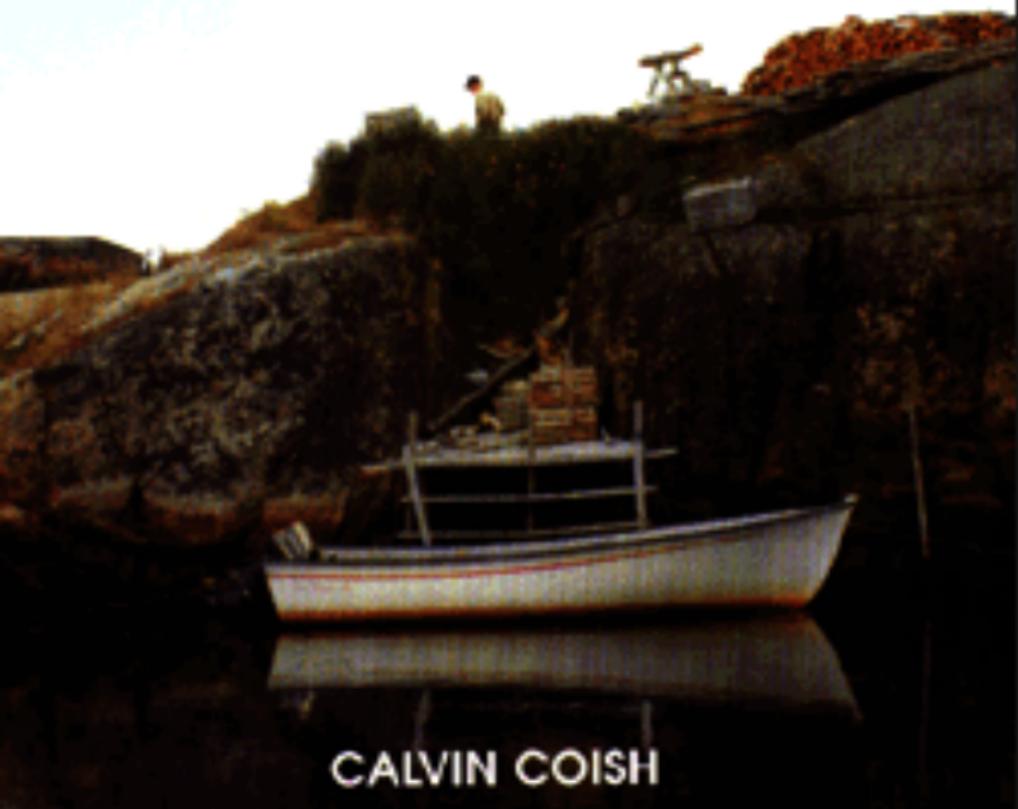




# VOICES OF EXPERIENCE



CALVIN COISH



# Voices of Experience

## Dropping Out? Think Twice

Calvin Coish

Central Newfoundland Regional College

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## **FORWARD Voices of Experience**

The Central Newfoundland Regional College (CNRC) is pleased and proud to be a partner in the province-wide efforts to increase the literacy rate in Newfoundland and Labrador. The level to which the College is involved is evident in the Literacy Outreach Centres in Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander, and the many programs and services provided to adult learners.

Since its beginning, CNRC has supported various initiatives and projects aimed at promoting literacy. *First-Time Readers*, the College newspaper, which had a circulation of 131,000 and was widely acclaimed both inside and outside the province as a major incentive in educating people, was published with the help of many partners, including provincial and federal governments. Various services and programs to benefit the individual learner, and the publications of the Centre at Grand Falls-Windsor, have shown the involvement and commitment of the College and its partners at every level.

*Voices of Experience* is the College's latest publication. In it you will meet men and women who have decided to continue their schooling at the Literacy Outreach Centre and elsewhere. You will learn from their personal accounts, related in their own words, what commitment truly means in a person's life. Many who left school for various reasons when they were younger now realize the value, even the necessity, of education. Learners share their personal stories, their fears, their joys, their hopes, and their dreams for the future. In these pages we can all find kindred spirits, and we can all learn by listening to these "voices of experience".

James Forward  
President  
Central Newfoundland Regional College

## **INTRODUCTION *Voices of Experience***

This book was created to help improve the reading skills of adult learners, but I think and hope it will serve another purpose as well. That purpose is to encourage people to talk about and deal with their own school experiences. Throughout this book, you will come across people whose stories are similar to yours and others whose stories are very different from yours. All have at least one thing in common. All left school without graduating. It is encouraging to note that most have returned to school.

People leave school for many different reasons. Some people think they can't afford to stay in school. Some people aren't interested in school. Some people don't see any reason to learn. There are many other reasons people give for quitting school which you will come across in *Voices of Experience*.

The people interviewed for this book were asked questions like: What did you do after you left school? How do you feel about not having a high school diploma? Why did you come back to school? How is school different now from what it used to be like? What plans do you have for the future?

As you read this book, you might want to think about these questions and the answers you would give to them. You will have lots of chances to compare your own story to the stories of the people in this book. Names of the main characters in this book have been changed, but the stories are all real. We hope you enjoy *Voices of Experience*.

Cal Coish  
Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland  
February 1995

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS Voices of Experience**

I wish to thank the many students who so kindly agreed to talk to me about their school and life experiences. Many of these people have problems with reading and writing, but they are quite eloquent in talking about their experiences. Although I edited the interviews for publication, I have basically allowed the people to tell their own stories. While I did make some corrections to grammar and syntax throughout the book, I have left many words and statements unchanged, complete with grammatical errors and unique Newfoundland words and expressions. I hope this helps make the stories as real as the people who tell them.

Thanks also to the instructors, principals and other people who have been so helpful. Thank you to the staff at the Harmsworth Library and the Central Newfoundland Regional College Library. Special thanks to the students of the Literacy Centre in Grand Falls-Windsor and staff members Lillian Moores, Olive Reeves, Mary Oldford, Harvey Parsons, Robert Gregory, Linda Higdon, Teresa Walsh, Kelly Hurley and Barb Devine. Thanks also to Jim Forward, Ed Smith, Ida Keough, George Head, Frank Drake, Linda Brett, and Karen Youden Walsh. Special thanks to Don McDonald, whose vision and hard work made this project possible.

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## Chapter 1 - RAY

## Voices of Experience

Here is an interview with a student named Ray, who is 30 years old. Ray left school in Grade 10 and came back 13 years later.

Ray talks about why he left school. "I had three suspensions that year. The third time the teacher hit me and nothing happened to him. I passed Grade 9. It took me two years to do Grade 9. My mother and father separated and I went through a big change in my life. I had sort of a chip on my shoulder. I found it hard in school and acted like this Mister Know-it-All."

"I lived on the coast of Labrador for half my life too, through the summers. I either fished, or mainly worked in the fish plant. Even before I left school I used to work in the plant, since I was 11 years old."

Ray says, "Through the years away from school I found it some hard to adjust to today's technology. I couldn't stand a computer. I didn't know anything about them. But now, I'd like to have my own and I'd like to know more about them. I'm still a bit afraid of them, but I like them better than I did before."

"All I ever did was labour work. My hands done my work and now the machine is doing the work. I didn't like machines taking over manual labour. You got to accept the changes I guess and I'm starting to understand that. I'm going more forward than back now."

"I took this course in JRT (Job Readiness Training). It was a 20 week program and that gave me a good scare. It taught me what are my values, what are my goals. I never knew my values or goals before. When the fish came in I had a job or I had a berth fishing or I worked in construction. I always had my stamps, and that's all I really thought about. When they asked me to put my long-term goals on paper, I didn't know what to put down. Then I said, 'I don't really know myself. What would I like to do, what are my capabilities and what are my limitations or whatever?' That was hard to deal with. All I've known how to do is manual labour."

"I got a back condition and that threw something into it for me. I can't do nothing else only labour work. If you hired me now as a technician, I'd be gone the same day. Labour work, I'd be there forever, but I can't now because of my back condition. I'm not a hundred per cent like I used to be. I do have limitations now. I have to seek a goal, a career, which I never had in the first place, only just general, seasonal work."

"I got to readjust and start all over. I'm trying to discover what I like, and I find that hard. I will be the first to admit that you need education this day and age for today's technology. The unskilled jobs are gone and you have to be educated to be employable. The more educated the more employable is what I learned. And for me to say that is a big step. I've come a long way. I feel good about that, but then I'm still afraid of the unknown, because I don't know what I want to do. I gotta decide on a two or three-year program that I could take that the TAGS Program will cover for me. I gotta find out what I want."

Why did Ray come back to school? "This JRT course helped make me want to come back. I did that here at the college. After taking that course I realized I had to get educated."

"That was a good program; they had a good instructor. She was excellent. She went out of her way almost to make sure you understood what you didn't understand. She knew I couldn't stand the computers, but she was there. I erased three or four pages of information. She stayed there anyhow and got me on track with it again. It could be frustrating, but she was still there. She overlooked all that and made sure I grasped it."

"I realized then I'd rather take ABE at the bottom of the ladder and work my way up. I wanted to be more employable by being more educated. I gotta find out what I want to do and go for it."

"I'm sorry for quitting school. That's why I'm back here now. I had a chance to go back when I was 19, but then I felt out of place, in with these kids four or five years younger than me. I tried BTSD a couple of times, but I still had a chip on my shoulder. The second time, it wasn't so much a chip on my shoulder, as my mind was in two places. I had a chance through the moratorium to take ABE, so I took it. Today, if I pass I'll have my 36 credits."

How is school different now for Ray? "When I was in high school, you learned more because you studied more of the chapter. Now it's pretty basic. But I understand that it's there for your benefit. Before, I had this negative attitude. When you're in school, you got no responsibilities, nothing to worry about. You're carefree. Your parents, they carry you. I never really looked at that, but now I look back, I am sorry and I'm understanding. The difference between now and then is that I understand now that it's important and school is good to have under your belt."

"From Kindergarten to Grade 8, I was doing pretty good. Grade 9, the first year, I was right up there in Academic. The people my age now are finished school. They all got university degrees. They're teachers, or social workers, nurses, doctors. I would've been the same way if I never just took this wrong road that I took. That's what did it for me. Rather than stay on the track that I was going on, I just messed myself up. I can admit that now."

"When you're young and your whole world seems like it's crumbling down, it's hard to come up. You're supposed to get back up and start over again. I didn't know how to do that then. Guidance was my big need. Mom was there, but she couldn't be a mother and a father too. Dad was there in his own way, but he wasn't educated. Dad more or less taught me to work. He did his best and Mom, she did her best too. I'm not pointing the fingers at them."

Ray says, "Anybody young who's in school who would decide to quit, don't quit. With today's technology, you're going to be left way behind. With the knowledge you got - say you got 90s in your computer studies - there's your field right there."

"I'm adult now. In the class we all get along together. There's no peer pressure sort of thing. You're all on the same wavelength. You're all out of school and you're all afraid to look at that test. You all say the same thing, but then you all come in with good marks."

What does Ray plan to do in the future? He says, "My idea was to take carpentry next year and then a two-year course in adventure tourism. Say, if you owned a resort, I would be looking for a job. You'd be hiring me two for one, because I could be your handyman plus have that two-year program under my belt too. And I could probably move up the ladder or branch off. The way TAGS runs, they won't enhance it for me, because it got to be enhanced with the same thing. Say, if I took carpentry this year, next year I gotta take cabinetmaking or something related to carpentry."

"I look in the mirror in the morning. What can I do? 'I don't know,' I say, 'but I gotta find out what I'm interested in.' I got my mind on community futures, so I could be a counsellor for someone who's addicted and who's looking for help. But that's technical, and I'm kind of slow on comprehension and reading. So that's a course I'm afraid of more or less. Then I had a mind to take computer drafting, but I say I'm not very creative. I want to take adventure tourism, but according to the components - kayaking and mountain-climbing and stuff like that - my back can't handle that. Then there's this computer course, and I heard that's pretty hard to take. So I'm left wondering where I'm going to go."

"I gotta narrow it down. I gotta make the decision. It's just that I've never done anything before other than be a labourer or gofer. I was good at that because that's all I ever knew how to do. I was accepted here in carpentry, but after talking to the counsellor at Manpower, I decided to take a good look at what course I want to take."

