was to provide an opportunity for creative self-expression while practising writing and editing skills.

Seventy adult literacy learners attended these workshops. Topics included how to describe personal experiences by using basic techniques: description, voice, sequence, dialogue, and truth. Afterwards, the learners were invited to submit a story or poem for publication consideration; hours were spent editing, refining, and polishing before stories were submitted to the contest. We received one hundred and twenty-one entries.

Learners used basic skills to document their experiences, but also learned to value their own lives as they shared personal events, thoughts, discoveries, and private moments. Choosing only twenty-five for publication was difficult, but the stories published here best captured and held our attention for myriad reasons. Often comical, sometimes sad, even horrifying at times: these stories are astonishingly heartfelt. The language is evocative, and the narrative voices resonate deeply with truth and confidence.

Spend some time with this book. Use it to find out how and where to access literacy resources in your neighbourhood. These programs welcome adults who want to improve their reading and writing skills, as well as people interested in becoming volunteer tutors. Or simply find inspiration in these stories to take up your own 'from self to story' challenge: all you need is some paper, a pen, and that first glimmer of an idea to begin.

www.thewordonthestreet.ca

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