

The Story of Emita

by Dorota Blumczynska

(Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba Inc.)

Until six months ago, Emita Mahamet had never stepped foot in a classroom. Born into a poor family in Lagos, Nigeria, Emita's parents struggled to feed their nine children. They could only afford to send their three sons to school.

"I have been home all my life. I got married when I was sixteen and had my first baby at seventeen. In my house in Nigeria I had a store where I sold drinks and bricks of ice, and in spare time I braided hair to get money to send my children to school. I never wanted them to end up like me. "At twenty-five and with four children, Emita is changing her life. In the basement of a Winnipeg inner-city school, she is doing what she had thought was impossible. "Now, I know how to write my first name, my last name, my children's names."

— continued on p. 7.



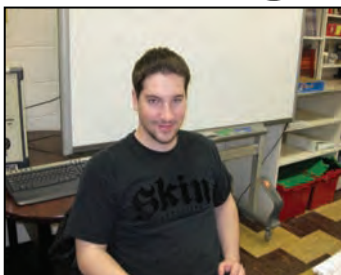
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Herding Cattle

by Brett McKay

(Swan River Adult Education, Inc.)



On our ranch we had a lot of cattle. They stayed there for the winter and left during the summer. They had to leave in about May every year after they were done having their babies. We did not have enough pasture land to keep on our ranch for the cattle to graze for all summer long.

— continued on page 3.



My Literacy Story by Joyce Splichuck



I was born in Elphinstone, Manitoba on August 4, 1952. I was the fourth youngest out of eleven children. We all lived in a three-bedroom house. My parents worked the farm to make ends meet. By the time I was five years old my father sold the farm and we all moved to Winnipeg because my mother didn't want her children to be put in a residential school. By the time I was six, my sister took me to Eaton's and we stole some candy. We got caught and the police brought us home. They told our parents and we both got a good spanking.

As I grew older I got into trouble a lot. By the time I was nine I got into more trouble than any other nine year old ever had. My mother died in 1962, so my father had to look after the five of us. The other six children were old enough to look after themselves.

It was hard for my father to watch us and work at the same time so we were all put into a receiving home on Assiniboine

Avenue. Then we were placed in foster homes. The two youngest ones were placed together because the girl between my second baby sister and me died. I was thirteen and got into trouble running away from my foster home, stealing cars, shoplifting, sniffing and drinking. They put me away for twenty seven months.

By the age of seventeen I had my first child. I got pregnant with my first and then eighteen months later I had another one. I had to leave school when I was six months pregnant. I was in grade eleven at the time. I went to R. B. Russell Vocational School and was in and out of jail for 2 years. After the third year I straightened out my act and got a job at the Salisbury House. I worked for sixteen years. Now I'm taking a Literacy Class to see if I can get better grades for a better life and get off Welfare so I can earn my own income to support myself. My goal is aiming to work for what I want in life.

– Joyce is currently studying at
STEP Literacy Program

Valerie's Trip by Doreen Wiens (*STEP Literacy Program*)



Valerie is off to California wearing her new dress. She will arrive at Christmas time by airplane in California to celebrate. She will be happy once she gets there. The airplane is gold and silver with red stripes on it. She looks so beautiful. I am so happy I can pay for Valerie's ticket. She is so impressed I paid for her ticket. She is happy. I couldn't buy her ticket before but I was scrimping so now I can. I am glad. I can help her now to get to her destination.

Learner Prose

Herding Cattle *(continued from p. 1.)*

In late May we would have to round all the cattle up and give them their shots and ear tags to get them ready to go up to the pasture. We usually hired a semi every year that would come to our ranch and load up the cattle to take them up to the Lenswood community pasture. That pasture is really big so a lot of cattle ranchers bring their cows and calves there.

It takes about two semi load trips from are ranch to the community pasture. It is about a fifty minute drive for the semi to haul them up to Lenswood. When all the cattle get there they're put into pens and then put into different pastures.

When it comes fall time in October the cattle are ready to come home. So when we go up there everybody has to round up all their cattle they own into different holding pens and every body takes turn loading their cattle up to go back to the ranches.

It is a lot of work doing that all every year but now we don't have to do that anymore. It was a lot of fun and some good memories.

– Brett McKay




I am a Pink Rose

by Jeannette Kirchen

(STEP Literacy Program)

I am a pink rose. I smell like a bit of heaven. An old lady liked the smell of me so she picked me from a flower garden.

Today I am a little excited because the old lady picked me. I hope she puts me where everybody can see and smell me. It makes me feel good that everybody likes the smell of me. 