"If I had a job, I wouldn't mind relocating. I always mark down on my application 'Anywhere in Canada'. I went to Alberta in '83 and took a course in foreman training on the oil rigs - roughneck they call it. I like a nice, quiet community. I don't mind living in the city, but I'm the type of fellow who would like to have a nice, relaxing place. I want to settle down; I'm tired of being on the beat."

**To Answer:**

1. Ray talks about why he left school. If you left school without graduating, why did you do so?
2. Why did you come back to school?
3. How is school different for you now from what it used to be like?
4. What did you do after quitting school?
5. What are some of your interests?
6. What are some of your special skills or abilities?
7. What hobbies do you have?
8. Values are things you believe are important. What are some of your values?
9. As Ray says, it is important to set goals. What goals have you set for yourself? What is your main goal? What is the next thing you need to do in working toward your main goal?

## Chapter 2 - JEAN

## Voices of Experience

Jean is 42 years old. She left school in 1967 when she was in Grade 9. She came back to school about 27 years later. Jean's parents didn't have much formal education. Her mother had Grade 4, and her father had Grade 2. Her parents didn't want her to leave school.

"I was a good student," says Jean, "always the top of my class. I lived on an island and I think that contributed to wanting to get out of school. It was isolated. You had to come on a boat to get to a hospital. If you needed your eyes examined you had to come on a mail boat. Even the ferry system wasn't there when I was going to school. The only way to get off would be on ice in winter, dog team or something like that. I just didn't want to be there anymore."

"A guy came to the island and he was looking for a girl I suppose. I was looking for a fellow and I fell in love or I thought I did. He wanted me to move off the island. I went to work in Grand Falls, looking out to little kids. I wasn't there very long, because I was only 16. I wanted to do anything just to get away from school. That was during Christmas and when the time came for me to go back after Christmas holidays I didn't go back."

Jean doesn't blame her teachers. She says, "The teachers never had anything to do with it. I think my problem was the isolation. I felt like I never belonged out there. And I'm the only one of my family who moved away. In order to get off the island, I had to quit school. Education back then wasn't looked at like it is now. Back then, if you got married and had a husband to support you, you figured you were home free. You'd think, 'I got a man to support me. What do I need an education for?'"

"I lost my husband 19 years ago. I was married (at age 18) five years and four months. I had three babies - four, three and 22 months old - when my husband got killed. I guess I started finding it hard when I got my first child in school. I regretted quitting school because I couldn't help them. When they got up past elementary school there was nothing I could do for them. I felt like I was deprived. I felt a little lower than what I think I should, because I never had education."

"Rearing my family was a full-time job. I had to be a doctor, and a nursemaid, and a baker and a cook and a seamstress. I had to be the Mom and the Dad and the grandmother and the teacher."

"I said if I ever live long enough to rear up my family, when I get my last son in university I'm going back to school. I've been saying that for years and Mom and Dad said, 'Jean, you know you're not going back to school.' I said, 'Yes, I'm going back to school. I'm going to do something for me.' When my son applied for university and graduated from high school I started applying for school."

"I got accepted and that was wonderful. I'm doing it all in one year - Grade 10, 11 and 12 - and I'm enjoying it right to the full. I'm doing stuff that I never done before, like trigonometry. I couldn't even spell the word. I'm doing algebra and geometry and human systems, and I love it. Usually it takes two years to complete all the grades (10 to 12), but I'm doing it all in one year."

Why did Jean come back to school? She says, "if you got an education you feel better about yourself too. It's not only just because you got something crammed into the head. It's like if you take two people - one got a steady job, and one is just waiting for his Social Services cheque to come in. You can look at them - their appearance, the way they behave, and their friends, and how they act in society. It all contributes to what you think of yourself. If you're down in the dumps, you're going to be usually around people who are down in the dumps."

"You feel like you're useless to yourself and society and everything else if you haven't got a job and you got no education and you can't do anything. You're just sot back waiting to see if you can outlive your next door neighbour. I don't want to do that."

School is much different now for Jean than it used to be. She says, "When we were going to school, if you did a certain thing, you were put up in the corner, or you had to stay in and write out lines and stuff. This is enjoyable."

"If you want to go to your science teacher and talk about the human body, you can sit down and have the biggest kind of a chat with him. Everything back when we were going to school was hush-hush. We didn't know anything, because we weren't allowed to talk about it. Everything was taboo."

Jean is making plans for her future. "I've always wanted to go into something in the medical field," she says, "because it fascinates me. I was also thinking about going into travel and tourism, because right now to go in to be a nurse or a nursing assistant at my age would take a long time."

"I'm definitely going to do something. When I get out now, I might not apply for anything for September, but I definitely will for January. I'm going to have a little break, because I'm putting two years work into one. I had to move away from my home and get an apartment here in town. I'm satisfied to go anywhere. My home wouldn't hold me back. I'd rent that out or something and go on. I never remarried, and I got nothing to stop me."

Jean says she'd tell anyone thinking of leaving school to "Go and get help. Get somebody to talk to. There's nothing out there. If you haven't got an education now you're finished. If you haven't got an education, the future's not that bright. I'd advise them to stay in school, get whatever they got to get, and advance from that."

**To Answer:**

1. Why do you think Jean left school?
2. What do you think Jean means when she says, "Education back then wasn't looked at like it is now."?
3. How did Jean feel about not having a high school education?
4. Why did Jean return to school?
5. How is school different for Jean now than it used to be?
6. What are Jean's career interests?
7. Do you agree with Jean when she says, "If you haven't got an education, the future's not that bright."? Discuss.

**He Came Back**

"It felt like you were below everybody else. A lot of my friends are university students - teachers and businessmen and all that. They used to talk about stuff and I didn't know anything about it. Right now, I can join in a conversation. If I had to go away and look for a job, I'd be better off with my Grade 12."

- Allan, age 30

## Chapter 3 - MACK

## Voices of Experience

Mack is 33 years old. He left school in Grade 8 around 1978. Mack says he left school because "I couldn't catch on fast enough. I fell back in my work. I can read, but I couldn't write. I couldn't spell the words." Mack returned to school in 1994.

Mack says, "I worked at construction for half a year. Then I went to the mainland. I worked in a factory for 9 years. I used to make fire logs in one factory. I left that place and went across the street to a place that used to make big boilers for apartment buildings. After that I got a job in a factory again, making parts for General Motors, working on the presses. Then I moved up to setter-operator, setting up the big dies. I left that and went into construction, for bigger money. I started doing fireproofing, spraying insulation around steel in the highrises.

"Everything started to boom too fast, then everything just stopped. In 1992, I only worked six months. The bit of money I had saved up I had to use to keep paying the rent (\$1,000 a month) and for food and gas. In 1993, I only worked four and a half months. I got laid off in March. In June I moved home. I got called back to work in September, and got laid off again in December. I have my own house here, so I don't have the rent to worry about. The kids have more freedom. I'd rather live here."

Mack admits that not having a high school education has been a problem. "You don't realize it until the kids are grown up," he says. "I just felt I had to go back to school to keep up with my children. If a kid says, 'Dad, what's that word there, or how do you spell that word there?' and you can't do it, you feel bad."

"Everything else you could hide or just fake your way through it. If I had a buddy on the job with me and something had to be written down, I'd tell my buddy to write it down. I'd say, 'You write this down, I have to do something else.' It was tough. Every now and then there was a situation you'd get stuck into, but you'd wiggle your way out of it."

What does Mack think of school now? He says, "It's good so far. There's nobody pushing you. It makes you feel more comfortable. In regular school, if you never caught on to it fast enough, that was it. If they had something like this on the go back then, they would have had more people with more education. People say, 'I'm stupid,' and they just take it at that. Now, if you got a problem, the teachers come over and explain it to you and you catch on. If you can't learn it from one teacher, you can learn it from another."

When asked what plans he has, Mack says, "I'd like to get Grade 12 at least, to take some kind of a trade. Today you need a couple of trades, so that if you can't get a job in one you can fall back on the other. I like mechanic work. I'd like to get into electronics. In order to get into these, you gotta read and write. I hear a lot of people say, 'To hell with it, the welfare will feed you.' But that's not the way I was brought up."

**To Answer:**

1. What reasons does Mack give for leaving school?
2. How would you describe Mack's work history?
3. Why did Mack return to school?

How do your plans compare to Mack's?

## Chapter 4 - PATRICK

## Voices of Experience

Patrick is 26 years old. He left school in Grade 7, but came back to school 9 years later. Patrick says he "went to night school but couldn't handle it. It was really hard work; they jumped right into it."

He says that in school, "if I had a problem with my work, the teachers would say they'd be over in a second. But they wouldn't bother. Then I'd keep asking them again. When they'd come over, another fellow near me would say something and I'd get mad at him. I'd get up and the teachers would start twisting my ears. I just couldn't put up with that."

Patrick says, "Teachers were a bit saucy. Outside of that, I didn't have any problem. I got along with one teacher. He was a number one teacher. He was right there for you. If you had a problem, he'd explain it right out to you. He really tried to help me. That made me feel good."

"I couldn't do math," says Patrick. "They used to give us homework. If I couldn't do my homework, I'd bring it back to school. The teachers used to get mad and call me out to the office. I felt like I was stupid."

After leaving school, Patrick went on welfare. He says, "I was trying to get a decent life for myself, but couldn't. Things just weren't working out my way. After my parents died, I was on my own, trying to get a roof over my head. I wasn't making much money. I was knocking around."

Patrick's first job was with the Town Council, just after he left school. Patrick says, "I was taking care of the garage. I had to clean up the garage and answer the phone. If they wanted pavement done I had to go out and get it. Then I had to put it in the wheelbarrow, muck it to the machine, heave it in, burn it up, then shovel it out and put it aboard the truck. I really liked that job."

Patrick says that later he worked "on computers, helping the minister with his files. He'd give me papers and I had to type them up. I was there long enough to get my stamps. That was two years ago. Mostly I was on welfare. People on welfare, I know what they're going through. I've been out in tents sleeping, trying to get a roof over my head, sleeping in cars."

"There was nothing out there for me," Patrick says. "I got a kid right now. I said I'd better do something in life for myself. Sleeping in every morning and getting up ten o'clock, that's no good. I decided to come back to school. I didn't know how to get here, but I went down to the unemployment office. I waited for three weeks before I got here. I couldn't get any sleep that night; the next day I had to get to the Centre. I felt like if I came here, people would be higher than me. I thought they'd put me down. When I came here, Lillian introduced me and I got used to the people. I really like it here. Now

I'm here and don't want to leave. It's really a good spot. I felt I was stupid when I came here."

Patrick says, "The teachers here are really nice. The principal helped me out a lot. In high school I didn't learn the stuff I'm doing here. I wanted to learn, but the teachers weren't there for you when you wanted them. They only had one teacher for us all."

"I find the teachers here really different. I want to push it. I want to go far. I don't want to leave this place. I've come a long way since I've been here. I didn't know verbs; now I'm really into verbs and pronouns. Now I'm into math. I'm doing really good."

Patrick says that in school, "If I wanted to use the bathroom I'd put up my hand. I could be there 15 minutes before the teacher would even answer. Then he'd say, 'No, you're not allowed to go to the bathroom.' I felt right uncomfortable, knowing I wanted to use the bathroom, but couldn't."

"I was a little bit thick-headed. I'm still like that at certain times, but I find it a lot easier to learn now. I can't sit down and give up on myself. I just got to keep going. I can see a big change. I got people to help me out."

"Hopefully I'll get a good job, settle down, get a nice home for myself, and carry on with my life. Right now I'm more or less going around from place to place. I'm gradually getting there. I'd like to be a mechanic. I've been helping my father with carpenter work a couple of times, but I'm not too keen on it. I'd rather be a mechanic."

"Some people say, 'I had a hard life with my parents.' I say, 'You're lucky. At least you had parents.' "

**To Answer:**

1. What was school like for you before you quit?
2. What is school like for you now?
3. Patrick says he really liked his job with the town council. Would you like that kind of work? Why or why not?
4. Would you enjoy working with computers? Why or why not?

How has your life been different from Patrick's life?

## Chapter 5 - WANDA

## Voices of Experience

Wanda is 23 years of age. She left school in 1986. She was in Grade 10 then. She came back to school in 1994. Wanda left school two weeks before exams. She says, "I was nervous and very scared. The year before, I started going out with this guy. I'm married to him now. I didn't spend much time studying. I was afraid of failing, so I quit. I was afraid of math. I didn't have anyone to tutor me. I went through Grade 9 and they advanced me, which I wasn't ready for. So I went and I did half of Grade 10 and I quit. It was a big class, but it seemed like the other students could catch on and I was just one of those slow students."

