

THE NEW START READING SERIES



By Robert Collie

GETTING ALONG

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When I was 18 years old, my teachers told me I learned too slowly. I could not read and write very well.



They said it was time for me to learn a job.
They sent me to a sheltered workshop.



My first job at the workshop was packing. I put together a package of soap, shampoo, and bath oil.



At a workshop you are always watched. The staff check the work and stop fights. At first I got into a lot of fights.



I didn't want to talk to anyone. Everyone ordered me around.



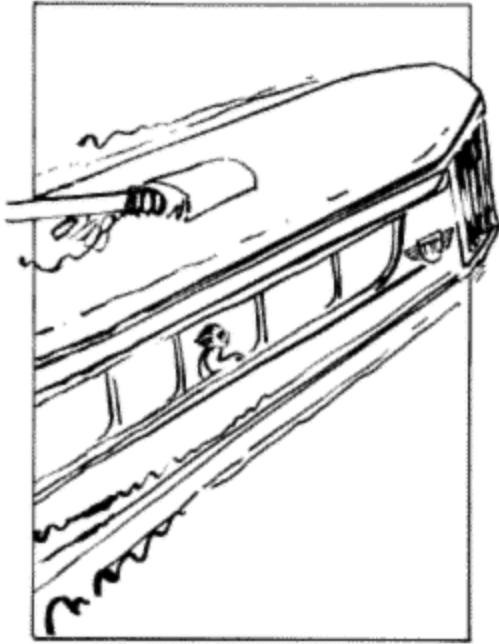
But after a while, I began to get along.



At a workshop, you are moved from job to job. My next job was packing clamps. A clamp is part of a car's muffler. I had to put clamps in boxes and weigh them. Then I put 50 boxes on a skid.



After that I got the job of mail carrier. I picked up mail downtown and took it to our workshop. It meant a lot to have this job.



I rode the bus and the subway. I was out on my own. I had more freedom. But then they moved me to another job.



I have some friends at work. After work, we go to the Sunset Restaurant. We have coffee and we talk about how the day went.



The waitress at the restaurant knows me. If I don't have any money, I pay her the next day.



Tom and I are old friends. We work on the belt.
We pack soap as it moves along.



Tom and I joke around when the staff aren't looking. If I yell for the line to stop, he yells for it to start again. The soap just keeps coming. Soon it piles up on the belt and spills onto the floor.



When you break the rules, you get punished. The staff can send you home or make you stay late. They can make you work without a coffee break.



I have been at the workshop for four years.
Nobody's perfect, but I have learned to get
along with people.



Sometimes the work is boring, but it feels good to get the job done.



In a few years, I would like to get a job outside the workshop. But first, I want to learn to read and write.



The New Start Reading Series is published by East End Literacy Press. The stories are written by adult learners at the Toronto East End Literacy Project and produced by volunteer tutors, adult learners and staff. The series is designed as reading material for adult learners of basic literacy and English as a second language.

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Robert Collie lives in Toronto, Canada. He is learning to read and write at East End Literacy. "I wrote this book," says Robert, "because I think people should know what it's like in a sheltered workshop."