

Memories of My Childhood

and

Other Stories

by

Students for Students



LAUBACH LITERACY OF CANADA

Memories of My Childhood *and* Other Stories

Editor: Gladys E. Neale



**Laubach Literacy of Canada
Alphabétisation Laubach du Canada**

Memories of My Childhood and Other Stories

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Introduction

These two books, *The Grocery Cart and Memories of My Childhood and Other Stories*, are the result of a contest. It was hoped that this would be an incentive for our new readers to practise their writing skills. It was also intended that the selections would provide suitable and interesting reading material for our students. There were three categories (although submitted material was not restricted to these): poetry, creative stories, and the experiences of students when learning to read and how much their achievements have meant to them.

There were about 150 submissions and most provinces were represented. It would have been gratifying for everyone involved if we had been able to print all the submissions, but this was not possible. The selection committee had to make difficult decisions. Here are their final choices, which were lightly edited for publication.

We hope tutors will find the selections a source of good reading material and our students will enjoy them and find them a source of inspiration.

Our thanks go to Karen Boskamp for sending out information about the contest and doing some initial screening; to all the students who took part; and to our judges, Rachel Mansfield, Lilla Sinanan, Gladys Neale, and our student representative Arnie Stewart, who was of great assistance.

We are grateful to the Canadian Gift of Literacy Foundation for their grant of \$4,000, which enabled us to produce these two books.

My Walk

by
Hilary Eaton

One day I went for a walk. I went down a long path until I came to a log cabin. I started to look around to see if anyone was home.

Then I heard a bang. So then I went to see what it was. But I did not see anything. I looked and looked. But I still did not see anything.

So then I came back outside. There stood a big black bear. So then I went back inside and closed the door.



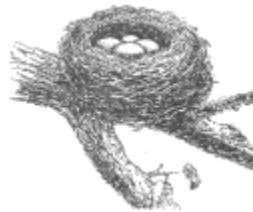
Worms for Breakfast

by
Andrea Menig

One spring morning I had a nice surprise! I looked out of the kitchen window to see the cherry tree in our backyard. Then, I spotted a robin sitting in a nest in the fruit tree. I was so happy, because I enjoy watching the birds. I hoped my new, little neighbours would be happy and stay around.

Some mornings I'd have breakfast with Mrs. Robin. I would have jam on toast. She would have some muddy, creepy worms. We became good neighbours. The robins were the stars, and our yard was their stage.

Another day I noticed there were blue eggs in the robin's nest. That spring I watched the robin family grow through my windows. I felt like one of the new birds, because I was in a shell. I think in a shell it's lonely and there's no room to grow. The eggs didn't move and go forward. They just stayed in one spot. I knew I must grow and break out of my shell.



I did grow and move in a positive way by becoming a student of Laubach Literacy of Canada. I had entered a new world, like the tiny robins. I learned about the dictionary, the alphabet, and how to create stories.

Just like the wise mother robin, my teacher gave me skills and her knowledge that I can use all my life. When I was ready, she knew it was time for me to take the big leap and soar. I didn't have to rely on someone to read and write for me. The best day was when I read my mail by myself. I was flying with my feathered friends. We reached the sky. It was like having a little birdie helping me.



When I had a difficult lesson, I'd wish I could join in the fun and be dancing around in the wind with my friends. But hard work paid off for my classmates and me. The robins can rise to great heights or enjoy worms for breakfast. I can enjoy reading a book about birds and writing a letter on my own. We feel good because we are as "free as a bird," thanks to our skills.

Summer

by
Darren Vibert

I like to walk down the beach at night time. It's cooler then. I like to walk my dog down too.

I like cutting the grass. It makes our lawn look good. I rake the lawn too. I like to work with the weed eater. I like the gas one at work.

I like working in the garden. I like to get my hands dirty. I like to pull the weeds out of the garden. I also like to plant flowers, all kinds of different types.



Memories of My Childhood

by
Grace B.K. Chan

I spent my childhood in a small village in China. In our village, we grew vegetables, planted paddy and caught fish in the river for our living. We also raised chickens and ducks. We ate our poultry only on special occasions such as at Mid-Autumn Festival or Chinese New Year. But we kept them for laying eggs. Sometimes we ate eggs. But mostly we used to sell them for money or exchange them for salt, sauce, oil, etc.