"Sometimes I almost blame a little bit on my parents. Maybe they should have been a little more strict, and said, 'Okay, this is a school night, maybe you should stay home.' Rather than that, I would be out. When I did quit school, they didn't make much of a do about it. A few months before that I hinted that I was going to quit school. This day when I walked in the house with my books in my hand, I remember Mom and Dad were sitting down at the table. When they saw what I had in my hands they said, 'Oh, how come you're home?' I said, 'Well, I'm not going back any more.' They didn't say anything."

"I quit and I got married the year after. I had a son that same year and I went to work in '88. I worked for three or four years in the fish plant. I went to work as a trimmer and I liked that, but my hands were bad, so they put me back on the casual labour list."

"They put me to work on a make-work project. I had a little girl. In '92 I had a little boy, and last year I had another girl. I started ABE and I did want to do my Grade 12. Opportunities are very limited if you don't have your education. So, I started in January. It was a very good move on my part."

"After I left school I got a job. When I didn't have a job, I was saying I could be in a lot better situation, if I had my Grade 12. I would have more skill than I had before I started this. I didn't have any outlook at all. It was just take it one day at a time, but now I find myself planning and hoping more."

"It gives you a different outlook. Before, they'd say, 'What grade did you get in school? I had to say, 'Well, I quit.' It doesn't give you much self-esteem really. You're afraid the subject is going to come up and you're going to say, 'Well, I didn't finish high school.'"

"Now I can have the privilege of saying I'm going to school, to be an example for my children. My oldest is six and a half and he's quite impressed that Mom is going to school like he is."

Wanda says she came back to school "because the fishery's not very promising. The moratorium is on and it's going to be for the next five years. I gotta do something between now and then. There's not going to be very many fisherpersons left when the five years are over."

"I think it's all in the way that I look at it. This is a good opportunity and I find it much easier. I can concentrate better and I'm more confident about what I'm doing. Now I got the willpower and I want to do it. Now I'm willing to make the sacrifice to come to school. I drive an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon."

So, what does Wanda think about school now? She says, "It's not so scary, because you're going mostly at your own pace. You don't have to be following the class, keeping up with everyone else."

You set goals for yourself. That makes you disciplined."

Wanda plans to do a course in computers. She says, "Even if I don't complete my ABE right now, I'm going to do it later. Academy Canada has records of what I've done previously. I still want to have my Grade 12. There's a secretarial course with computers in it. I suppose I could get a job even in my own town. Right now I don't know how computerized they have things down there. If I were to move away from here, then I would have that in my back pocket. After that, my heart is in sewing. Maybe after I get my computer course done, I'll go a different angle and see what happens there."

"I would very much like to stay here, but, if I had to move I would. That's me saying that and not my husband. He wouldn't move for all the money in the world. He only has his Grade 8. I'm wondering if he's feeling a little inadequate, where I took the stand and I'm going to school. I don't want to make him feel bad. I'd like him to be encouraged by what I am doing."

"A lot of people feel that it's only them in their situation. In fact there's a lot more out there than they realize. Then they get the feeling, 'Well, I'm not alone. If they could do it, I can too.'"

**To Answer:**

1. Do you think Wanda should blame her parents for her decision to quit school?
2. What do you think of Wanda's decision to come back to school?
3. What do you think Wanda means when she says, "I didn't have any outlook at all. It was just take one day at a time."
4. How do you feel when someone asks you about your education?
5. Compare your goals to Wanda's goals

## Chapter 6 - CLIFF

## Voices of Experience

Cliff is a 30-year-old married man. He left school in Grade 7, when he was 15 years old. He came back to school 15 years later. Cliff says his mother had a Grade 4 education. His father had Grade 5 or 6.

Cliff says that in school he had trouble with "science and geography. Reading was a problem. I was pretty good on math."

Cliff says, "I didn't want to leave school. My parents needed work and used to travel around a lot. We had a big family so we had to do something. I went to work on summer holidays in a fish plant. I got a few stamps, then I went to school. I didn't like the school very much there."

"I was 15 years old, so where could I go? There was nobody to take care of me. So I started to look after myself and went to work. I ended up getting all my stamps, but I was missing school. I still wanted to go back to school, but I didn't like where I was."

"I've been working in fish plants. I had to go on the welfare for three years, then I finally got a job in my own place. So I've been working there the past 8 years. I'm getting more than I would on welfare. If it wasn't for the plant I wouldn't be in school."

"When this cod package came in I had the opportunity to go back to school. By this time, I had a wife and three kids. I wanted to go back to school for years. When you're settled down with a family, you're trapped in one job. I got the chance to feed my family and get educated and go get a job."

"I didn't want to read very much. When the youngsters would come home from school, they'd come to me all the time and want me to read a book. I can only just read a little bit. I'd say, 'I'll just read a tiny bit.' They'd say, 'Dad, how come you won't finish the book? You got it started.' I'd shove it on their mother and get her to read. I'd feel right embarrassed. If I had it back, I would never have quit school."

"First when I came back to school I was proud of my life. It seemed like I was right young. The first couple of weeks I started getting headaches. Now I can take out a small book and read it without getting headaches. I'm getting used to it now and getting into writing journals. I felt like giving it all up, but I know I'm not going to give it up. After the first couple of weeks, I started getting into school and started liking it a lot. I'm going to hang on."

"When I came here first I was doing science and it was a bit hard getting into it. You had to write a story about it and try to find the questions. Now everything is coming to me. I can read the words better. Now I got more interest in it. If I read a story book I want to finish it because I'm getting interested in it. I'm picking up more words and catching on a lot."

"When you're an adult, you pick up more and you're more interested in school. You already got your family and you know you got to get out to work and feed them. You want to get a better education to teach the kids too. I'm planning to get Grade 12 regardless, then go to trade school to do carpentry. A month before I was 17 I started building my house." Cliff would like to stay in his hometown.

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Cliff leave school?
2. Why did Cliff come back to school?
3. Why didn't Cliff want to read to his children?
4. Have you ever felt like Cliff did about reading?
5. What's school like for Cliff now?

**A Better Life**

"I figured I could have a better life out working than I could in school. I was a bit old I figured for the high school program. I never had any money to live on. I had to make a choice or sacrifice, whatever. My parents didn't want me to leave. I figured I had to go out and get a job."

- John, age 23

**Young And Stupid**

"I was young and stupid. I wanted to go to work. I thought money was better than education. My parents didn't really care, because with 15 in the family, another one gone wasn't so bad."

- Nadine, age 39

**On Her Own**

"I just got bored with school and left and went to Gander. I got a call at school to go to work in a restaurant. I took the opportunity and went on to see if I could do it on my own. My parents were mad. They didn't want me to do that."

- Rose, age 40

## Chapter 7 - KEN

## Voices of Experience

Ken is 43 years old. He left school at the age of 16, after Grade 5. He came back to school 27 years later.

Ken says, "When I was in school I had problems getting into it. My eyes were pretty bad at the time. I had to be up to the front, and it seemed like I wasn't getting anywhere. I always had that strain on me. I was almost blind as a matter of fact. I was 20 years old before I realized that I could get the eye operated on. So, I went to Grand Falls and got it operated on."

Ken says he found math hard. He says, "Even now, I'm still working on fractions. And I need improving in reading. I was trying to read ahead of myself. I'd just read on, but I wasn't getting the real meaning of it. Since I got back in school now, the teachers have checked me out and know what my problem is. Now I slow down a little bit. Then they ask me a few questions and I can pick up on it."

"My Dad can't even write his name. If he gets a pay cheque, he got to put an X there. Mom never got a big lot of education. I think she could read a bit. Most of what my Dad did was fishing and working in the lumber woods. If you don't have an education, it seems like you work a lot harder to make a living. There's good money in the lumber woods, but you got to work hard there. You want five or six cord a day to make any money. We get thirty-three dollars a cord with the union. My father used to work for 90 cents a cord."

Ken says that after he left school, he went fishing with his father for a couple of summers. He says he "never did too good on fishing."

"So, as I was getting a little older, me and another guy went to Toronto. We were working at a little bit of everything, mostly factory work. There were lots of jobs then. I worked with metals and in construction work and stuff like that."

"I couldn't make Toronto my home. I used to go back and forth between Toronto and Newfoundland. I'd go up probably for 9 months or a year, or I might only go for 6 months. I've been out West since that, out to Calgary."

"I've often thought about it," Ken says. "I'm getting older and I don't have anything going for me. I used to get mad, you know. Here I am getting up and I got nothing going, this job and that job. I used to switch around a lot. I had to take anything because I never had much learning. I couldn't be too choosy about a job. I never had no trade, mostly labour work, janitor, washing dishes, you name it."

"Like the teachers used to say, 'What are you going to do once you get out of school? You're 16.' I'd say, 'I'm going to the big TO.' There's times I have stopped and said, 'It's nice to have your education.' If I had more education, I could have had better jobs. I might have stuck to the same company, instead of just moving around from one company to another."

"I wasn't settled. I even had problems doing the application. I could fill some stuff out, but I never had the education to understand some stuff. I used to get right mad. I might take it and leave it and probably wouldn't fill it out. The application might ask, 'Where did you work last?' I never had a good job going for me. I couldn't put down I worked for what's-his-name. I only worked there probably three months."

The application might ask, 'Why did you quit?' I just wouldn't say. I never had the education, so I used to do a nice bit of moving around. I guess I spent ten or twelve years on the mainland, before I got married."

"I was a logger," says Ken. "I was doing very good until last year, when they signed a contract. Anyone who didn't have 200 days and up was left out in the cold. They didn't have any jobs for them. I suppose there were about 80 or 90 fellows there with under 200 days. So, what happens to us now? I worked with them a nice while too. Takes a long time to build a few days up. Work in the woods is only seasonal."

"The last job I worked on was in Nova Scotia. I went up this summer with one fellow and cleared a bit of land for him. I came home in October and had no intentions of getting in school. I came back and the union was working on something for us, to get us in school as displaced workers. We could go back to school and get our unemployment extended up to two or three years."

"I was just making ends meet anyway in Nova Scotia. I said this was a good chance. I should go for it, so this is what I've been at since November. I just came down from Nova Scotia for a weekend. I was supposed to go back on the job again, but I told my boss I was going back to school. 'Oh, that's fine,' he said. I got a long ways to go yet, but I want to give it my best. Then, there's times I wonder, 'Am I too old?' "

"I did a bit of night school too last year. We had one fellow there who couldn't tell the time. To him, to be able to tell the time, or read, or write his name is probably as good as university to you."

"Sometimes I wonder if I'm getting anywhere," says Ken, "but I guess I am. I'm learning something every day. I can read a book now and I can enjoy it more. I'll take my time. Before, I wasn't getting anything out of it. A lot of words I couldn't pronounce. I find it better now."

"I never had it as good as my daughters got it now. The ones coming up now, they got everything. We'd get out probably half an hour, twenty minutes, for recess. You'd have a game of ball or something, go back in class again."

"Someone asks me, 'What do you want to go in for?' I can't answer that one," says Ken. "I like working outdoors. I like construction work. They say you really got to know your math to do carpentry. I'm getting into math now. I still find add and subtract a little hard, but I can do it. I like writing. I don't know about welding. I tried a little bit of that one time. I couldn't seem to get ahead with it. I went through it with Manpower in Halifax a long time ago. Two weeks or a month and that was it. My eyes would be red and I used to get those flashes."

**To Answer:**

1. Which subject was hardest for you in school?
2. Which subject was easiest for you?
3. What was your favourite school subject?
4. How much education did your parents get?
5. Discuss Ken's comment that, "if you don't have an education, it seems like you work a lot harder to make a living."

**Did You Know?**

Most new jobs available these days require at least a high school education.

## Chapter 8 - LANA

## Voices of Experience

Lana was 31 years old at the time of this interview. She left school in 1981 at the age of 18. She had been in special education classes. She came back to school in 1992. Neither of her parents finished high school.

Lana says she left school because "I thought I couldn't keep up with the work. I was having a lot of problems. I was finding my math extremely hard. I wanted to quit at 16, but my parents would not allow me to."

