

Learning to Read Later in Life

My name is Terry Affleck and I learned to read at the age of 63 and today at 65 I am enrolled at Holland College to prepare for my GED.

I started school in a "one room" classroom which was very common in small rural communities in the 50s. I was fine for the first few years until 5th grade where the school experience took a turn for the worst. Low self esteem and rebellion set in and although I had no particular learning disability, my reading skills became problematic and so did the rebellion.

In those days, someone quitting school to go to work was not an issue at all. Parents accepted it and there was work for people without education. I could read a bit and do my job and learn easily what I was told to do so I never regretted not continuing school. I was also dulled by alcohol in believing I did not need more education.

I always thought that I could read until I had children. That is when I realized I could not read enough to help my children with their homework. This realization is what brought me pain and shame the most. I could not encourage my children to pursue their education because I felt far from being a role model. It was painful to see my son cry because he did not understand his homework and there was nothing I could do for him.

For many years I found myself tricking people into thinking I could read. I pretended my handwriting was bad, they were the ones that could not read my handwriting which was no more than a scribble. I gave up on many things because there was a form to complete or a complaint to write or an instruction to read.

I thought I was fooling everyone and did not realize I was not pronouncing words correctly either. A good friend of mine who had a university degree approached me one day and suggested that I should take advantage of the Laubach Literacy of Canada, the PEI literacy tutoring program.

I had not fooled everyone and it was a relief to admit it. I applied and was matched with a tutor. For 2 years, twice a week, we met and I could see the change in myself. Old hurts from past experiences will remain but overcoming them has been a blessing. I am no longer afraid of a piece of paper with words on it and most of all, I enjoy reading very much.

I intend to do what it takes to get my GED. I feel that I can contribute to society. I also intend to take a computer course and attend the senior college because now I have new interests and there is a lot I want to learn.