The life in the village was simple but hard. I didn't have toys. The only amusement I could have was playing games with other children in front of the house in the evening. I had to go home when it got dark because there was no electricity at that time. Also there were so many mosquitoes outside.

WE DIDN'T HAVE ELECTRICITY

Inside the house, we used oil lamps to give light. Even though we used to read and write in the sombre house, it was strange that no one had myopia as my children now have. I think the reason was that there was no television at that time. Now the children watch too much T.V., which impairs their eyes.

When I was about 8 years old, China became a communist country. Thus my family's nightmare began. Our house and fields were confiscated. We had to live in a broken small house. We did not know when a raid would take place or somebody would knock at the door at midnight to see if somebody had run away.

They tortured my mother by asking her to kneel down on the shelf. They tortured her by hanging her up by her two thumbs or by making her stand up for a whole day under the scorching sun and in many other ways. She had been so cruelly treated that many times the idea of committing suicide flashed in her mind. But she was tough. She realized that her children would be in a more difficult situation if she was dead. So she decided to overcome the plight. She believed that tomorrow would become better.

I BEGGED FOR FOOD

As a child, I was looked down upon by the villagers because of my status - the daughter of a landlord. I had to walk with my head downwards. I had to beg for food. I still remember how I was once a beggar.

“Please give me some food. I haven't had anything to eat since last night. Please be kind enough to give me some rice.” Wearing a torn dress, with a deep and trembling low voice, I begged for food from door to door in the village.

“Ha, you are the daughter of that landlord. Do you think I would give you some food? I would rather put it into the garbage. Now it's your turn to suffer.” Then the person would spit on me and slam the door. I wouldn't go back home as I was really very hungry. I needed something to eat, or I knew that I might starve to death. In order to survive, I would go to another door with tears in my eyes.

“Poor little girl, you shouldn't suffer like this. Come in, quick, don't let other people see you.” Then that person would close the door and give me food to eat. At that time, the landlords were considered as the plague. One would possibly get into trouble if one spoke to the landlords and their families. The comrades would think that you were of the same clan and were exchanging communications.

Now I live in Quebec, Canada. This is a place where I face a language barrier. I can't speak French. But most people here are nice and the place is beautiful. I feel free to live here. But the memories of my childhood are still haunting me.



Auction Adventures

by
Delia Holtom

On April 5th I went to an auction in Woodstock. The car ride was a boring drive, but when my friend Trish and I arrived we were feeling kind of excited.

The buyers at the auction came from near and far. My friend Trish was coming for the first time. We looked around at one section that was considered the junk area. There were pretty good things there. My eyes were on a slow cooker. My friend Trish had her eyes on a set of measuring bowls.

We walked around to the other side that was the antique section. The antiques were very expensive, but there were beautiful things. My friend Jim was there. He really enjoys auctions very much. Later, Trish told me to bargain on the measuring bowls for only five dollars. The auctioneer started on the bowls at two dollars. Someone said three. I stopped bidding.



Trish started bidding and ended up getting the bowls at six dollars. She was so happy about that. I'm very cheap to begin with, so I got the cooker for two dollars. We were there all day. The day passed very quickly.

All the way home my friend Trish kept telling me how proud she was to get the bowls for six dollars.



The Law Enforcement Torch Run

by
Paul Nichol

The Ontario Provincial Police run for Special Olympics is every year in June. This Torch Run goes on in Port Carling, Bala, Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville.

This year the O.P.P. asked me to run. On Saturday, June 13th, I ran from MacDonalds to Gull Lake Park. I started at 1:30 p.m. and finished at 2:30 p.m.

I like running with the O.P.P. because it's helping to support someone who can't run.



Fire Water

by
Michael Rice

At first I did not drink that much, but as time went by I drank more. The day came when I knew that I was drinking too much! I tried to stop by myself, but every time I went back to drinking. I could go for about a week without a drink. Then after a week, I would go back to drinking. I had no idea why I could not stop drinking by myself. Why could I not stop drinking?

Fire water can ruin your life! The bar is fun at first, but after a while that was all I wanted. I went to the bar because I felt I had to go. The people at the bar made me feel good, and so did the liquor. I did not see what the booze was doing to me. I could see what the booze was doing to other people.

