



International Adult Learners' Week 2008

LEARNERS' STORIES

Lory-Anne Campeau

Hull Adult Education Centre

How Coming Back to School Improved My Life!!!

My life has been a struggle. Previously I couldn't spell words properly. It was also difficult for me to write good English essays. All this at a point affected my self esteem and my life.

It has not been easy for me because my pregnancy was not expected. At nineteen years old, I was a young mother who was on her own without any support or father figure for my daughter. I felt the need to go back to school, not only for myself but to be a good role model for my daughter. Concerning my education, well, I dropped out when I was in grade 8. I decided to come back now because I didn't want the minimal education in life.

Prior to coming back to school, I wasn't able to spell properly. I usually misspelled words. I would spell one word in place of another. Without realizing it, I would use unnecessary letters in words like "whent" for "went", "whas" for "was", "whant" for "want", "whit" for "with" and "he his" for "he is". Today I would say that my writing has improved. I don't use unnecessary letters anymore. I pronounce the words if I'm not sure how they are written, and it helps me to write them well.

With that little problem, I couldn't write essays. They kind of scared me a little bit. But with a bit of practice and hard work, I can say now that I've made improvements in essay writing.

When I started school, I was at the bottom of the ladder. I told myself "Oh Lord, this is going to be hard". As I attended the classes I saw that it wasn't so hard after all. If I just put a little bit of motivation into my work, I will achieve my goal in life. My goal in life is to be a paramedic. I want to make a difference in the world.

Before coming back to school my self esteem was low. Being a young mother of a two-year-old girl, I lost all hope. My focus is on my daughter. When I look at her every day I find the strength to come back to school and reach my goal. For me to be able to get her a good living environment is very important. As she grows up, I want to be able to be a good role model. I want her to know that no matter what happens in life, it shouldn't hold you back from achieving your dreams. As human beings, we are all in charge of our lives and we are the only ones capable of changing our lives for the better.

Until this day I hold my head up high. I'm glad I came back to school. With my improvements in spelling and essay writing, I hope to move forward to achieve my goal. I set it up high but now I know I can get anything I want. It's just a matter of time.

Euphema

Great Learning Mix

When you meet Euphema you are immediately struck by her warm and exuberant spirit, the love she has for her family and her desire to learn. The story of Euphema's remarkable progress with literacy skills began at the age of 57 when she decided that being unable to read the songs in her church choir was unacceptable. Her frustrations and desire to improve her reading speed and comprehension provided the motivation needed to join a literacy program.

Euphema grew up in Jamaica, attending school only very sporadically. Past instructors told she would never really learn to read. Yet, she persevered, finding a program and coach that worked well with her learning style. Euphema's patience and determination are the keys to her success and her advice to others is: "Never give up! Don't be afraid to ask for help." Since joining the program in January 2003, Euphema has enhanced her sight word recognition and reading comprehension by more than two grade levels. She has mastered new skills including how to use a dictionary and the telephone book. Furthermore, she is now able to write confidently to family members overseas. "They can't believe I wrote the letters," Euphema says proudly. While the effects of increased literacy have improved Euphema's daily life in a number of positive ways, perhaps the most important impact is her enhanced confidence and self esteem. Both are evident as Euphema speaks about her pride in being nominated for the CCALA Life of Learning Award (LOLA), and being named a Finalist for the 2005 Canada Post Literacy Award. Euphema's resolve and desire to keep learning are boundless. According to the Library's Carolyn Reicher, "Euphema is an inspiration and a wonderful example of how we never stop learning."

Euphema did not travel the path of successful adult learning alone. She had the assistance of her dedicated coach, Verla Boyle. A teacher and principal with over 50 years of educational experience to her credit, including work with Special Needs students, Verla joined Reading Advantage skeptical about what she would learn, but still wanting to volunteer her time and skills. Now Verla is the first to admit that she has learned a great deal from working with Euphema, and that she is happy to be able to continue learning. Verla finds it rewarding to see the progress that Euphema has made and has noticed that Euphema feels better about herself since joining the Reading Advantage Program. A large part of the program's success can be attributed to the volunteers like Verla referred to as "learning coaches." These dedicated volunteers allow the learners to set the pace and focus of learning sessions. Euphema states empathically that she feels blessed to have Verla as a coach, and Verla adds she feels lucky to be able to work with Euphema. Both women are true examples of lifelong learning and their patience and commitment are truly an inspiration to adult learners everywhere!

For more information please contact: Emily Leclair, Reading Advantage Calgary Public Library 260-2729 or visit the library on-line at: www.calgarypubliclibrary.com

Sarah Loft, TVDSB

Gateway to Learning Program - Woodstock. Ontario

May the hand of a friend always be near you

This is the title to a picture I took for our photography class. I had some sight but have had a setback and I have lost a lot of vision. I guess you can say I am legally blind now. I work on a special computer called the Saraw, or Speech Assisted Reading and Writing and it is supplied but the Neil Quire Foundation. I like the computer because it reads all back to me.

I love writing stories and doing my journal everyday. I started a little business called Bath Balms. You put the balm in hot water and soak your feet. I typed a little poem and tie it to them and sell them for \$2. I love it when we share our stories in class and I learn what is happening in Woodstock.