A Picture is worth a Thousand Words

by Clarence Fontaine

(STEP Literacy Program)

Last night I looked at the pictures through a magnifying glass. I took a picture of the bus in the middle of the street. It was funny. Then I took a picture of some kids. They were so cute. I walked

down the street some more and took a picture of two dogs. One was barking very loud. I then took three more of my friend Elizabeth. She is a good egg and is always caring for people. I took a picture of the train track, and Liz took one of me on the floor right beside it. It was so funny. I took a picture of Doreen, and she took one of me. I liked that one because it was a candid moment.

Learner Prose

Nannying Adventures

by Tina Doerksen

(South Eastman English & Literacy Services)

In the summer of 1998, in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, I was a nanny for an American family. They had a three year old girl, named Emma. Emma was sweet, smart and funny.

The family lived in a big house with a big yard full of plants, flowers and palm trees. On the yard there was a large swimming pool, as well as a fountain with fish in it. Our days were always full of adventure. In the summertime Emma and I liked to go down to the fountain to watch the beautiful, colourful fish. The fish were red, yellow, orange and blue. When we got to the fountain one day, we did not see any fish.

We wondered, "Where did the fish go?" Beside us we saw the family dog with his head in the water. Was he just drinking? Then we realized the dog had eaten all the fish again!

A Day in the Life of a Bus Stop

by Clarence Fontaine

(STEP Literacy Program)

I'm a Bus Stop. I would rather be fishing instead of being pushed around by people that are rushing to get on the bus. Teenagers are always writing graffiti on my sign. They make me mad because then people can't see the real me.



They also try to tip me over. Crowds of people smoking like chimneys, drop their butts around me. I kind of like to hear the gossip when people are standing around me but what I mostly like is to feel them.

Postcard from China

By Doug Bellerose (STEP Literacy Program)

Dear Sandra,

I am at the Olympics in china. I am watching swimming. I am watching the swimmers jumping into the beautiful blue water. They all want to win the gold medal.

After the swimming was over I went back to my hotel to get some rest. I am thinking of you.

I will be staying here for a couple of weeks.

Wish you were here!

Love, Doug

Innovative Drop-In Programs: Elmwood Goal & Transcona Literacy Centre

by Anne Thomas

University of Winnipeg Practicum Student

Juggling work, family and learning got a bit easier this fall for students at 2 literacy programs in Winnipeg. In September, Elmwood Goal extended its drop-in hours to 33

hours a week – they are now open three mornings, four afternoons and four evenings every week from September to May. A new drop-in program also started this September at Transcona Literacy



Centre. It is open twenty hours a week – three days and two evenings.

How does a drop-in program work?

Learners share one teacher who moves around the room, spending individual time with each student. At Elmwood Goal there may be up to 15 learners at one time. About 35 or 40 students are in the program.

Her students work on individual programs tailored to their needs, skills and goals.

“We never really know who is going to come through that door and stay for the entire session,” says Evelyn Peterson, the Coordinator

and one of two part-time teachers.

Evelyn says a teacher has to be experienced and energetic to be able to work with 15 people at different levels. She always welcomes help from teaching assistants or volunteers.

At Transcona Literacy Centre, the number of learners is smaller and a bit more predictable. Each week, learners are asked to write down when they expect to drop in the following week. So far, there are twelve earners in the drop-in program. This winter, before any more learners join, program Director Karen Ellis will train a group of volunteers to help out.

The drop-in program is one of three options at the Centre. Drop-in learners work on Stages portfolios (Stages 1 to 3.) There is also a small class of four to six students meeting three hours a week, as well as one-on-one tutoring for learners who would not feel comfortable in a group setting or who need more focused help.

– Continued on page 9

Innovative Programs:

Fieldstone Ventures Education and Training Centre

By Shelley Bjornson, Executive Director
(Fieldstone Ventures Education & Training
Centre Inc.)

The majority of our adult learners are Aboriginal single Moms living off reserve. Some commute over one hour to attend our Centre. There were many adults who could not attend programming due to a multitude of challenges of living in rural Manitoba. We decided to do something about it!

This fall, Fieldstone Adult Literacy program decided to “take the program on the road!” The Abinooji Head Start Centre partnered with Fieldstone to enable the parents to participate in the Literacy program in a unique way.

Following an informational meeting, participants identified two key areas in which they wanted to improve their essential skills – keyboarding/computer and numeracy. To overcome the transportation barrier, the adults were driven to Ashern using the “Headstart Van” one afternoon per week. Their children were looked after



by staff at the Headstart Centre. Using innovative approaches to teaching, an individualized program was set up for Mathematics where students would work on their own or as a group, to complete a unit and then come in to Fieldstone to review and assess their learning. Staff at the Abinooji Centre are available to help them during the

week and everyone gets involved in the learning process. Relationships were already established with their peers and the staff at the Head Start and new relationships are being built with staff at

Fieldstone to support their learning.