I DID NOT UNDERSTAND

I became addicted to the booze and the bar scene. I did not know I was addicted, but alcohol is an addictive drug. When I became addicted I did not know it, but all the people around me did. It affects you by slowing you down, and you do not even know it. Fire water makes a person feel good, but it is a drug and can do a lot of harm. I know of people that have died of booze.

When I was alcoholic, what mattered the most was drinking. I did whatever I had to do to get it. Alcoholism can destroy a family; relationships are torn apart. The drinker only wants to drink, and even the children no longer matter. The children do not get the love they need from a drinker. If one parent drinks, they go to the one that does not drink. The children do not understand what is happening to the drinker, and they suffer the most. The second biggest loser is the one that does not drink.

I WANTED TO STOP

An alcoholic feels the craziest when he is not drinking. When I tried to stop drinking by myself, my mother and father thought I was on drugs. I felt a great deal of anxiety and I needed a drink even more. I did not understand why I felt this way. After I had some beer, I felt alright. I thought that no one wanted me around. So I would go to the bar and drink, and this made me feel better. I was angry at myself, because I could not stop drinking. At the time I really wanted to stop my drinking. No matter how hard I tried I could not stop drinking.



I went to Alcoholics Anonymous in 1992 and stopped drinking. After about a year, I felt something was still wrong, but I did not know what. What I did find out was that I was drinking so I would not feel my past. What I did not want to feel about my past was that I had been sexually abused.

Even today this is still a problem. Because of all the drinking I did, I have a hard time understanding feelings.



Lumberjack's Daughter

by
Joanne A. Charlebois

When I was a very little girl, I used to go to the bush with my dad. The bush is what a lumberjack calls a forest.

My dad uses a very big machine called a chainsaw. Lumberjacks cut the tree down with a chainsaw. Then they cut the tree into smaller pieces to make the trees very easy to carry.

Lumberjacks work all summer long, when it is sunny or when it is raining. Sometimes they work into the winter. When the snow starts falling heavily, lumberjacks have to stop. Then they start back up after it stops snowing.

Sometimes the lumberjacks have strange weather. Two lumberjacks will be standing beside each other cutting away. One guy will get rained on and the other will get sunshine.



They also run into a lot of other stuff out in the bush. You have to watch out, because sometimes lumberjacks come across wolves. Lumberjacks can step on ground bees or get sprayed by a skunk. Sometimes when they cut trees they can't see nails, steel wire or knots inside of the tree. If the chainsaw grabs it, it jumps back and the person can get hurt really badly, or even killed.

The saddest part is seeing the animals losing their homes to make way for our homes and businesses. Lumberjacks work from the early morning to sunset. When you're really quiet you can hear the faint sound of a chainsaw buzzing far away. Then they say the famous word "TIMBER," then the cracking of the wood and the rumble of the falling tree, then a big thud.



Lumberjacks are hard-working men and women. It doesn't pay much but the fresh air can do wonders for your health.

Gardening

by
Lisette Rivet

I'd like to tell you about my garden. For me, I have liked flowers since I was a little girl. I always dreamed of lots and lots of flowers - a big yard full.

Well, today it is my hobby. I have my big yard, 125×200 feet, with lots of flowers. There are different kinds: roses, tulips, alyssum, begonias, lilies, carnations, cosmos, dahlias, dianthus, hollyhocks, sunflowers, geraniums. There is a little bit of all kinds. I planted some trees myself. I put fertilizer on them and watered them well.

Every year it is beautiful and I also have a vegetable garden: tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, watermelons, etc. I like to work in my garden early in the morning or after supper when it's cool.



Some day I'd like to have a greenhouse to start early in the spring to sow them and to be able to sell my own plants or fruits and vegetables. For me to work in a garden is a joy. I just love it, especially when you see what you plant grow. And every time somebody comes to my home, they visit my garden. "Oh! This is nice! Oh, look at that!"

Well, I am very proud of myself, because I know I have worked hard, and I just love it.



All Grown-Up

by
Cindy Shabley

Perhaps you'd say I'm all grown-up
And much too old for toys,
Too old to think of Santa Claus
Like little girls and boys.