Lana says, "My reading skills were excellent. Anything else, I just couldn't do it. I know the teachers would try to help me, but I needed somebody on a one-to-one basis. They told me I had a learning disability. Everything got to be said to me a second time before I can really get it in my brain. There was a problem to really understand science and math. I was quiet in school. I wouldn't ask a question. I felt like I was ignored and couldn't get the help I needed."

Lana says she "tried to get in trade school, but my mother sort of discouraged me from that. She said, 'You know you can't do it. You can't make it there.' Then I went to Social Services and I tried again. I got a seven year old. I felt like she didn't want me there. She'd rather for me to be home raising the child and not going anywhere. But I got in and I feel good about it. I'm glad I made the decision to come here. I made it on my own."

"I never got a job, because I never had any experience. I didn't have any skills. I would have loved to have been in the work force and get the right kind of training, but I never got that."

How has Lana felt about not having a high school education? She says, "it made me feel like I was stupid, like I couldn't do anything, like I knew nothing. It's like everybody else knows about their subjects, knows what they're doing, except for me. I felt like an outcast, like somebody who couldn't get any help at all, just like a complete fool. You don't know this, you don't know that. I never did learn my times tables in school, never even got through them, because there was no help there for me. Now I'm getting it, and I look forward to each day and I love it."

Lana says, "I never actually went out and tried to get a job, because I felt, 'Well, I don't have the education. I don't have the know-how. I don't have the training for it or anything like that.' "

"I came back to school not just for myself, but for my child," says Lana. "He's growing up and I know one of these days he's going to ask me a question. I'd like to be able to give him the answer to it. I feel good about it for me because I want to get my Grade 12. I'm daring to do it supposing it takes me a lifetime."

Lana enjoys school now. She says, "I find that you're getting the help that you need more than you would if you were in a school where there's about 23 or 24 students in a classroom. Here they can sit down with you on a one-to-one basis and give you the help that you need. They don't have to go off to somebody else because everybody's raising their hand and they want help right away. I feel a lot better because of the help I'm getting. The instructors are wonderful people to have the patience to sit down and help you."

Lana says she would "like to take a trade in being a secretary. I got an uncle who always said that I look like the type that would be nice as a secretary. I used to just laugh it off, because I didn't think that I could do it. I know now that maybe, farther down the road, I could."

Lana has advice for other people. She says, "I'd tell them not to quit school. The best thing you can do for yourself is to stay in school and get your Grade 12. Then maybe, when you come out of school, go to trade school, and after that probably get a good job for yourself."

**To Answer:**

1. Did your parents encourage you to get an education?
2. Did you feel like Lana did when you were in school?
3. Why did Lana come back to school?
4. What is school like for Lana now?
5. Compare your career plans to Lana's.

**Own Time**

"I wanted to learn on my own time. I didn't want any teachers looking over my shoulder, saying, 'Do this, do that, do something else.' Now I know that I got to have them looking over my shoulder. Whenever you need a teacher, she's right there, on the spot. It's excellent. I like the idea of being able to work at my own pace. I don't want to back up any more. I'm sick and tired of that."

- Rick, age 35

## Chapter 9 - BILL

## Voices of Experience

Bill was 23 at the time of the following interview. He was serving time in a correctional centre. Bill left school in Grade 7 at the age of 14.

Bill says his mother has a Grade 10 education. He says, "Dad, I don't know much about him. I know who he is, that's about it. Mom was six months pregnant when he left."

Bill says that up to Grade 6 he "passed with honours every year. In Grade 6 I spent the first six weeks of school in the hospital. When I came out, in two weeks I had everybody caught. To me, school was almost somewhere to go and have fun. The first year, I struggled in Grade 7. I showed some interest, but come the end of the year I failed."

"After I failed the first year, it kind of hurt a bit, because it was the first year that I ever failed. The other people that I grew up with, they all went ahead. It was like I just didn't care if I passed or not. I was thirteen years old. I said, 'Well, two years, I don't care if I spend it here in Grade 7, because I'm quitting anyway.' "

"I struck high school and I just lost interest. The teachers had no control over me, and I was getting kicked out of my classes and getting suspended from school. I fought with the principal. He grabbed me by the hair of the head one time. I told him, 'Don't ever grab me again, or I'll throw you face and eyes into the lockers.' I put my hat back on and he grabbed me a second time, so I threw him into the lockers."

"Then I got into a fight with another guy in school. I ended up hurting him pretty bad. They sent me to the group home in Whitbourne for six months. I went there in May and I turned 15 in June."

"They put me in school, and I didn't want to be in school there. I wanted to be working on the farm, or out in their workshop. They told me I wasn't old enough, so I gave the teacher that much of a hard time that he had me put out of school there."

"Then I called the schools, to try to get back in. One would not allow it. The principal at the other school told me he would have to check things out. He called my Mom back and told her there was no way that he would allow me into the school. I told my Mom, 'He can't stop me from going into the school. I gotta go to school.' I was 15 at the time. Apparently, the school board got involved and they would not allow it, because of the trouble that I'd been into."

"I turned 16 and I went to Ontario. I stayed there for eight to ten months. I came home, drew my unemployment for a year and went back to Ontario again. I was up there for about five or six months. I came back and drew my unemployment again and met a girl back here. We were together almost a year, then we went to Ontario together. We stayed there for a year and a half. We came home and split up. I went back to Ontario again, and got into a little bit of trouble up there. So I came back here and now I'm in this place. I got a three-month sentence."

Bill says that in Ontario he "did everything - road work, construction, bricklayer's helper, driving a forklift mostly, shipping and receiving, order picking, plumbing, drywall, whatever was paying."

Bill says he "went to the unemployment a few times to see about getting a seat for upgrading. But there were two or three hundred people ahead of me waiting. She told me it could be about five years before I'd get a sponsored seat. I could get in there right away paying my own way through. Like I told them, 'I can't do that because I don't have the money for it.' "

Has Bill learned anything from these experiences? "Oh yes, I learned I don't want to be here. I went home two weeks ago. They let me go home for 12 hours. It's pretty boring where I live, but just the idea of being free is good. My Mom is in Ontario. I stay with my grandparents."

Bill says, "I see this trouble thing as something you bring on yourself. If you go and get in trouble, you know what you're doing, you know what's going to happen if you get caught. In my own family, the most that's there is young kids now - teenagers. They're all trouble makers, can't wait to get 16 and quit school. I tell them, 'Listen, men, take it from somebody who's been there, there's nothing in quitting school. What are you going to do if you quit school? Go to the mainland? Yeah sure, you go out and get your stamps, you draw your unemployment. Big deal, you still got nothing.'"

"They say, 'Well, what do you get with education?' I say, 'Well, you got a family that's backing you to put you through school so you can get somewhere.' They say, 'Well, why did you quit?' I say, 'I quit because I lost interest and I never had the people to back me. I never had the money, and I just didn't care.' "

"Then they say, 'Oh, well, what makes you think my dad is going to send me to school?' I say, 'Listen, buddy, your father works. He's got a full-time job every year. He makes good money and he's going to put you through school. I can't see him not doing it.' I told them, 'You won't realize what it's all about until you're locked up. It ain't a joke. Trust me, it ain't a joke.'"

Bill plans to go back to Ontario again. He says he wants to "get those charges cleared up. I'm going to have to do another little bit of time, I know that. It's no good to be on the run. I'd love to go to British Columbia, but I can't afford to go out there. A friend of mine got his own business in Ontario, so if he'll give me work, I'm going to work and save three or four or five thousand dollars and head out west. There's a lot of work out there."

What would Bill say to a person who is thinking of dropping out of school? He says, "I'd tell him it was stupid. If I could turn back time, I would not have dropped out. I would have showed more interest, paid more attention to school, would have finished high school."

Bill says he "almost went to school a while back. I was doing plumbing with a friend of mine and I almost went to school to do that course, but it was just a little too much money for me at the time. I got into trouble in Ontario and everything just went bottom up again."

"Every place you apply right now wants a Grade 12 diploma. I've got a friend who's got his Grade 12 and four years of university, but he's still at home doing nothing. But that's mainly because he's not pursuing it enough. He's just sending out applications, rather than take some money and go. He's hoping to hook onto something in Newfoundland. I told him he's not going to get anything around here."

**To Answer:**

1. Did you ever get into fights at school?
2. Have you ever been to the mainland? How is it different from Newfoundland?
3. How important do you think education is? Discuss.
4. What do you think life is like in prison?

## Chapter 10 -HOLLY

## Voices of Experience

Holly is 39 years old. She left school in Grade 3, when she was 13 years old. She came back to school 26 years later.

Holly remembers some things about her early school days. She says, "Some of the teachers just didn't care." She remembers "talking to the principal, asking him if he would put me in with my peers. I would still do Grade 3 work. He wouldn't let me, so I walked out of school. He didn't bother to call my parents. At the time, I didn't think it was any big deal. Now I got kids of my own. If my little girl walked out of school at the age of 13 and nobody called me, I'd be going up there."

"Mom and Dad were poor, so having me home helped us a little bit. Mom used to be sick a lot. At the time I walked out of school she was really sick. I went home and I just said to Dad, 'I left school'. He didn't say very much, because Dad didn't have much education. All he could do was write his name."

"We didn't have any books," says Holly. "At the time, we had to wear a blouse and gimps in school, and we couldn't afford it. We used to be always picked on for that by the teachers and the nuns. We had to have that outfit, and my mother couldn't afford it. So we just had to go to school with what we had. Every day we used to go in and we'd get tapped on the head or have our ears wrung and they'd say, 'You got to have the blouse and the gimp.'"

"Many times we had to go to school hungry. I was so hungry all the time going to school, I used to daydream a lot and fall asleep. I felt out of place for not having clothes, not having my books, not having pencils, not being involved with things like concerts. They used to make us sit there and watch my group go up and sing. I would just have to sit there and watch all of it. It's still emotional to me. It does hurt. I can imagine my little girl coming home and saying, 'Mom, she made me sit down while all my schoolmates were up there singing.'"

"I wouldn't let anybody know that I couldn't read or write. If you went to work in a store, you would find it very easy. I would have to work twice as hard to keep up with you, because I wouldn't know how to read and write. More jobs I went to, and I was there for years and they wanted to promote me. There was a lot of reading and writing and I just had to decline. That hurt a little bit too, because I was still in the same place all the time, while new people were coming in and passing me."

"I was 15 years old when I worked at a grocery store. That was my first job. I think I worked there for about eight months. Then I was home, just doing odds and ends, babysitting here and there for a few dollars. When I turned 17 I went up to Toronto with my boyfriend. I knew then that I needed education, but I still couldn't see myself going back to school - even up there - although I didn't know anybody. I just didn't want anybody to know that I didn't know how to read and write."

"So, I got a job in a factory and worked there for 10 years. The boss scared me, because he said he was going to promote me anyway, whether I liked it or not. This job was having to do a lot of

reading, and I couldn't tell him that I couldn't read. He passed me this book and told me to take it home and start reading because I was going to rebuild offset copier machines. After eight months, I had three or four machines rebuilt from scratch. But I felt that wasn't for me, because I was dirty all the time, and my hands were getting so terrible. So after eight months, I just said I couldn't handle it any more.

"Then I went up to the Northwest Territories and worked in a daycare centre. I spent six or seven months there. The director gave me a book to keep things in. She used to tell me to go home and write down things that I was going to do the next day with the kids. I used to open up the book and I didn't know where to start, what to do. So I'd close the book and turn on the TV to the kids' cartoons. I used to watch *Curious George* and a couple of other cartoons. On a couple of cartoons they showed how to make butterflies and things. The next day I went in and I said, 'I never had time to write it down, but I know what to do with my group.' They all sat down and I showed them how to make these little butterflies."

"There were a couple of books about cold and water and stuff like that I knew how to read. I used to look through the books after the kids would leave and see what I could read to them. Most of the time I used to go along and say things from my mind. They all thought I was pretty good and they wanted me to go to Edmonton to do a course. I was scared so I just up and quit. I couldn't tell them I couldn't read and write."

"I moved back to Toronto again and went back to filling out receipts. I don't know how I did it, but I did it. I guess one day they just told me I had to fill it out, because there was nobody else there. I didn't know what to do. I was looking through all those things and came upon one that had the same things I was doing. So I put down my dates and how many cases I did and signed my name. From that time on I got used to it. After a while, I knew exactly what to do. That's what I did up until '87, when I came back to Newfoundland."