Once a month the Adult Literacy instructor, Bev Johnson, and Shelley Bjornson, Education Co-Director travel out to Lake Manitoba to visit the learners and their children at the Headstart Centre and work on their learning plans. Learners are kept up to date on training and employment assistance resources available. Fieldstone provides all reference material to the Centre and the Headstart Centre provides the computers and the coffee.

– Continued on page 7.

Emita (Continued from page 1.)

All her life Emita has faced great challenges, yet her tears are of resilience and she comes alive explaining all that she can do. "If someone asks me, what is your birth date?, I can even remember that. I am so proud of myself."

Despite her perseverance, Emita struggles to read. "When my son brings home a paper, he says "why you didn't fill out the form for me to school? I tell him I didn't go to school so I have to find someone to fill it out for him and read it to me. I feel embarrassed."

"I struggle to learn English and read so I can help them with their homework. That's why I come to school every day."

Emita is grateful for the help she receives from volunteers and her teacher. "(They) ask me to make the sound of the letters so I can read to my children." She is her toughest critic, too humble to say that she can read many short sentences and accurately provide personal information about herself and her family.



Emita and classmates at IRCOM
Write On! January 2009

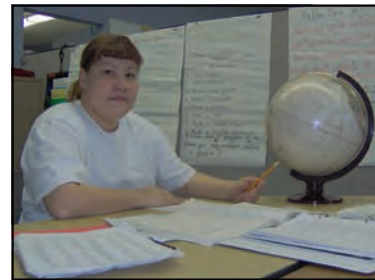
"If I didn't come to Canada, I would never have learned all these things. I look at everything I have learned in six months and if I live here for three or four years, I will learn a lot."

"If I could go to school for a long time, I will also be a teacher and help many people."

But it is the things we take for granted that Emita dreams of in a distant future. "Maybe I can even read a book to myself."

— Dorota Blumczynska

Fieldstone (Continued from page 6.)



Mandy, a Fieldstone student.

Six young moms are participating in this project and love it! They enjoy coming to school and don't mind the bus ride as they get to come to town and have an "afternoon off" from their children. These young Moms are eagerly engaging in their learning, taking assessment tests, and getting their former school transcripts to see what courses are necessary to complete their high school. They are starting to talk about the future and what it might bring for them. To quote Leo Tolstoy, "True life is changed when tiny changes occur!" We hope we can make a difference in the lives of these young people as we encourage them to take the first small steps towards a brighter future.

— Shelley Bjornson

Wolf Hunting

by Brian Oovayuk

(Swan River Adult Education Inc.)

I am talking about how to live in the Arctic winter during cold days and how to survive when hunting also in the cold blizzard day. I like to hunt with my uncle because he is more experienced than I am, and he was also taught by his parents. We both learned a lot from them.

While hunting I would get some supplies because it's what I need to catch some wild wolves in the tundra. I would need a skidoo

have warm clothes, tent, tools, foods, blankets, matches, and the last thing is a Coleman stove. I would need a Coleman stove for heat in the tent, and if not, for food to cook and some tea to drink.

I would hunt in the winter in the tundra mornings because snow would be thick and slow for the wolf because they would be very tired. Before setting up camp, I would get a map so I would know what to do if I get lost in the open tundra. I also will find a perfect land space to sleep on so I won't get a sore back when I go to sleep at night. The perfect spot would be a flat place with no low area so water won't go into the tent when sleeping. I also would organize the campsite so I would know what to do in morning so I can go as soon as possible, but before leaving I will also have a hot tea to drink when leaving campsite.

My grandparents taught me how to track wolves from how far the foot prints are from the ground and how warm the tracks are in the snow. When I began my trip to the tundra, I saw wild wolves and caribou from the land that my grandpa spoke about. When trapping the wild wolves, I would use my skidoo to get closer so I can shoot and chase them while driving near the wolves and then use my advantage not to let them escape on me when driving near them.

After we kill the wolves, we then go back to the campsite and talk about how much fun it was. Then after we settle down, we then load up the sled with the wolves that we killed and then pack up to leave home. When my Uncle Mark and I go back home, he then would tell me to bring the wolves inside to my grandparents, and after I bring it to them, my grandpa would tell me to get the wood to stretch the fur.

I fondly remember so many things that my grandpa taught me. I will always remember wolf hunting as a special time that I shared with my grandpa.



Brian at Swan River Adult Education Inc.

Elmwood Goal & Transcona (continued from p. 5)

New students are carefully matched to the option that best fits their wants and needs. The reasons for changing to a drop-in schedule are many. In a program with a fixed schedule, people might not be able to attend regularly. They might miss time because of shift work, family responsibilities, illness, or appointments such as job interviews. Evelyn points out that when a program can't accommodate learners' schedules, the learners will stop coming. For example, now if a learner has been attending regularly during the day and then is hired in a day job, she can just switch to evening hours and continue learning.