And yet I love the pleasant thrill,
The happy sweet surprise,
The packages on Christmas morn,
Those big blue wondrous eyes.

Perhaps you think that Christmas dreams
Are only for the young,
The ornaments and Christmas wreaths,
The mistletoe that's hung.

The waiting for that happy time,
The chimes on Christmas Eve,
The cookies left for Santa Claus
By those who still believe.

Perhaps you think it's just a fad,
The Christmas time parade,
For often times grown-ups do insist
That too much fuss is made.
Why trim the tree, why wrap the gifts
In packages so bright,
Why count the days till Santa comes
That gay and wondrous night?

Perhaps you think it's not worthwhile,
And yet somehow I've found
The world takes on a special glow
When Christmas comes around,
And though it is true, I am too old,
In size I'm much too tall,
In heart and mind each year I find
I'm not grown-up at all.



Decisions

by
Kathy Cotton



Awaken to the sunny morning
As I open my eyes
I wonder what I shall do today
Close the blind
Or
Go out to enjoy the day

As I make that decision
The day is skipping by
The hours go
And
Next thing it's night

Another day gone
Because I took too long
Deciding if
I should enjoy nature



It Means a Lot to Me

by
Keith Fairweather

I graduated from high school in 1976
I could hardly read and write
I worked as a landscaper and a cleaner
I had a secret I kept tight

I was afraid people would find out
That I could not read or write
I went to the Learning Exchange
To see if they could give me any help

I went there every day for two years
They gave me a lot of help
They then sent me to Read Saint John
Where I was given a tutor named Heather

Now I'm in book number four
And I'm using computers more
I'm learning a lot of new things
And a new job has made me proud.

It's Fun to Learn

by
Dwain Tiller

I am a 31-year-old man. I was a heavy drinker and a drug user. Four years ago my life changed. I was in a car crash and now I am a quadriplegic. I only have usage of my left arm. I had to learn how to do a lot of things over again, like feeding myself, talking, along with reading and writing. Now I am learning to read and write thanks to a good friend who put me in touch with Laubach tutoring.

After my accident I did not feel good about myself; I had a problem talking to people. Since I started doing the Laubach tutoring I have been getting so many compliments about my work I feel much better about myself. I can communicate with people more easily and it feels really good. My family and workers are really proud of me and that feels extra good.

Recently I had the privilege of attending the Laubach Annual General Meeting at Corner Brook, NF. I learned a lot about myself and others. I met a nice lady who did not have much education. She got tutoring and went on to complete Adult Basic Education. She went on and wrote a short story about her life along with writing short columns for the newspaper. I have done two courses on how to be a volunteer, also how to be a learner. I learned steps to boost self-esteem. I realized it was easier for me because I knew how to read and write before my accident. It was a learning experience and a good time.



School—A Learning Experience

by
Denis Avon

Today I am starting my fourth week in this Adult Education Centre in a very small town in Prescott-Russell County. Just one day prior to these three weeks, I could only write in big block letters and I did not remember where to put commas or periods most of the time.

You see, in my school days the teachers had big classes, like thirty or forty students per class. Most teachers were strict and hard on us. If we fell behind in a subject they did not have time to go one-on-one with us, so we were left behind. Some of those teachers did not care or lacked teaching skills.

I COULDN'T WRITE PROPERLY

I am one of these people that was left behind. I never learned cursive writing in all of my ten years of school because of that reason. After graduating from grade eight to a very reputable high school in Ottawa, I completed grade nine and ten only able to write in big block letters. This was somewhat embarrassing for me. The school did not quite accept this writing. At that point it was too late for me to learn cursive writing. All I could do was to take a pencil on a piece of paper, and scribble up and down. If I stretched it to a decent length it would look like a word. I did not know how to form letters or attach them together. Nobody else or I could read what I wrote. That is why I wrote in big block letters and because of this I lost a lot of marks so I got discouraged and quit school.

THE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS

Over the years I learned a few trades in the construction business and with that I was able to start my own construction company. I was very successful with my business for about twenty-two years. But I was working long hours and most weekends all year long. This required hard physical work. Today I cannot do this kind of work anymore. Working this hard for so long I ended up abusing my body to the point of damaging my back and my knees and elbow joints. At my age with problems like these I had to retire. My body cannot support this kind of work anymore. Everywhere I go to apply for a job I am turned down because I don't have a Grade Twelve Diploma and/or experience in any other work field.