Back in Newfoundland, Holly got a job at a hotel. She says, "It's bad enough when you have to clean up your own place, but when you have to go and clean up somebody else's dirt, you get kind of sick of it after a while. The ball players would come in and they'd have pizza everywhere. One day I went home and told my husband, 'I really don't think I'm going back there, cleaning up this dirt.' That was when they were really talking about AIDS. There used to be a lot of blood around from the ballplayers. I was getting scared, so I said I just can't do it anymore."

"About a year and a half ago my sister came and started talking to me about the Literacy Centre. Her boyfriend was in it. That same afternoon I called Don McDonald. I didn't think I was going to go in the next day, but I did. He welcomed me here and told me not to feel bad. The teachers are lovely here. It's a lot different from when I was going to school. They're more willing to help. They got time for you here and they enjoy it. It makes you feel so much better about yourself."

"I can pick up the newspaper and read it. I can read to my little girl. She's in Grade 4. Now, if she's doing something, I don't look at it and say, 'That's Dutch to me. How can she do it?' Now I can help her. I feel I'm starting to go up the ladder a little bit."

"There were times I felt like nothing. I felt I was no good. One time I was looking at the paper and someone said, 'Pass me that, because the pictures will still be there after.' That made me feel stupid. I felt I wasn't as good as anybody else. I feel good about myself now. I don't think that a year and a half ago I could have come to you and talked, because I didn't feel confident."

"I didn't want to do any more cleaning' homes. I didn't want to be in a hotel the rest of my life having to clean toilets. I said, 'Maybe for the next 20 years of my life I could get dressed up and go in with my nails long and be a secretary or something.' My son - I could never help him. He had to struggle all the way."

Holly says she would like to "get enough education so that I can pick and choose which job I'm going to look for. I can't go to college and pay my own way, because we're the working poor. I would love to get my Grade 12, not so much for the credits, but just to say I got my Grade 12. I always wanted to be a cop and I always wanted to be a nurse."

Holly would like to stay in Newfoundland. She says, "I lived away for 20 years and I had a stomach full. The last five years in Toronto it was getting pretty bad. My son - he was 12 - wasn't allowed to move out of the house. I just couldn't have that, so we came back down. At least he could get out around and I wouldn't have to be so scared, wouldn't have to be always looking to see where his blond head was."

"It's a hard life," says Holly. "Back when I was growing up, you could work with your hands. Now you got to have a good mind."

**To Answer:**

1. What was school like for Holly?
2. Why did Holly leave school?
3. Have there been times you've hidden your problem with reading and writing? Perhaps you could talk about that.
4. What are some ways you managed to get around your reading and writing problem?
5. Why couldn't Holly take a promotion?
6. How does Holly feel now that her reading and writing are improving?

## Chapter 11 -VANCE

## Voices of Experience

Vance is 37 years old. He was 17 when he left school in Grade 7. That was in 1974. He went to night school for a while a couple of years ago. He came back to school in 1993. Vance is married and has two children.

Vance talks about what school was like for him. "I wasn't doing that well," he says, "and I'd try sometimes. I was a little bit behind all the way. I started failing in Grade 2. I failed Grade 2, passed Grade 3, failed Grade 4, passed Grade 5, failed Grade 6. I spent two years in Grade 6. They pushed me on to Grade 7 the following year and I quit before Christmas. I was really behind on everything. I wanted some special help. Even in Grade 2 and 3, I used to go home and Mom used to help me with spelling. She'd help me until I had them all right - probably 20 words. The next day in school I'd get three or four right."

"I was proud in a way to get out of school, because I wasn't doing anything. There was a bit of work at that time. I got in the woods and got a bit of work, loading birch and stuff like that for the sawmill for creosote ties. I was 17 then when I quit school in Grade 7. A lot of people were finished school then. That didn't make me feel too good while I was in school."

What did Vance's parents say when he left school? "They knew I wasn't doing anything in school," he says. "My parents don't have a good education. Father can't read at all. Mom got a little bit of education, probably as good as I can read now."

Since leaving school, Vance says he's "been working everywhere. I went to the mainland, this and that. About two weeks after I left school I went to work in a sawmill, sawing birch for railroad ties. They used to send them out to Clarendville to get them creosoted. I was at that for one summer. The next summer I went up there again. Then I got a job with another company and I worked on the asphalt for seven or eight years. Then I went into carpentry. For about eight years I've been into carpentry with a small contractor. I bought my own house and rebuilt that."

Vance says that the year before last he got only 10 weeks work. "I just scraped enough to qualify for unemployment, which is not very good," he says. "It's not enough money to do anything with. It's just living. Last year I couldn't even get my stamps, so I checked this place out and got in here."

Vance has done pretty well over the years. "I own my own house," he says. "I always had a machine (motor vehicle). I'm after buying two brand new trucks. I got a new trike. I bought a skidoo, but it's pretty old now. I'm looking forward to buying a new skidoo. You got to do without things."

Vance says that not having a good education bothered him at times. He says, "I put in applications at places but a lot of it I didn't fill out. When I marked down schooling, I kind of lied about that a few times. There were lots of things to fill out - like signing up for unemployment. A nice few things I couldn't do and I did need help for. I had a job to take a book and read it. I'd get some words. I'd have to spell some words, probably miss some words. By the time I'd get to the end of the story, I didn't know what they were talking about anyway."

When it came to filling out an application form, Vance says, "I couldn't get it all. I mainly put down social insurance number, my name, where I live and probably 8 or 9 for schooling. When it got down to where did you work last and people's names and stuff like that, well I didn't do that."

Vance says, "You can do it without an education, but you're not up there where you would like to be. After I finished school I had a real struggle. I went to Manpower and I wanted to come back and upgrade. "She asked me, 'What grade do you have?' I said, 'I quit in Grade 7.' She said, 'You got to have Grade 8 to upgrade.' I said, 'You mean to say I haven't got enough education to upgrade.' So I said, 'I'm shagged.'"

"A couple of years after that I found out about night school, so I started going to that. I was enjoying that. I wouldn't miss a night. That was two or three years ago. I'd been going a nice bit and I picked up a lot. When I came here nothing was strange to me. I had a taste of everything. I still needed lots of work, but it started to come a lot better. Going to night school really helped."

Vance says he came back to school, "because I wanted my carpentry papers, so I could go to a unionized job, probably get a bit more work and live better. All I could ever go for was labour work. I could do carpenter work on the side, if they weren't unionized. If they were unionized, that left me out the door."

So, what is school like for Vance now? "I'm getting a lot more attention. If I can't understand something here, the teacher's right there. Back then there were 30 people in a class and you were half-shy to ask for help. I wasn't as interested as I am now."

"I'd like to stay in school, now that I'm in here. It'd be nice to keep going. I don't really care for Grade 12; that wasn't my goal when I started. I really wanted to know how to read, but I want my carpenter papers, so I can live good. That's what everybody wants, so you can take your woman away for the weekend. If you can't afford to do it, you got to just stay home."

Vance plans to do a course in carpentry. He says, "if I don't get in this year, I don't know really what I'm going to do. I might be able to go across the street and take my credits. I'd have to go to work, but I hate to leave school. I wouldn't mind going out to work for a while, then coming back in again. Two weeks after I get out of school in June my unemployment is cut off anyway. So I'm stuck then, I got to find something, go away or do something."

Vance says his wife was working, but "she's not working now. She never got her unemployment this winter. It's only my little bit of unemployment. I found it a bit rough this winter. We knew where every dollar was going."

Vance was accepted into the carpentry course after this interview was done. He is doing well with that.

**To Answer:**

1. How were your school experiences like those Vance talks about?
2. How were your school experiences different from his?
3. What do you think Vance means when he says, "You can do it without an education, but you're not up there where you would like to be."?
4. How is school different now from what it used to be like for Vance?
5. What has life been like for Vance and his family during the past year or so?

## Chapter 12 -NELSON

## Voices of Experience

Nelson is 20 years old. He grew up in a small community on the south coast of Newfoundland. Nelson left school in 1991, when he was in Grade 8. He came back to school three years later.

Nelson says he left school "because of math. I was afraid to go to the board, because the teacher used to get mad. If I made a mistake, he'd get right mad. I felt stunned. I got discouraged every time I looked at the math book. I didn't want to do it. I left it home. I didn't do any work for the teacher at all. When math class used to come, I hated it. I grieved to death to go in there. I used to skip off math class and go to the gym. One day, I had a real low mark in math and the teacher went out and spread it around."

Nelson says that since he left school he's been doing nothing. He says, "I worked in the fish plant about three months. I went on one welfare project, cleaning up the town."

In 1993, Nelson left his hometown and moved to central Newfoundland. He says, "I've been on welfare and looking for a job, but there's nothing available. My uncle was telling me to go back to school, but I wouldn't listen, because I was listening to everybody else."

Nelson doesn't feel good about not having a complete education. He says, "I feel upset and contrary all the time, just knowing I could have stayed in school and all my friends have graduated. I feel like there's no hope, like there's nothing I can do. I feel right stupid. I get discouraged."

"Being on welfare is really terrible. You can't get enough money for anything. It gets me in trouble. I got a four hundred dollar fine for doing something illegal, for the sake of five dollars, because I didn't have any money and I needed it."

Nelson says, "I feel better about myself now. I'm more focussed. For once in my life I'm not listening to anyone else. I never want to go back to my old self again. I want to start fresh. My girlfriend quit school in Grade 12 and I've been telling her what happened to me. Without an education you can't do anything."

Nelson says, "Whoever quits school is making the biggest mistake of their life. They're throwing away their future. Today's times are getting really tough. Without education, you'll get nowhere. Without education you're nothing."

"I came back to school because I couldn't get a job. It was something I had to do for myself. I had to prove to myself that I wasn't stupid. It feels really great to be back. Everybody feels different about me now. When people ask me what I'm doing I say, 'I'm going to school.' It feels good."

Nelson says, "I got a dream I can focus on now. I've always wanted to fly a plane. I don't want second best. I want enough money to support myself and a family, because I don't want my kid to grow up feeling the way I did."

Nelson says, "I wanted to come back to school but didn't have enough nerve. I was ashamed. I was afraid to come in. I was afraid that everybody would look at me and say I'm stupid. I look forward to getting up in the mornings and coming here, because I know I'm doing something with my life and it makes me feel different in ways I can't describe. I feel right at home here."

Nelson quit school again several weeks after giving this interview.

**To Answer:**

1. What reasons does Nelson give for quitting school?
2. What was life like for Nelson after he left school?
3. How does not having a high school diploma make you feel?
4. Were you afraid to come back to school? Talk about that.
5. Why do you think Nelson quit school again?

**Then and Now**

"When I was in school and I opened a book, it looked like dots to me. It meant nothing. I always wanted to know what them dots was. In school, you just sat in your seat and you had to shut up. If you spoke, you'd get a strap or get put up in the corner or you had to stay in after school. I really enjoy it now. I find it much easier. I got someone to help me. I enjoy coming here every day, even though I got to drive up and down. I don't mind that. I'm here and everyone's here for the same reason, so you feel at home. I can take a book now and sit down and read it myself. I always wanted to do that before but I couldn't."

- Nadine, age 39

## Chapter 14 -DAVE

## Voices of Experience

Dave is 53 years old. He quit school in Grade 6, when he was 16. He came back to school 37 years later.

Dave says he left school because "Dad took sick when he was only young, way younger than I am right now. Mom had diabetes. Somebody had to be home to get the wood and everything. Here was Dad in bed, more or less an invalid. He took a heart attack when he was about 43 years old. I was the oldest in the family, so everybody else looked up to me. I had to stay home and make sure the kids were in school. I had four sisters and one brother, all younger than me."

"I used to do good in school," says Dave. "Mooching would never come in my mind. I wanted to get there and learn. But then it came to a point where I couldn't get there."

"When Dad did get back to work, I didn't feel like going back to school. It was a little embarrassing, having to go back to the same school. I said to Mom and Dad, 'I'm going to look for a job.' I did find a job for about six months, putting the water and sewer in. Dad got me the job there. He was working on it at the time. After that finished, here it was coming on the fall."

