

Audio Transcript of Allan Quigley Recording

Section 4: Social Learning beyond the Classroom

Hi,

I want to include the story of Tom. Not because he was a problem in any sense; in fact he was an ideal student and a pleasure to have in my literacy education classroom that first year I taught in Northern Saskatchewan. I include this story because, in many ways, I think this story is an example of social learning, despite the fact it doesn't illustrate the social learning teaching method, *per se*. But, I want to include it because it shows how learners can affect other learners in the class and beyond the class or tutoring situation.

Basically, by teaching or tutoring one adult learner, we often touch many prospective learners. Prospective learners or learner supporters in learners' families, their friends and their co-workers. I like to think this story depicts "social learning both in and beyond the classroom."

As I was saying, Tom was an ideal learner. He was always on time, he participated in all the discussions, he asked good questions, got his work done, and was always willing to help others with their work.

He was a model of social learning because everyone was back to "school," as they called it after years away. Nervous, unsure how to relate to me—the teacher—they were adults of all ages and they could see how Tom was eager to learn, glad to be in the room, and happy to help others. Here was social learning in the classroom.

Now, our class would take field trips and Tom suggested we go to the Pulp and Paper mill near Prince Albert. About a forty-five-minute drive. Tom made many of the arrangements for the trip.

We took our own cars. Tom and I rode with Big Bill. Tom in the back, me in the front. I talk more about Big Bill in the voice over in Section five with transformative learning. But this will give you an idea of what to expect with that Big Bill story.

He drove a long four-door Oldsmobile 98. Huge car with several dents. And, as Tom and I quickly realized, he rarely drove at the speed limit. Usually, he barreled down the road at 80 to 90 miles an hour—these were the pre-metric days.

Also, he had cut the seat belts out of his car with a hunting knife. He had heard about someone whose car had flipped over and was unable to get out because of the seat belts. So he told us, "*I got rid of them.*"

I looked back at Tom wondering if this trip was a good idea, but by now we were speeding down the highway.

So there we were. Flying down the road, well over the speed limit. Bill smoking cigarettes. Tom and I were hanging on. And, between puffs, Bill was swearing and complaining about the condition of the highway.

"Look at these pot holes!" "Look at that crack!"

And, it was all Pierre Trudeau's fault.

This was how Bill interpreted many of the problems in society. Trudeau's fault. This was back when Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister. As Bill saw it, Trudeau was responsible for all the unemployment insurance forms he had to fill in over the years, the welfare forms, those incomprehensible tax forms... not to mention the unjust taxes he had to pay... Basically everything that government stood for and did was wrong. Trudeau was prime minister after all. He was obviously to blame. It was logical...at least to Big Bill.

Tom and I exchanged glances and wondered if we should say something in defense of our Prime Minister. But travelling at close to 90 miles per hour, we just nodded to everything he said. And kept holding on.

We were getting close to the pulp and paper mill. If you have ever been near one, the smell lets you know well in advance that you are approaching it. This too, was Trudeau's fault.

"Why doesn't Trudeau do something about this stink?"

Suddenly there was a sign saying here was the turnoff for the Mill. Or did it say that? Tom and I craned our necks to read it as we made a 90 degree turn off the highway... *"This must be the turn off,"* muttered Bill. Then a larger sign flew by which seemed to be saying something about Danger. Stop, Construction ahead!

Tom and I realized the dirt road we were bumping along on was in the construction zone. What we didn't remember was that Bill had limited reading skills...he couldn't read that last sign. But now it was really too late.

The car was crashing over large bumps.....Tom and I were bouncing around without our seat belts. Suddenly, Bill hit the brakes. "Look out," tom yelled! We skidded down into a shallow hole where the company had been digging.

We spun down into the hole and jerked to a stop. We sat kind of dazed for a minute. The sign we had passed was telling us not to drive down here. "Danger."

But Bill looked around and declared. *"Damn that Trudeau!"*

I looked back at Tom and he looked at me. We silently agreed to say nothing. Not a good time to discuss literacy. We quietly let Pierre Trudeau take the blame.

As I say, we will meet Big Bill again in the next section.

But here's what happened next with Tom.

Towards the end of the basic education program, Tom invited me to visit his home in Carrot River, about an hour's drive north of where our program was.

We drove, at the posted speed limit, I should add, and arriving at his house. We were greeted by his father. A quiet man, a small, modest home. As I remember, Tom's dad was a widower.

He made some coffee for us, we had a nice visit and, looking around, I couldn't help noticing there was not a single book, magazine or newspaper any here in the house. No print anywhere. I wondered if growing up in a book-less house contributed to Tom being in my class?

When our program ended, Tom went on to study heavy equipment operation at a college in southern Saskatchewan, and was later hired by a major construction company. I will tell you what happened to Big Bill in the next Voice Over, but...here's the remarkable conclusion to this story.

Some five years later, I was Director of an Adult Basic Education program in Regina. I remember visiting the classroom dedicated to those who were learning to read at the very beginning level. Level one, as the curriculum called it.

I noticed an elderly man sitting at one of the desks in the back of the room and went over to say "Hi." I asked where he was from. He was from Carrot River. Hundreds of miles north of Regina.

I asked if he knew Tom. He said that Tom was his son.

And, get this, he remembered my visit those many years ago.

Turns out he was inspired by Tom's example. This was the dad's retirement plan. To learn to read, and, as he said, "To read well...like Tom."

I wanted to add this story just to say crazy things can happen in literacy. Things that are fun, like that wild field trip, but to also remind us that our work reaches well beyond our immediate learners. I like to think this is an example of "social learning beyond the classroom."

The next voice over story is about Big Bill and looks at transformative learning. Both for Bill..... And for me.

Thanks for listening.