The first thing I have to do now is to go back to school so I can get my Diploma. In this literacy program I am learning to write with proper printing. To my surprise I am learning to spell all over again with spelling patterns. I am also doing math that I had forgotten how to do. Some of this stuff I learned years ago in school but I have been out of school for about twenty-five years and all this time I never bothered to write. Why bother? I cannot write properly anyway. I did not want people to know I could not write any other way than big block letters because I was ashamed of my writing. By not bothering for all those years I forgot what I had learned back in my school days.

HELPING WITH HOMEWORK

My daughter is in grade two at school and I cannot help her with her homework. When she asked me “WHY” I was too ashamed to tell her. I could not write or spell properly or remember how to do the things in her homework. This grade two work was too hard and complicated for me. Believe me, you cannot imagine what this feels like.

With the Laubach Literacy program, and an instructor called Doreen, after only three weeks with determination and hard work I am succeeding. What was impossible for me to accomplish and I believed I was too old to do has become “DO-ABLE.” Some is “JUST” reviewing. It is not easy for me to do, but I love it because I am learning and doing it well. I can prove this: it has taken me about six hours to write and to type what you have just read. In less than six hours I wrote more words than I have written in the last twenty and some odd years of my life and you can actually read it.

My thanks to Laubach Literacy program and especially Doreen for making my life literate.



Story From the Past

by
Peter Remple

I was born in the late fifties. I started school when I was five years old and was finished at the age of twelve. The school where I went was one big classroom. There were eighty children and only one teacher. I didn't learn much.

I started working when I was very young, because my parents were poor. I worked for one farmer for five years.



In 1972 I got bitten by a very poisonous snake. The transportation in Mexico was very hard to get because there were not a lot of vehicles. My older brother went by horse to the next village to find transportation, but it took him two hours. And by the time I was at the hospital I didn't think I would make it. The doctors gave me 60 needles in 24 hours. I was very sick and don't remember much after I had all those needles. After 48 hours I was somewhat better, and since my parents were poor they would take care of me at home. They could not afford the big hospital bills. My health was affected for quite some time after.

In June of 1973 we all came to Canada to see if we could make an easier living out here. We picked cucumbers, which was a lot different from the work we had done in Mexico. And none of us really enjoyed it, so after the work was done we went back to Mexico. In July 1978 we came back to Canada and tried to make ourselves at home here. Everything was different, the language, the work, and the food. It took a lot of learning, and making new adjustments.

My first job was working in a nursery. It wasn't too bad, the pay was not much. I worked there for three months. Then I had an opportunity to go with a friend to Imperial Leaf Tobacco. And I was there for two hours and I got lucky to get a job there. The pay was a lot better, and I've worked there every winter season since 1978. It was then that I found out how very important education really is. I really needed to be able to speak English, and read, and write. But I didn't know how or what to do about it. I tried my best to get along and learn on my own by listening to the radio, buying newspapers, hoping to learn something.



FRIENDS AND FAMILY

On Sundays I would get together with some of my friends. In 1979 I met a girl who interested me and we started dating. She had been living in Canada since the age of four, had gone to school here, and spoke mostly English. I was too embarrassed to tell her that I couldn't speak English. But it didn't take her long to find out. Being very understanding about it, she tried to teach me English words by explaining what she was saying to me in German. I learned a lot from

her. In 1982 we got married.

MY FAMILY HELPED

This made things easier because I had someone whom I could depend on to help. I have three sons and one daughter. They also helped me a lot once they started going to school. By the way things were going at work I knew I needed to learn more. And that is when my wife showed me the paper she had picked up at the Tillsonburg Library about the Multi-Service Centre. She said, "Why don't you try this if you want to learn more. Here you can have a tutor all to yourself and don't have to worry about anybody else laughing at the mistakes you make."

I thought it was a very good idea. I got my wife to call in and she arranged it all for me. I had to wait about three months until they had a tutor for me. And what made it so nice was that I could arrange appointments the way it fitted me best, so I could still learn and keep my job.