"They had this strike - the IWA strike. There were a lot of company men on strike and they couldn't get wood out of the woods.

They had to get it out, so they were asking for men to go up in the woods. They were calling us scabbers at the time. Here I was only 18 years old, the youngest and smallest guy up there. I said, 'I got to go to work.' So I went on up there. I used to go to Badger on the train, walk across the river and walk another 10 miles up to the camp on snowshoes. I stayed up there until the end of March when the hauloff was over. A lot of the guys used to sleep with their boots and coats on. They were afraid of the IWA. I didn't care. Where I was so small and so young, I figured they wouldn't touch me anyway. I did good up there. I made just as good a day's pay as any man up there."

"I came back home," says Dave. "A friend of mine came to me and said he was going to the mainland to look for work. I had a few dollars where I had worked all spring. I packed up the suitcase and told Mom and Dad I was going to the mainland. I was up there two weeks when I got a permanent job, excellent job, in a warehouse."

"I wasn't there two months and Mom phoned and said Dad was sick. So, I told my boss, 'I'm going to have to go down for a day or two.

"'What do you mean, a day or two?,' he said. 'You go on home for a couple of weeks with your family.' That's how good he was to me, I suppose because I was doing a half-decent job. So, I came down and I stayed home two weeks, with pay. I made sure everything was okay, and Dad got back on his feet again. Then I went on back to Toronto again."

"The boss came along on this particular day. Here I was unloading trucks. The boss said, 'How much education have you got?' I said, 'Oh, my God, Mr. T., not much.' He said, 'I'm thinking

about retiring our shipper and receiver. Would you be interested?' I'd have to do out forms and make up weights and measurements and what not. There were cartons of bolts and we had to sort them out. Some customers only wanted a few. Others might want five thousand dollars worth of stuff. 'Yes,' he said, 'I know you can do it. You give it a good try. You got the job anyway. I'm going to Florida. I want you to run the building while I'm gone.' I said, 'My God, Mr. T. I don't know what I'm going to do.' 'Look, I'm leaving the building in your hands,' he said."

"A friend of mine was working there too. I said to him, 'How much education have you got?' 'I got none,' he said. I said, 'You're not much help.' I said to myself, 'He left me in charge. I got to do the best I can.' So, he went away. He was gone three months."

"He came back and looked through all the papers. He said, 'Dave, I thought you said you never had any education?' I said, 'I only got Grade 6, boy.' He said, 'You did a marvellous job.'"

"I just took my time to figure out so much. I'd get a few pointers from one of the customers probably. It worked out okay. I stayed there three years. I came back because Mom wanted me to come home again. I could have been there still. The boss wanted me to go into partnership with him. After I did come home, I got all kinds of letters and phone calls, begging me to come back. I told him I just couldn't do it. Even after I got this other permanent job here, he still wanted me to quit and go back to the mainland with him."

"I was home about three months. I was getting UI. I was on two minds about whether I should go back to school or go back to the mainland again. Anyway, this friend of mine, an oldish man, he was going to retire pretty soon. I used to go down and give him a hand at this service club where he worked. He used to do maintenance there - painting and a bit of plumbing, everything. He told me one day, 'I'm thinking about retiring soon. Would you be interested in the job?' I said, 'Yes, boy. Good job, here in my own town and everything.' He said, 'Well, I'll recommend you to the president.'"

"I put in an application. They called a general meeting. We had to go to the meeting. There were twenty-five guys there for the same job. I said to myself, 'I haven't got a chance. I might as well just walk away.' They didn't know me that well, but this friend had recommended me. The president stood up. He said, 'We got twenty-five applications for the position here as maintenance man. Under the recommendation of our former janitor and maintenance man, the job goes to Dave.'"

"I went to work there in 1971. I'm still working there, but it's only part-time. I worked there 22 years and never lost an hour. I look back and wonder if I would have done better if I had gone back to school at that time. But, I had a job anyway. That's what fooled me up. Now that I'm not full-time anymore, I said to myself, 'I should go back to school. I might be able to get a permanent job somewhere.' So, I made my decision to go back to school."

"I couldn't get a job because I don't have much education. I couldn't live on part-time work. A few friends were saying, 'if you go to school, your UI will be extended for a while anyway. That will be a bit of help.'"

"I said, 'It sounds good. At least I'll get a bit of extra education, and I'll get a few dollars to help me along.' I should have gone to school before this."

Dave talks about his school experiences. He says, "Back in them days, the teachers wouldn't come and sit by you and help you like they do here. I find it's totally different. If there's a problem you don't know, she'll show you. If you do it wrong, she'll come back again and show you again until you get it right. The greatest thing that ever happened to me was meeting Olive and the other teachers. I've learned so much in so short a time that it's unbelievable. I've learned as much here in two or three months as I did in the past twenty years."

"When Olive showed me the first lot of fractions, I might have done the low ones, but I couldn't remember the rest. Now I know them all. I want to get as much in my head as I can. I know I'm up in age now, but you're never too old."

Dave says he's "very disappointed" that he didn't get a high school education. "I look around and see so many job opportunities that need a high school education or a trade. I'm trying to learn electronics now. I joined this club. Now they want me to go in for amateur radio operator. I got to pass this course. It costs eighty dollars. I'm worried about that. I know I can read, but to pass this course I got to study, study, study. You got to have your manuals and go through them."

Dave's parents had very little education. He says, "Mom had Grade 1 or 2. Dad, I don't believe he ever went to school. It made me feel bad too, knowing my parents couldn't read and write."

Dave says that during the past two years, "I had a bit of bad luck. I lost my home in a fire two years ago. I had no insurance. My wife's grandmother perished in the fire. But, life goes on. You got to make the best of it and do what you can. I've been divorced and married again. I got three kids, and my second wife got four."

When asked about his advice to others, Dave says, "For God's sake, stay in school, and get as much education as you can get. You'll definitely make a better life for yourself with a better education. I don't think I'd have to come here today if I had stayed in school. I'd try and try and try. If I did it wrong once, I'd go back and go over it again."

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Dave leave school?
2. Why didn't Dave want to take the job as shipper and receiver?
3. Why did Dave get the job as maintenance man?
4. Discuss Dave's statement that "I couldn't get a job because I don't have much education".
5. How is school different from what it used to be like for Dave?
6. How would you describe Dave's attitude toward life?

### **Nothing Left**

"We got a young fellow going to school. Like I told him, 'it's just as well to stay in school until you get your Grade 12. You can see what there is. There's no future for you now. If you haven't got your education now, it's just as well to forget it. You can see there's nothing left. There's no woods, no fishery, there's nothing. You can see what the boys have been at here. They go to the mainland and that's it. They don't even come back. There's nothing to come back for.'

- Larry, age 35

### **Out Of Luck**

"I worked anywhere I could, construction jobs mostly, digging basements, pouring cement, jacking up a house, building a house. I applied for a job as a stock clerk in a grocery store and they never even looked at me. They wouldn't hire me because I didn't have my Grade 12. I always said I was going to finish school. That was one of my life goals, because most of my family haven't got a Grade 12. My sister got hers. She's a teacher."

- Bill, age 23

## Chapter 15 -BETTY

## Voices of Experience

Betty is 46 years of age and lives in central Newfoundland. She left school in Grade 6 at the age of 16. She came back to school in the fall of 1994. This is her story.

Betty says, "I was eight before I went to school. My Mom was afraid to send me. She was afraid I'd get knocked down by a car. I was a bit slow in school. My parents weren't educated enough. I was young, so I never had sense enough to push myself. I never ever mooched from school. Never."

"I can't remember the years that I failed, but I can remember failing Grade 6, and I was 16. The kids were smaller and I was bigger. I felt right out of place. I didn't want to quit. It was just the age group I was in. Years ago there was no such thing as anybody teaching you anything extra. If you got it, you got it. If you didn't, forget it."

"Mom said, 'You can't quit.' The principal came up. They didn't want me to quit. I said, 'It's all right for you, but I'm 16 years old, sitting in a desk, with some little youngsters who were in diapers when I started school.' They gave me canteen work to keep me in school, but I still had to go in that classroom with them youngsters. If there had been any special teachers there who noticed that I was slow in reading and spelling, I think I would have got my education. I went to school in Stephenville a long time ago and took Grade 7. I wasn't there long enough to pass."

"When I was 17 I went to work as a waitress. I learned how to use the cash on my own. Whatever I'm interested in I'll get it. I did that until I was 21. It was easy to get a job then, because you still could get a job without education. But, if I went now and put my name in to a lot of places, I wouldn't get a job. You'd get a waitress job, because you don't need no education for it, and you might get a plant job. You can't get anything now unless you got your education."

"When I was 21 I got married. I had two youngsters. I made sure they went to school when they were five. I tried to get them to get their education. My daughter got Grade 10. She ended up pregnant, but she's in school again this year."

Betty says she came back to school "just to see what I could do. I said I'll try it and if I don't like it I'll go on back. My kids are reared up. It's a great pastime and you are doing something good for yourself."

"I don't feel out of place now," says Betty. "They're just as smart as me or we're just as dumb as each other. The other day I learned how to spell a new word. Ten years ago I thought I couldn't do it."

"I'm looking for something challenging, to see what I can do with it. Really, I'm in Grade 5 and 6 right now. The older you get, the more you'll concentrate on things. If I was reading that story and I didn't know a word in that sentence, I'd skip it. But, when I was finished I didn't understand that story, because there were words I missed. Taking the dictionary and looking for the word never entered my mind. I just lost all interest. I said I don't want to read that. I don't know all the big words in it."

Betty says she also came back to school for her "own self-esteem. It's never too late to learn. You don't feel like you're walking around like a dummy after you get so much in your head."

What are Betty's plans for the future? "I always wanted to become a hairdresser," she says. If I got a trade in hairdressing, I could open my own business. I'd love to have my own business, because I got a real business mind."

Betty says one of her children who dropped out told her, "'So-and-so got a brand new Cherokee.' I said, 'Yes, I'll tell you how he got that. He didn't quit school. He put his nose in the school books. He was in the house doing his homework before he ever went outside to play. He got his education and he worked himself into a job and he got his own business. If you go back to school and you got determination enough, you can have the same things.'"

Betty has some advice for others who may be thinking of leaving school. "You're not going to get anything in this world now unless you got your education. There's no one going to put the food on your table only yourself. If you want to spend the rest of your life on welfare, that's all you're going to get. And that's a poor thing to look forward to."

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Betty leave school?
2. Why did she come back to school?
3. What is school like for Betty now?
4. What career plans does Betty have?

## Chapter 16 -STAN

## Voices of Experience

Stan is 30 years old. He left school in Grade 8. He was 15 years old at the time. He came back to school in the fall of 1994.

Stan tells his story. He says, "I believe it was Grade 7 I failed. I got promoted. I don't know if it was because of the age. I did Grade 8 and passed it, but I was having difficulty with it, so I dropped out. I had a chance of a job. At the time, that was more important to me than going to school. Of course, now I'm paying my dues, but that's how it is."

"Some weeks, no matter what they threw at me I could tackle it. But, it seemed that other weeks I just couldn't do anything with it. It was a constant struggle. Some days it was good, more days I wished the hell I didn't have to get up and go."

"If something was read to me, I could tell you word for word what it meant. But I would have to read it over three or four times to get a good understanding of it. Science was one of my strong subjects, I guess because I was interested in that. Several times before I dropped out, the teacher would take time to talk about something on the board. She'd say, 'Stan, come on, you know a lot about this.' So, I'd get up and explain it."

"I'm an only child. I had a brother who died at an early age. Neither of my parents got a lot of schooling. They definitely didn't approve of my leaving school but what could they say? I was up to that age."

What has Stan been doing since he left school? "I worked in a grocery store for about two and a half years," he says. "The teachers and principal wanted me to come back, but I just thought work was more important. I was working in the warehouse unloading trucks, carrying people's groceries, stocking shelves and doing general work in a store."

"It seems that when I started work the time just flew," says Stan. "I got married and we had a baby boy. I went to Toronto. We lived with my brother-in-law. That didn't work out too well, so we got a place of our own. I got a job working in a steel plant. I was with that company for six to nine months. There was a lot of stuff going on, like sneaking off to smoke some drugs. I wasn't really into that, so I quit. After that, I went to work with a company making TVs and stereos. I applied for a warehouse job, which didn't involve much reading or skills like that. I didn't want to be confronted on different things I knew there was no way in hell I could get over."

