

# Rock Brisson



Yukon Literacy  
Coalition

Yukon Learner Series

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*“It’s never too late to learn.”*

Rock

*"I got put in the corner [at school] because they just thought I was stubborn and didn't want to learn."*

Rock Brisson



# Growing Up

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Rock Brisson was born in Shawinigan, Quebec. He was the fourth of 10 children.

Rock had a very difficult early life in foster homes, he changed schools 10 times between the ages of 5 and 13 years old.

When Rock was 13 years old, he was placed in a foster home outside of Drummondville, Quebec. Rock had such difficulty learning to read and write, he was put into a Grade 3 classroom, despite his age.

This made school a horrible challenge. When his new foster father began to abuse him, Rock was removed from the home and the school. Lacking anywhere else to go Rock was sent to live with his boss, who ran the local grocery store. Although he did not complete Grade 3, Rock was enrolled in high school.

Rock struggled with high school and did not help the situation by selling liquor out of his locker. When he got caught the school contacted his boss and told him that school was just no place for Rock.

Rock did not return to a classroom for 30 years.

Feeling alone and desperate, he turned to alcohol.

*“The frustration I felt because I did not know how to read or write drove me crazy and caused me a lot of grief. It made me go bankrupt in many ways—spiritually, financially and mentally.”*

Rock



# Covering Up

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In 1979, Rock moved to High Level, Alberta where he managed to stop drinking and worked hard to provide for his family. He was able to successfully hide his literacy skills, and held various jobs including pool hall owner, and property manager.

How did he do it? Rock got other people to complete his paperwork, he even had customers write out their own receipts.

In 2002, after 24 years of coping with this secret, Rock approached a learning agency in High Level to begin his learning journey.

However life became very difficult, family problems, a major heart attack, a stroke and a suicide attempt, all prevented Rock from continuing with his studies.

*Stroke: a loss of brain function due to bleeding and blockage in the supply of blood to the brain*

*“There are so many different opportunities to express yourself through reading and writing.”*

Rock



# The Awakening

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While Rock was recovering from his suicide attempt, a nurse at the hospital asked if they could photograph his wound as the wound was unusual and his case was rather extraordinary and understanding it could help others.

Rock was 46 years old and living on welfare, it was at this moment in his life that Rock realized that perhaps he could help himself and others. Rock wanted to change and he believed that he could make a better life for himself and for his family.

*“I needed more education in order to work...to prevent my children, who were illiterate too, from ending up like me.”*

Rock

*Extraordinary: reaching beyond what is ordinary or usual*



## Starting Over

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It was 2004 when, after moving his family to Whitehorse, that Rock first walked through the doors of *Yukon Learn*, looking for help for his son. Yukon Learn only assists adults and although they could not help Rock's son, Rock took the chance and enrolled himself in one of Yukon Learn's programs.

Yukon Learn provided Rock with a tutor and he started working to improve his skills in reading and writing English.

Rock's first language is French, and so he was also directed to *La Service D'orientation et de Formation des Adultes (SOFA)* to get tutoring in French.

Before beginning his tutoring work with SOFA, Rock took some learning tests at the *Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon (LDAY)* to make sure that he got the support he needed.

The learning tests showed that Rock was 60% deaf in one ear and 30% deaf in the other. His stroke and heart problems had increased his language problems and his reading and writing was now at a kindergarten level. It was clear that Rock needed help, and this time he was able to do it. Rock received tutoring from Yukon Learn, SOFA, LDAY and he also enrolled in an Essential Skills program at Yukon College.

*Essential skills: the basic skills needed to accomplish tasks in the workplace*

## Rock's First Poem

### *Angel*

*To the special angel I met  
The first time I looked in your eyes  
They were like two shining stars  
And the glow in your face was like a floating cloud  
When you looked at me  
I felt a strong desire to know you  
The more I learn about you  
The more I want to know this beautiful angel  
When you speak to me it's magic  
The more we learn about each other  
It's like something I've never felt before  
Your kisses electrify me  
Thank you  
It's a privilege to know you  
I feel really special*



# Life

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After 4 years of hard work with his tutors Rock could read in French and English. As well Rock could also write with a voice-recognition program.

Rock started his own business—**Northern Lites Painting**, he can read and draw-up contracts, take care of his banking and is able to fill out forms.

Rock can better find his way around public places and feels more confident being out in the world. But most importantly, Rock can help his children read and write.

Today Rock works hard to look after his family and is dedicated to life long learning and spends his spare time traveling to encourage adult learners in their literacy journeys.

For this work, he has received acknowledgements and awards, including being voted Yukon's 'Learner Representative'

In 2006 he received the Yukon Council of the Federation Literacy Award, presented by Yukon Premier, Denis Fentie. This is a national award presented to a literacy leader or learner, in each province and territory.

Rock Brisson is truly a literacy hero. His dedication to life-long learning and his hard work over many years, despite his personal struggle, is an inspiration to us all.



# Yukon Learning & Literacy Agencies

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## **Yukon Learn**

107 Main Street  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Y1A 1Y6  
Phone: (867) 668-6280  
Toll Free: 1-888-668-6280  
[www.yukonlearn.com](http://www.yukonlearn.com)

## **Service D'orientation et de Formation des Adultes (SOFA)**

302 Strickland Street  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Y1A 2K1  
Phone: (867) 668-2663  
[www.sofayukon.com](http://www.sofayukon.com)

## **Yukon College**

Box 2799  
500 College Drive  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
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Phone: (867) 668-8800  
Toll Free: 1-800-661-0504

Check out **Yukon Literacy Coalition's** website for a  
literacy or learning agency in our community.

[www.yukonliteracy.com](http://www.yukonliteracy.com)

# Yukon Literacy Coalition

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To sign up for our weekly e-newsletter or purchase a membership, please contact us:

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*The Yukon Literacy Coalition is a Yukon-wide literacy organization that is community governed and committed to supporting and encouraging literacy in all the languages of the Yukon.*