I've gone now a little over three years; it's helped me a lot. I would encourage anyone else that is in a position like I was and wants to learn to read and write to try this service that is available for people like me. I wish to thank everyone in this program, especially my tutor for all the help she gave me and patience she had with me.

An Interesting Story

by
John Ward

John wanted to read for about 20 years. John wanted to read and enjoy the newspaper more than anything. He wanted to sell Real Estate but knew it was a dream because he couldn't read or write up the contract because he was illiterate. John also would like to write his father a letter.

Wait!!! That is an interesting story. Would you like to hear it?

JOHN'S ROAD TO READING

Shortly after John started school he caught many types of illnesses: measles, chicken pox, flu, and some colds. He missed a lot of school but the nuns passed him anyway. They thought he should be with his friends. So he missed out on a lot of his basic skills of reading and writing. In grade six John transferred to a new school. His handicap became very noticeable to him and the other students. He began to play the class fool. With that he became very angry with himself and anybody around. John stopped reading, unless he had to read. He would get someone to read for him. If John had to write anything he copied off anything he could get his hands on. He avoided reading and writing at all costs. He even went as far as asking his sister to write numbers from one through a hundred in his cheque book. John ended up graduating from R.B. Russell Vocational School in carpentry. At this time he was still illiterate. When John started working he looked for work in the construction field or factory work. In these fields there is very little reading and writing. He got laid off a lot because when the work ran out the job did too. When John was laid off he looked for a job in new fields doing anything he was interested in because that was the only way he could learn. Most jobs in these fields deal with maths, machines, and tools and John was very good with them.

NOT THE RIGHT SOLUTION

When John started to read again, it was to his kids. He read to the kids for a few years. Before his son started kindergarten he realized his reading hadn't improved. So John decided to try something. He found a reading class, signed up, attended one class and realized the class was for advanced reading. At the end of the class he talked to the teacher and said "that wasn't for him." His mother-in-law found a literacy class at the Adult Education Centre. John stayed for one term and improved a little.



Finding Mrs. Bjarnason was a godsend. She tutored Andrew, John's son, on Saturday morning. John went for breakfast instead of going home and coming right back. At breakfast John started to read the newspaper. Reading the newspaper was helping a little. One Saturday John was talking to Mrs. Bjarnason and she thought it would be interesting to tutor an adult. A little time went by and suddenly she said, "I found the perfect thing for him: the Winnipeg Volunteer Reading Aides."

THE ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM

Mrs. Bjarnason became a Volunteer for the Winnipeg Volunteer Reading Aides and John became a student. In November 1997 Mrs. Bjarnason became John's tutor. John started writing from the "Challenger 4" workbooks. He enjoyed them. The stories were very interesting to John, and the writing was challenging. John's reading has improved a fair bit, and his writing is neater and has less spelling mistakes. When Mrs. Bjarnason noticed something that John needed to work on she made a lesson about it. One day John was reading the newsletter with Mrs. Bjarnason like they often did. They thought it would be interesting to enter the contest. John picked a biography. This biography was easy for John because it was about himself. I know the story about John's life best because I am John.

Life Is What You Make It

by
Cindy Cousins

In 1901, my grandmother was born in Norwich, England. Her father owned a chain store. He was able to send his children to a private school. The mother died and the father remarried. Due to poor management or problems, the business went under. My grandmother and her sister were taken out of school to save money. In 1913 the Salvation Army sent my grandmother's sister to Toronto where they found her a job as a house cleaner. My grandmother, who was twelve, was sent to Belleville to live with her brother. He was scheduled to pick her up at the train station - he never showed. My grandmother sat on a bench outside. She sat there from two o'clock in the afternoon until six the next morning. (I can't believe someone would be so cruel.) The train station worker went home not realizing that my grandmother was still outside on the bench.

When the train station worker returned to work in the morning, he was quite shocked to find that she was still there. The station worker contacted her brother who came and got her. He was married with a couple of children. He said he could not afford to feed her. I think he could've if he'd tried.

LIFE ON THE FARM

She was placed on a farm to live with a farmer, his wife and children. Here she was considered a farm hand. She had a bedroom off the kitchen and only hand-me-down clothes and shoes. I remember my grandmother telling me that when she went to live on the farm, the farmer and his wife looked at the shoes she had on and said, "You do not want to wear those shoes. You do not want big ugly looking feet when you are older."