"The job I got was in the shipping and receiving department. That was just like putting me in an office with a lot of paperwork. There were just never enough hours in the day. When it came time for reading or writing something down, there was no way I could do it. I would try to bluff it. At times, there were things building up and I'd get a friend to sneak in and give me a hand to straighten things out. It was wicked."

"If I knew that the next day the boss was going to be coming by to see how I was doing, I would take my paperwork home and get my wife to read it to me. When I heard it, I knew it. Then I would read it back because I knew it, but probably wouldn't even follow it correctly with my

finger. So I was memorizing. I'd have to write up dates, names, a few things like that. Anything minor like that I could do."

"You're not bluffing anyone but yourself. There would be times I never brought anything home, like when a guy from Japan came out to have a meeting with the planners. He started asking questions on my shipping and receiving. I was doing mailorder; I was doing letters. It was like four jobs in one. I wasn't hired for that, but I was placed on the desk. What could I do? I was caught in the centre, with all the paperwork. I just couldn't get over it. Two days later, they said, 'Sorry, we just can't have you here and have another guy hired to do your paperwork.' So I said, 'Instead of you guys getting rid of me, I'll quit.'"

"I went from there to a job with a window manufacturer. I was working on an assembly line, on a punch press. Each window had 14 or 15 different punches you had to perform. I guess at times I was getting behind in that. The foreman was a real pusher anyway. I just didn't get along with him. So, push came to shove, and I went and seen about it. I started working on the installation part, going out and installing windows. So, I was doing that for about two years. I really enjoyed that job. But we were out on the road all the time. Our little boy was getting close to three at the time, so that wasn't easy. I was living out of a suitcase for a year and a half. I'd be home only on Saturdays. Sometimes I'd be home just long enough to get a change of clothes, have a shower and say, 'See you later.' Sometimes I wouldn't see them for another two or three weeks. The money was good, but it was coming to the point where it was tearing the family apart. It just wasn't worth it."

Stan says the next job he got was with "a small construction company. I saw them pour a basement. I didn't have any knowledge of construction work. I said, 'I know how to do that.' He said, 'You know how to do it? You're hired.' So, I bluffed my way through that, until I really got to know how to do it, pouring curbs, sidewalks, adding a finish on this and that, watching someone else. From that I went to a big company, and got into the union and started getting into bigger jobs. I was a labourer in all the jobs, so when it came time to do a bit of steel work or carpentry or this and that I could always get by. That's something that I really enjoyed because there wasn't much thinking involved. There was very little reading, except for measurements, and there was very little writing."

"One company led to another," says Stan. "Somebody would bump you because they had more seniority than you. I really enjoyed working with the big companies. Not that you can get away with a lot, but there's not so much a focus on you. You're always still bluffing your way. I knew my work and could explain it to somebody else, but if it came time to read anything, I would always say to a friend, 'Hey, I'm not into reading this this morning. You read it and talk to me.' That was just my way of getting around it, always in a joking fashion. That was just my way of making it through."

Stan didn't have a job when he came back to Newfoundland. He says, "I worked in the woods for a year. That's not really my ball game either. Last year I tried it. I was a partner with somebody else and that's not really my thing. The hours just weren't there. The money just isn't there."

"I was drawing UIC and I found out about this literacy centre through a friend of mine. My friend said, 'You should go in and check up on it.' So I did that, and he said, 'I doubt there's any way of getting in.' I kept going back and going back because I just wanted to do it."

"My son is 11 years old now, my daughter is nine months old. I said if I'm going to be any type of an example, I'd better do something to better myself. I should have done it ten years ago, but it's never too late I guess."

"I always had the intention of going back to school or trying to achieve something a little better than what I got. But, it just never worked out for me. Fifteen years later here I am. I would say I'm progressing more in some fields than in others. In weak skills, like reading, I guess I'll just have to push myself a little more."

"There are times I feel I gotta get out of here, I'm getting too frustrated. But that's only because I want to learn everything in one day. If I see something on the news and say there's something written on the board in the back, I'm trying to get close to the TV to read that."

"It's almost like it's coming to me more. I pick up things and try to read them. If I couldn't read it, I'd get someone to explain it to me and then that would create more of an interest in it. Last night on the way home I had a brochure handed to me about aspirins. I mean, I really don't care about aspirins to a point, but I read about it and it was interesting."

Stan says, "I only wish that back then there was a school like this one here, but not a separate school. No doubt, if I had something like that then, I would already have a course or something now. I totally lost interest. Right now, this is excellent. You can go at your own pace, and there's lots of help."

"I definitely want to achieve Grade 12," says Stan. "If it takes me two or three years, I really don't care, because once I got it I got it. I just want to go from there. I want to get a course in electronics. I'd like to open something on my own, even if it is a one-man shop."

Stan says, "Only last night I was watching a wrestling tape. I guess I was so interested in it, I never noticed my son was right there on the couch watching it. He said, 'Dad, I'm too tired to go to school tomorrow. We're not doing anything in school anyway, and I'm not really interested in it.' I said, 'You're only in Grade 6, what are you going to do?' 'Ah,' he said, 'go for another couple of years. Dad, you only got Grade 8, that's enough.' I said, 'Listen, fifteen years later I'm back. I'll have my Grade 12; I'll have a course. Do you want to be a dropout like myself?' 'No, Dad,' he said, 'I don't. I want to do something with my life.' I just hope that he'll think about it and it'll stick with him."

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Stan leave school?
2. How has reading been a problem for Stan?
3. Discuss Stan's statement that "You're not bluffing anyone but yourself."
4. Have you ever had to "bluff your way" because of a lack of education?
5. How would being able to read better have made a difference in Stan's life?
6. What would you say to your child if he or she talked about dropping out of school?

**She Should Have Stayed**

"I never went back to school. Dad gave me a choice. He said I could leave school and go to work and help - we had 15 children in our family - or I could continue my education. I decided to leave and help them. I feel I made a bad choice. I should have stayed in school and got my education first. Then if I wanted to help my parents out, I could have done it. But, you make your mistakes and you learn by them."

- Penny, age 43

**Off To The Mainland**

"I'd like to go to the mainland somewhere, up around Alberta, I guess. I wasn't out of Newfoundland before. I got a brother up there now. They say that's where the work is, so I figure that's where I'm going to go."

- Harold, age 19

## Chapter 17 -DOREEN

## Voices of Experience

Doreen is 34 years old. She was 16 and in Grade 9 when she left school. She came back to school 17 years later.

Doreen says she repeated Grade 9 "because of problems with math, mainly. I was doing so poorly in math, I just got discouraged with everything. I just couldn't wait for the time to come to quit." She says math is still a big problem for her.

As for her other school subjects, Doreen says, "I enjoyed science, I loved English and still do. I was really interested in French. I liked social studies. I liked everything except math. It gave me a feeling in the pit of my stomach like you wouldn't believe. Right now I'm doing a business math. Before, I did a consumer math, and I think the only reason I passed is that it was an open book exam. I could go back and look at the examples and then I could do it from there. I've been finished my business math for over a week, but I won't do the test. I'm trying to memorize some formulas, but it's not easy."

Doreen says that when she quit school, "My Mom cried. She said, 'Oh no, you can't quit school, you just can't.' When I decided I would quit, she said, 'Okay, you're not going to sit home and do nothing. You'll have to go out and try to find work.'"

"Back then you could get work without having a high school education. You could get work in a restaurant, at the hospital, whatever, but I couldn't get anything. It was all taken up by married women. There was nothing for teenagers. People were a little hesitant to hire teenagers because they were so fickle. They'd stay at a job a week or so and then they'd quit."

About a year after she left school, Doreen headed to Manitoba with her boyfriend. She says she "couldn't get work up there either. I got married up there, had a child, and the rest is history. I've never worked. I'm not proud of that. I raised my daughter and she's wonderful, she's smart and she's a good kid. She loves school and she hates to miss a day. I can't believe she's mine."

Does Doreen regret leaving school? "Absolutely," she says. "When my friends graduated, I felt awful because I wanted to be a part of that so much. I felt really bad because they were all graduating. I called them and congratulated them and sent messages. I didn't even have Grade 9 because I didn't finish it. Really, I only had Grade 8, so it was bad."

"I said if math was off the curriculum, I'd go back. It's a fear. I come in in the mornings even now and see it on the schedule. 'Oh no, math first thing in the morning.' I have to have at least six credits of it."

Why did Doreen come back to school? She says, "I had a lot of people talking to me about it. They were saying, 'You should go back and try and get your Grade 12. You know it's going to be even harder to get a job now.'"

"Something that really made me sit up and take notice was that two years ago my brother-in-law died of a massive heart attack," says Doreen. "As far as he knew, there was nothing wrong with

him. It just happened. At three o'clock in the afternoon he was talking to his wife. Four o'clock he was dead. His wife has no skill. She didn't finish high school. She worked in a grocery store. I thought about myself. I said 'You're in the same boat. You have no skill, nothing.' What about if something happens to my husband? What am I going to do? I've seen the struggles of the last two years that my sister has had."

Doreen says, "I'm doing this for me. But, it really makes you sit up and take notice. You have somebody taking care of you financially. Then all of a sudden they're gone. What are you going to do? My daughter is grown now and I'd like to have something in my life. I'm already accepted for Veterinarian Attendant Receptionist."

"I know I'm not going to get a job at that here in town," says Doreen. "I'm hoping not to be living here in two years. I'd like to have a change of scene, and my husband could follow me for a change. I'm looking forward to finally having something I can call my own."

Doreen likes school now. She says, "Instructors are different. They seem to be more laid back in a community college. You can work at your own pace. When I was in school, it was, 'How come you don't have that done this morning? You're supposed to have that done today.' There are people gone ahead of me, who did trigonometry and algebra I will never do. I'm just doing the basic math, business math, consumer math. In school you couldn't do that. Everybody was at the same thing. I can remember trying to do algebra. I failed it miserably, but I had to do it. I enjoy this a lot more. I actually enjoy getting up in the morning and coming here."

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Doreen leave school?
2. Which school subjects did she enjoy?
3. Why do you think Doreen couldn't get a job after she left school?
4. Why did Doreen come back to school?
5. What is school like for Doreen now?

## Chapter 18 -ADAM

## Voices of Experience

Adam was 16 years old when he left school. He was in Grade 9. The last grade he passed was Grade 5. His parents don't have much formal education. Adam says that when he quit school his parents weren't too concerned. They were pleased that he was going to work. Adam came back to school at the age of 39.

Adam talks about his early school experiences. He says, "The teachers never had time enough for me. They just had time for people who were learning fast. Reading is a problem for me. I left school at the end of the year. I had a job at a gas station. I worked there for six months. I got laid off and I went with another gas station for another three months."

Then Adam went to the mainland. He says he "first worked as a material handler with an electrical company, for 10 months. I got laid off, and drew unemployment. I came back to Newfoundland. Then I worked at a grocery store, doing deliveries. I had a hard time with that. The manager's wife was my teacher and she knew the way I was at reading. The names I didn't know I'd just go ask the clerk. Some days I had to get someone to come with me and tell me the names.

"I got laid off there and went on unemployment again. I went to the mainland again. I worked with a scaffolding rental company. Anybody could do it. All you had to do was count to 20, stack up the scaffolds 20 high, strap them, that was it." Adam did that job for three months. Then he came back to Newfoundland again and drew unemployment again.

Adam and his girlfriend went back to the mainland again. Adam went to work with an elevator company. He says, "I was on the saw. I had to know how to use the measuring tape. I had to know fractions. That was the only stuff I had to know. They had a layoff, so I bumped over in the other plant. There I went on the paint line, just hanging up the door, putting it in a line to be painted, then taking it off, that was it. I went from that to the forklift. I was there a year and a half altogether. When I got laid off I came home again."

One job Adam had on the mainland was with a food company. He says, "I worked there four weeks. They knew I couldn't read. I had to read the instructions on a piece of paper, about how to make the food and all that. We were making hot chocolate, iced tea, hot noodles in a cup, maple syrup. Everything had numbers, like a fellow told me. 'Just go by the numbers,' he said. 'You don't have to read.' It was hard when I didn't know how to read it. They used to tell me to go down and pick up a skid of maple syrup. There would be 20 and 30 skids of all different kinds of stuff. I had to look through it for maple syrup. Maple syrup was like Dutch to me, because I didn't know how to read it. There was only me making that food. When the food comes out it gets tasted for quality control before it goes out of the factory. They caught on, because I made a few mistakes. The boss said, 'We're going to have to let you go because you don't know how to read.' That's when it hurt. I cried that day."