The GOAL Adult Literacy Classroom

“When we say that we individualize programs to meet the students’ needs,” Karen says, “that’s all true, but if we don’t also make it flexible, we’re not really making it individual, because it would be so hard for some of them to come consistently or to keep up with the class.” Learners can create their own schedules now. “They can come for two hours, they can come for five, they can come for fifteen, and they can change it on different weeks.” A drop-in program also helps to meet the needs of students who want more hours.

The new programs are convenient not only for learners but also for volunteers. Some don’t

want to make a commitment to come at a certain time each week, as a one-to-one tutor does.

Twenty years ago, Transcona’s program started up with thirty one-on-one volunteer tutors. At that time, volunteers had more free time, and fewer of the learners were working shifts. Karen sees the new programming as part of an ongoing process of evolving to meet the changing needs of the community.

Response to both drop-in programs has been very positive. At first, Karen expected learners would come about four or five hours a week, but the average has been six to nine hours. She is getting more referrals from Employment Insurance, because learners can now attend all day.

Evelyn spent time recruiting learners last year, but this year she no longer has any time or any need for that. This year, instead of looking for students, she is looking for more space for them and also looking for more volunteers.

In the future, she hopes to get funding to open 5 days a week. Her dream would be to have the funds to hire more teaching assistants and to have a second teacher in the classroom.

— Anne Thomas

MADD

by Rhonda Pelletier

(Swan River Adult Education Centre)

Why you?

You were so unique
You had a bright happy smile
You brightened up a room
Just with your presence
Hanging around you
How time just flew by
Why you?

You had a heart so big
You had so much love
For everyone
You helped others in need
You cheered people up
When they were down
You said a lot of crazy things
That we laughed about
Why you?

We had our fair share of fun
Times we were apart were lonely
I had a friend by my side
I felt whole and joyful
I felt at peace with you
Going to church together
Even to school
Why you?



Rhonda Pelletier

Where did you go
Waiting for you to return
But you didn't show up
I was and am still waiting
When will you be back?
To see your loving smile
The way your eyes sparkle
I need your laughter
I want you to say
This was a joke
Why you?

My Sister in Law
My friend
And classmate
Why you?

Love you
Memories I will always have
Miss you already
December 4, 2008
Is when you left
I never thought
Losing you would hurt so much
Trying to be strong
But I feel weak

It is December 10, 2008
The pain is real
The tears fall but I can't
Say Good-Bye

Rhonda Christy-Anne Stevens
Come home please
Just come back home
I don't understand
Why you?

What is it like to be a Cat?

by Valerie Laroque

(Fieldstone Ventures)



I have a good life because I don't need to shop for food. I can sleep anytime. I like to run around all day.

One thing I don't like is my bath time or going in the house when it is time to go in. I enjoy my life when my hair is combed. I give more kisses to be combed more. I only have one cat I don't like. He is a gray cat. I don't let him around my yard at all. One other thing I don't like is a smelly cat box.

They say that cats have nine lives. I guess my life being a cat isn't so bad then.

Yellow

By David Strong (*Fieldstone Ventures*)

Yellow is the sun.

Yellow is fresh corn.

Yellow is my hat.

Yellow is a pencil.

Yellow tastes like bananas.

Yellow smells like dandelion.

Yellow sounds like a canary.

Yellow feels like cold marbles.

Yellow looks like a Volkswagon

Yellow makes me hot.



Ode to my father "dad"

by Ileah Sanderson

(*Swan Valley Adult Education*)

Sometimes I think of my day
And wonder to me if you could say
That you love me so very much
And in your hand you'd have mine to clutch
Would my life be a little less bad?
Or possibly in heart I'd be a little less sad
What made you run and try to flee
What were you thinking when you
abandoned me
All of my friends have someone to call dad
And sorry to admit in my heart it made me
mad
Maybe its better that I don't know you
But I always would wonder if you think of
me too
The least you could do is pick up the phone
Maybe then, I won't feel so alone
I hate you for leaving this space in my heart
Sometimes I wish I could just tear you apart
Then I won't feel so badly unwanted
Maybe even then a little less daunted

Editor's Note:

Thank You learners and practitioners for your submissions. Your contributions have made this issue of *WRITE ON!* a memorable one. Be proud of your continuing achievements.

A special thanks from me to Jan Graham, who was very helpful when I was putting this issue together, as was Anne Thomas who hit the streets to do some investigative reporting.

The theme for the next issue is "**Listening With My Eyes**". I welcome writing from learners and practitioners on this or any topic. Please email writing in Word format and keep your pictures a decent size. The deadline is **Friday, March 14, 2009**. Until then, happy reading and writing!

—Lindsey Jay Walsh

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*" All I can do is show my
kids I can learn and so
can they."*

— Rhonda Pelletier —