They made her wear shoes that were too small. She had foot trouble for the rest of her life from wearing shoes that did not fit. When my grandmother asked if she could go to school, they only looked at her and said, "Your classmates and the other children will only make fun of the way you talk. We do not want to put you through that humiliation."



Her duties on the farm were helping in the kitchen and rounding up the cattle. She was less than five feet tall and was a very slim built person. Nevertheless, she worked and learned a lot about cooking and sewing.

My grandmother stayed on the farm until she was eighteen. For her six years of service they gave her a fifty-dollar savings bond. Then she went to look for work on her own. She found a job in a shirt factory, sewing. Later she married and had three children.

READING WITH THE FAMILY

Not being allowed to attend school, she could only read and write a little. In fact she learned to read and write when my dad brought home his speller and reader from school. She would do the lessons right along with him. My dad says that is the one thing he will never forget. Her husband helped her out a great deal as well.

When her husband died in 1950, of cancer, she passed a written exam to get a job as a Nurse's Aid to support herself and one child. (The two oldest were already married. Her youngest was married in 1958.) She worked at a retirement home caring for the elderly. She worked there for eighteen years starting at 12 dollars a week.

HOMEMADE DINNERS

On holidays she used to get passes for some patients. These were the patients that needed the most care or had no family members. She would take them to her house, and cook a homemade dinner for them. My grandmother enjoyed her work so much that she would come into work on her days off.

Despite all her hardships she found it in herself to be helpful to others who were less fortunate. My grandmother was truly a remarkable person. It's a shame more people didn't know her.



The Missing Link

by
A.S.

If you go into something and come out with nothing, you have lost!

I went to a one-room school. There were thirty-two kids and I was one of them. We had eight grades and the poor young teacher had to teach all of us. Since I was a slow learner, I was falling behind. At fourteen years old I gave up.

My Dad agreed that I could quit school and go to work. I knew I would have to do labour work. I couldn't read or write. My first job was on the farm. Then I got on with a roofing company where my brother worked. My brother and I were fired because we were moonlighting in roofing to make extra money. That's when my career began. My brother and I started our own company. Of course, I was the labourer. He could read and write and I couldn't.

I had something missing every day. When a person can't read or write, they try to bury their shame and they make it up some other way.



HIDING AND PRETENDING

For thirty-five years I had to hide my missing link by faking it. I developed a good memory for details. Before going to meetings, I used to sit with my partner and study the job. Then I was ready to go to the job site. With a little bit of help from God and a good memory I was able to pull it off. I used to sit in the job site office and pretend that I was reading the plans. People didn't know I couldn't read. Whenever I had to pay with a cheque, I used to say, "Make it out for me. You write better than me."



The first five years were hard with no experience in running a business. That's when I made another effort to learn to read. I went to night school. It was a school for non-English speaking people but it was all I could find. Again, I was lost in the shuffle. I tried for a while but then I lost confidence and interest. I figured my writing and reading were over with and again I gave up!

I was very lucky that my wife could help me at home by reading me the letters and helping me to pay the bills. In a restaurant she would read the menu. When I went out to eat with my friends I'd order the special if I liked it. If I didn't, I'd say to my friend, "I'll have the same as you." No one realized I hadn't even looked at the menu.

GIVING IT ONE MORE TRY

After going to work for thirty-five years, I decided to retire so I would have time to enjoy life. Now I could travel and do things I liked to do. After a while I was going to visit my daughter about every day. I think she was tired of seeing me around. She started getting on my back about going back to learn to read. She had read about the Transcona Literacy Centre. So, to keep her happy, I decided to go there. After trying so many times before, I thought it was hopeless, so I made a contract that I would try them for three months. I was still scared of failing. I always figured I couldn't do it. I wanted a teacher that I couldn't twist around. One that would keep me in line and would get me going.

After the three months, I felt I could learn to read. I wanted to keep going to school. It got me hungry for words. I am still afraid of forgetting the words that I learned. How can I remember all these rules? I don't think I would have ever made it in a crowded class. Now I am starting to have a good feeling about it. One-on-one is the only way I could make it. I can see the light, so my missing link is getting less and less.