"Three years ago I said, 'I got to find a trade or something.' I done a bit of welding here and there, so I said I'd try for a welding course. I said I'd go down and do the test. I went down and done two questions on the test and had to give it up. I couldn't read it."

Adam says he has "missed out on a lot of stuff because of his reading problem. "My girlfriend got Grade 12. She plays games like monopoly, with cards and all the stuff you got to read. I didn't want to play it, because I couldn't read it. I'd have to say, 'Here, read this for me.' It made me feel real bad. Playing darts, one person had to keep the score. I couldn't add up that good without a piece of paper. That's why I didn't play darts."

Adam came back to school to work on his reading problem. He gets up at six-thirty every morning during the week. The drive to school takes 75 minutes. He gets back home at six-thirty in the evening. "It's paying off for me," says Adam. "in September I'm going to do welding. So far, I got my Class 9 air brakes, my Class 3 permit to drive a dump truck, and a Class 1 to drive a tractor-trailer, all because of my reading. I had to write tests. So, it turned out pretty good. I get lots of work done in this school. I get lots of help. I find the work easier."

Adam says that when he left school, "Nobody could tell me. I soon found out. I got a nephew who quit school three weeks ago. I went down and had a talk to him about it. He don't care. He's 16 years old. I said, 'What are you going to do?' 'Stay home,' he said. I said, 'What are you going to do 16 years down the road? You're going to be like me. Go back to school and get your education.' He's in Grade 11 now. I said, 'You only got another two years, if that.'"

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Adam leave school?
2. Have you ever had problems on a job because of your reading?
3. Has reading ever been a problem for you in any other way?
4. How has learning to read helped Adam?
5. How important is education in your life?

## Chapter 19 -SHARON

## Voices of Experience

Sharon is 53 years old. She left school thirty-seven years ago. She was in Grade 7 at the time.

Sharon says, "I'm not sure how old I was when I started school - six or seven, I think. Up to Grade 4 I passed every year. I remember Grade 4 because that's the year polio was on the go and school was closed for an extra month or more. When I returned things were never the same. I couldn't remember how to divide. It was down hill from there. I spent one year in Grade 5. The last grade I really passed was 5. Then they put me in Grade 6 and I spent two years there. I spent three years in Grade 7. The only subject I took interest in Grade 7 was algebra."

"I left school in June and went in the convent in September. I wanted to join the forces, but my brother told Mom that a lady didn't join the Forces. A nun came down at my desk one day and put a little pamphlet in front of me about Sisters of Service. I said, 'Me a nun?' 'Yes,' she said."

"Well, I said, if I can be a nun, I'd like to be in the order that she was in, because I liked all the nuns. That was no problem. I went in in September and that was it. I must say that was quite an experience. I just turned 17 and for the next four years I was either an assistant cook or chief cook. I had every opportunity to better myself but was too proud to let them know I wasn't smart or stupid, whichever way you want to look at it."

"The nuns were really nice to me in school. No matter how bad we were they were nice to us. I mean I got a few slaps, but that was normal. I should have been killed many times."

Sharon says she went into the convent "just to get away from home. Nothing bad happened or anything, but I just wasn't happy there. Father was never there. He was drunk. I was in the convent four years and loved it. I learned that whatever you are you are."

"I was 21 when I left that life. One year later I was married. I had five children - two boys and three girls. My first baby died six months after he was born. In order to keep the payments on my house for the next eight years I took in six boarders just to keep us afloat. I had my next four children - three girls and a boy. It wasn't easy keeping boarders and raising children at the same time. When I was 33 I divorced my husband. At the time, the youngest was three and a half and the oldest was nine. I brought the children up on my own. It's an experience I wouldn't wish on anybody."

"For the next fourteen years, I didn't go out, only when spring came. Then I stepped out into my back garden. It was the longest fourteen years of my life. I had no social life at all - no bingo, clubs, or anything else. I spent all of these years on social assistance because I couldn't see any other way to keep my children together. I cared for them to the best of my ability. I had a few problems like any other parent. If I couldn't work them out I went for help elsewhere. I had a lot of friends who stuck by me and helped me keep my sanity."

"I must say I'm very proud of my children. I have two married. My oldest married and gave me three beautiful children - a boy six, a girl five, and a girl one year old. They are beautiful like their grandmother. My son is married. He is the second oldest at 28, no children. One daughter

graduated from university with a teaching degree; she's 27. My youngest is 24. She is in the Forces stationed in Ottawa. She is hoping to make the Forces her career."

"When I was 45 and my children were on their own I tried to find work. I worked with the Department of Forestry for the next seven seasons. I finally was real proud of me. I got off social assistance and was making it on my own. Then last season my job was gone. Desperation set in again. It was the first time in my life I was ever sorry I didn't have my education. It's the most desperate feeling in the world, not being able to depend on yourself."

"That's when Charmaine tried to talk me into going back to school to get some upgrading. She really pushed me until I finally went. I guarantee you I didn't want to go the first time. I came here at least six times before I had the guts to walk in the door. I had to come in alone, which was a big thing."

"After about two weeks, one day I just said, 'Mary, I need help.' Her face just lit up like a Christmas tree. From then on I didn't mind asking. I was just so scared of anyone finding out I was as stupid as I thought I was."

"I don't think I've done that good, but I must say I'm real proud of some things I've done. It's very hard to be 53 and not have the ability and the confidence to do what's necessary to get my GED. I guarantee you that I'll do my best not to let down those who tell me that they believe in me. Most of all, I hope I don't let myself down."

"I hope the next twenty years are easier than the first fifty-three. I don't think I can handle just surviving anymore. It would be great to have a job that you don't have to worry about losing at least till 65. It's no one's fault but my own. It sure does pay to have your education. My mother had Primer. She could read and write. She believed in you getting your education. She called me many mornings when I mooched from school, but I never used to get up. Of course, she had that much on her mind. There were fifty thousand of us, and if you didn't get up, well, that was it."

"She wanted me to get my education, but like I said I wasn't that happy at home. I wasn't really interested in school, because if I got an education I was only good for one thing anyway. If I didn't go in the convent, I was just made for having babies. That was just part of life. Mom had sixteen of us, so I figured that's what a woman was put here for - to have babies. I was going in the convent, so she didn't have to worry about me."

Sharon says that not having an education "never bothered me until the children were grown up and I wanted to make a life for me. I don't want to be dependent on my children. When they know I need anything I'll get it. I don't let them know usually that I need it. I'm trying to figure out how to get a job and stay in school."

**To Answer:**

1. Did you repeat any grades in school? Which ones? How did you feel about that?
2. Compare your school experiences to Sharon's.
3. What do you think Sharon means when she says she "was too proud to let them know I wasn't smart or stupid."?
4. Discuss the statement, "Most of all, I hope I don't let myself down".
5. Did anyone encourage you to get your education? Perhaps you could talk about that.

## Chapter 20 -TOM

## Voices of Experience

Tom is 21 years old. He was 17 when he left school. He was in Grade 10. Now he is back in school.

Tom says, "I ended up quitting one year in Toronto and I had to go back and do the whole year. I just didn't pay attention. I didn't see any reason to go. It didn't seem like it mattered. Now that I'm back in school I see all that I've been missing. I realize that you need your education. You can't get anywhere without it."

What did Tom's parents say when he quit? "They didn't like it," he says, "but where I was so much out of hand - more or less with the wrong crowd - there's not much they could have said that would have changed my mind."

Tom says, "I thought I'd leave school and get a job. Lots of people are in school all their life here and aren't getting anywhere with it. I thought I'd get out of school and start early."

"In Toronto I was doing odd jobs. I worked with a shipping company. I worked at a furniture place. One time I went back to school. I quit school again. I was in another job and they only had people hired on for two weeks because people were on holidays. Eventually we moved down here. My dad's parents died, so we got the house. I went back to school when I came down here."

"Since I came back, I worked about five and a half months enough to get my unemployment. That was on a garbage truck. Then I realized being on unemployment is not something I want to do. There are times you might have to take that route, if you get laid off or whatever. If you put your mind to it you don't have to be on it."

Tom talks about what school was like for him. "I was just waiting for the teacher. I'd be sitting there, writing my name and laughing. There were times we got tests and I put zero on the paper myself. I didn't care. I was getting frustrated. I just gave up. I was feeling bad because I didn't know how to read. I figure I wasted a lot of time. I could probably be in college or have a trade and be making good money."

He says school is different now. "I work harder. Half the time, I even work through my breaks. I find that time flies faster when you're getting something done. I find I get more help. I'm grown up more and I see more. I see the purpose of getting an education."

Tom says his reading "is getting better, good enough to know what's going on." He says he understands 75 or 80 per cent of what he reads. "Now that I'm starting to do the work and understand it, I don't get frustrated. I feel better about myself because I'm getting something done."

What career plans does Tom have? "I'm thinking about it every day, you know. I like doing art. I'd like to get into the cartoon system. I want to get into something more serious than that too, you know probably computers, or electrician, or even become a male nurse."

What advice does Tom have for a person quitting school? He says, "You'll regret it. You'll wish you got your Grade 12 or whatever. You almost need university to be a janitor now. You have to look at your children, if you have any or you're planning on having any. You want to have enough education to know how to raise them."

**To Answer:**

1. Why did Tom quit school?
2. How do you think Tom's parents felt when he left school?
3. What would you have done if you were Tom's parents?
4. What kind of jobs has Tom had?
5. How is school different now for Tom compared to the way it used to be?
6. What are Tom's career plans?
7. What does Tom say now about quitting school?

**She Came Back**

"I came back for my children. I don't want them when they get 14 or 15 to give me some homework that I don't know how to do. I figured if I went to school and got my Grade 12, if they ever came home with something, I'd be able to know what they're doing. I'd be able to help them out. If they asked me if I had my Grade 12 or not, if I said, 'No,' they'd probably say, 'You didn't get your Grade 12. Why should I have to go get mine?'"

- Karen, age 21

**Getting Ahead**

"If I can get far enough ahead, I'm going tractor-trailer driving. The only thing to get into now is something like that. Next year you might not even be allowed to catch lobsters. You're only out there now to get your stamps and get out of it, because you're not making enough to pay for the fuel you burn."

- Jack, age 34

**Then and Now**  
**By Chris Butt**

The boring days of school are gone,  
as I walk out that classroom door,  
books and teachers I see no more.  
I look in the world,  
to find work that is,  
but no work is found  
for if you don't have Grade Twelve,  
the employer just puts you down.

A year or two is gone by now,  
and still no work is found,  
so what do I do?  
I don't know,  
I can't just lie around,  
I have no job,  
I have no school,  
I have no life to live.  
So perhaps I'll try again,  
and give school another dare,  
and maybe I'll achieve Grade Twelve,  
in a couple of years.  
For now I see fight,  
and now I understand,  
what was meant when the teacher said,  
"Without Grade Twelve,  
you get nowhere in this land."  
So in school I am once more,  
with my nose stuck in a book, but at least now,  
my future has a better outlook.

**To Answer:**

1. What does Chris think of school at the beginning of this poem?
2. How does this compare to what you thought of school?
3. What does Chris find when he leaves school?
4. Why does Chris return to school?

**Couldn't Handle It**

"When I went into high school, I couldn't interact with other students. I didn't feel comfortable. I always was a loner. I was in Grade 11. I did the public exams, but I didn't pass all my courses. I got kind of fed up with school. There was too much pressure on me and I wasn't that good a student. My mother and father went their separate ways. I was young at the time and I couldn't handle the situation. I found relief more or less in the bottle."

- Bob, age 38

## **Wants To Do Something**

"There's that much on my mind I'd like to do. I'd like to do that Childhood class, but they say it's a hard course and you got to have 70 in order to pass. They say you have to do a lot of work at home. I got kids and I can't do any work at home. I'd like to do something. I'm even thinking about doing something with the handicapped again. I worked at home with the handicapped. I'd like to go to the school and work with them too. I went to school for a week in St. John's at the CNIB to train and I loved it."

- Marlene, age 25