I have gained a lot of independence. The CNIB has helped me to enter the building and find my way to class and exit the building without assistance. I am learning a lot in my classes and lot of times I do it orally and it keeps my mind active.

I will never stop learning.

Mary McGowan

New Brunswick Community College, St. Andrews

I was forty when I went back to school. I had previous office experience, but had not worked full-time for twelve years while I was home raising my children. Although I had worked a bit on a part-time or casual basis, I wanted to get back into a full-time office environment and I knew my skills were outdated. When I was laid off from a part-time job, my kids were in school and my husband was at college, so it seemed like a perfect opportunity for me to go to school too.

I enrolled in the Office Administration program at NBCC St. Andrews Campus in the fall of 2006. The whole family was in school that year. It was a very challenging time and required me to acquire strong time-management skills. My husband was a big help and everyone did homework together after dinner.

It was not easy to be back in school as a mature learner. All my skills had been learned on the job. I had no other post-secondary education. But I really benefited from every course I took at the college because I learned the right way to do things. Anything I knew previously about computer programs was just what I needed to know to perform my job. In the Office Administration program, I learned so much more. The thing I liked best about the program was the instructors were really good at pushing to get me to reflect about past experiences, to focus on developing new skills, and to celebrate my own personal successes throughout the year.

College can be so positive for an adult learner, especially when the program has a work experience component. My work practicum led me to my current job. My ultimate goal was to get a job and I was successful in getting one right after graduation. I now work in payroll at Cooke Aquaculture, a large company in New Brunswick that processes and sells more than 80 million pounds of Atlantic salmon each year.

Mary McGowan is a 2007 graduate from the Office Administration program at the New Brunswick Community College in St. Andrews.

Patricia Ross

Northern College's Moosonee Campus

Upon graduating from the General Arts and Science program at Northern College's Moosonee Campus, Patricia Ross went on to take the Practical Nursing program and graduated in 2006.

"I wanted to be an example for my children and community, therefore I enrolled in the General Arts and Science program" says Patricia.

Once in the program, Patricia soon began to experience increased confidence in her ability to master new knowledge and skills.

"Ever since I was in high school and maybe even earlier, I wanted to be a nurse. I gave up on this dream because I never thought it was possible. But during that first semester of the General Arts and Science program, I started to believe I could be a nurse."

In May 2004, Patricia graduated from the General Arts and Science program with the confidence to go further.

"I started to see more and more native nurses and I wanted to be like them. I wanted to help people and because I speak my native language I could help translate for native patients, especially those from the James Bay region."

Patricia states that going back to school changed her life on numerous levels. Not only has her financial outlook improved, but most importantly, she feels good about herself, and has become a confident person who now focuses on the positives.

"Today, education is very important for my children," she says. "I let my children know that they can be anything they choose. In fact, I would like to tell others that it is never too late. Here I am today, a Registered Practical Nurse with Weeneebayko General Hospital in Moose Factory helping people just like I dreamed of doing."

Patricia admits that it was not an easy path, but she was determined and committed to succeed. She made sacrifices, including getting up at 4 a.m. to study. However, these short-term sacrifices made an enormous difference in her life and the benefits will last her a lifetime.

Patricia has plans to go on to university to obtain a Nursing degree.

Ellen Szita

I was born in England in 1941 on the 26th of August. I was one of eight children. My parents were married almost 25 years when my father died of cancer at 53 years. My mother died at age 80 in England.

At 14 years of age, and with very little schooling, I went to work in a factory. Because of a very dysfunctional childhood and a total loss of self worth, at fifteen I attempted suicide. At age eighteen, I immigrated to Canada. I arrived in Quebec in April of 1960. I went into a factory and earned \$56 per month.

I met and married my husband in 1962 and by 1969 I had four children. Because of the FLQ Crisis, we left in 1970 and moved to British Columbia.

By 1979 the marriage failed and I moved to Victoria, on Vancouver Island, with my children.

I lived on welfare for many years because of my lack of academic skills. This was very humiliating for me. Due to living in a dysfunctional family as a child and going through depression as a single mother, I spent four years of therapy with a Dr. Pazder. Prior to that, I entered a treatment center for alcoholism. I have been sober for twenty-five years. It was during my visits with Dr. Pazder, I was found to be dyslexic, and encouraged to attend the Victoria, READ Society. It was during this time that I became aware of the high rate of illiteracy in this country. After some months, I continued on to Camosun College to complete my grade twelve, taking a computer course and nurse's aid courses.

Thinking back about how three of my four children had left school between grades 7 and 10, I became aware that illiteracy could breed illiteracy. It was then that I started to become very involved in the movement for Canadian literacy. I have become a motivational speaker for Adult Learners and sat on many boards. I am chairperson for Learners for the Movement for Canadian Literacy in Ottawa. I'm also on the Expert Panel for Health and Literacy and sit on boards in my own community. I have participated on various panels, spoken throughout high schools, colleges, universities, at conferences, and to social workers, those incarcerated, health organizations, and many others. Since then I have taken a counseling course which I graduated from five years ago in order to help those learners in need. I have had an award-winning documentary done on my life and received an award from the Governor General of Canada for my work in literacy. I have volunteered my time for twenty-one years. In 2007 my autobiography was released, called 'Ellen's Story' and can be purchased at Coles Book Store.
