

the way in



WORD ON THE PRAIRIE

photo essays of real lives

“
“
*I felt useless to my children
My cup was always empty*

I immigrated to this country

I was 42 years old when I had my stroke

For most of my life I hid my true self from the world

. I never thought I would be able to read out loud

People make assumptions ...”
”

FORWARD

the way in

Thank you for opening *The Way In* photo / essay book.

I would like you to take a moment to think about a few questions.

Why did you choose to open this book?

Are you interested in literacy and learning?

Do you like the story a picture can tell?

Are you a literacy student, tutor or practitioner?

Are you a teacher, a nurse, a pharmacist, a librarian, a bank teller
or anyone who has contact with the general public?

The Way In is a project intended to create a path into the very whole, full lives of 6 Albertans who have at some point in their lives been involved in literacy and learning programs. Each of these people found their way to literacy programs along different life paths. This book does not reflect the lives of all literacy students.

This book is a 'snapshot' of these 6 people's lives.

In Alberta, there are almost 600 literacy programs offered by 200 organizations. These programs include family, youth, senior, Aboriginal, academic upgrading, English as a Second Language, and workplace literacy (Literacy Alberta, 2006). These programs help build or re-build the foundations for lifelong learning with many adults.

The people who participated in this project were previously trained to do public speaking through another project with Literacy Alberta, called BLAST. As a result of this training they are keen to be involved in other opportunities to raise awareness about the issue of literacy.

This project was simple in design:

give a group of people digital cameras and send them home, into their lives, to photograph what could help you, the reader, understand some of how they see and describe their world. A number of other organizations have used this model very effectively.

Dr. W.E. (Billie) Thurston met with us on the first weekend of training and presented the work that the Women and Fair Income Working Group (WAFI) participants had done around the issue of poverty (see website in acknowledgments). This presentation gave our group the opportunity to see a similar project in practice, and to answer many questions around how they would do their own work. Our work on this first weekend was to build the shared vision, orient to the digital cameras and map out the project.

6 weeks later, on weekend 2, they came together as a group to choose the photographs to be included in this book. They all had stories to tell. Some of them arrived with 20 photographs, some arrived with 150 photographs. Their first step was to choose, in small groups, the 6 photographs which would most strongly invite you, the reader, to step into their lives. This was not an easy task and they worked hard together to do this. The next task was to write the words to help you understand the photographs the participants had chosen, to help you find a 'way in' to their lives.

On each of these weekends we had strong support from a core of volunteers (see acknowledgments) who helped orient participants to the cameras, discuss the project, answer questions, sort through photographs, and work on the text that would become the final draft. We talked and we laughed, we worked hard, we learned a lot from each other.

This book is a tribute to the valuable work that is done by literacy and learning practitioners, tutors, and adult basic education teachers around the province. This book is a true celebration of the courage and hard work of adults who make learning a daily choice.

This book will give you some valuable and perhaps surprising facts about literacy. This book will also introduce you to 6 wonderful people who are proud to be learning.

The weekend that we completed this photo/essay project we were guided by an 'intentional hope.'

We would like to share it here.



We hope for good energy.

We hope for good participation.

We hope to learn from one another

*We hope to use our learning in a way
that contributes to our own wellbeing
and to the wellbeing of others. ¹*



Table of Contents

4 - Facts about Literacy in Canada

The Photographers

6 - Phil Beakhouse

10 - Lil Gallant

14 - Paul Ruot Galuak

18 - Kate Nesbitt

22 - Geordie Pankiw

26 - Alison Pepper

30 - Acknowledgements

32 - Footnotes

Facts

Facts about Literacy in Canada

What is Literacy:

If you can read this you have literacy skills.

According to the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS, Statistics Canada, 2003) 42% of Adult Canadians have low literacy skills. On a local level almost 40% of Albertans don't have the literacy skills needed to meet the ever increasing demands of today's information based society.

Literacy is an essential skill. Literacy is much more than being able to read and write. It is about using different ways of communicating to help us understand and interact with our world. The scope of literacy includes, but is not limited to, problem solving, critical thinking, numeracy, reading, writing, and technological aptitude (beyond computers). These literacies are often known as 'The Essential Skills'.

What do we use our literacy skills for?

Look around you. We use our literacy skills to read an address, to read a map, to read a recipe, to read a job application, to review an article in the paper. We use our literacy skills to understand the safety standards for a task we are doing on the job and to explain them to the people we are working with. We use our literacy skills to write a funding proposal, create the budget, and file the final reports. We use our literacy skills to read to our children or grandchildren, to help them with their homework, to fill out the school volunteer forms. We use our literacy skills to order equipment, schedule staff and to compare information about extended care facilities for an aging relative. We use our literacy skills in all ways and everyday.

Many of us have been adequate readers, perhaps excellent readers, for most of our lives. We may have taken for granted the freedom that this skill gives us.

For the nearly 40% of Albertans who live with the challenge of low literacy skills in their everyday home and work lives this freedom is hard won. Low literacy skills can have an impact on just about everything: level of income, availability of good jobs, justice, health, social supports, work, family life, access to childcare, citizenship and participation in our communities.

"Being able to read, understand, and act on written material and basic numerical information is fundamental in our daily lives as parents, students, workers, community members, and citizens." (Government of Canada, Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan- Canadian Response, 2003)

Our beliefs and our assumptions effect our understanding of the Literacy issue. These same beliefs and assumptions influence how we find or support solutions. Literacy is everyone's concern and we all have a part to play.

Did you know...

- A literate population is a healthier population; as literacy improves, wellness and prevention go up, acute and chronic care costs go down.
- Literate adults and senior citizens are far better equipped to maintain their independence and quality of life, thus lessening the need for social services.
- People with higher literacy rates are not as likely to be in trouble with the law. Many people in trouble with the law, particularly chronic offenders, have lower literacy skills than the general population. Early prevention plans that include literacy can help reduce the risks of criminal actions that are associated with poverty, unemployment, and isolation.
- People with higher literacy skills often earn higher wages, and are less likely to be unemployed. Unemployment lasts on average for 9 weeks for a highly literate person, compared to 38 weeks for a person with low literacy.

- The skills and capacity to learn that we develop before the age of six stay with us for a lifetime. Parents with higher literacy skills have greater economic security, which contributes to healthy child development.

- There has been a decline in literacy scores among Canadian youth. 25% of Alberta youth do not complete high school within 5 years.

- A high school education is no guarantee that a person has the literacy skills they need to succeed. Employers require higher levels of literacy and education than ever before.

- People who do not maintain their literacy skills regularly at work, home, or through continued education, risk losing their skills over time. This means you!

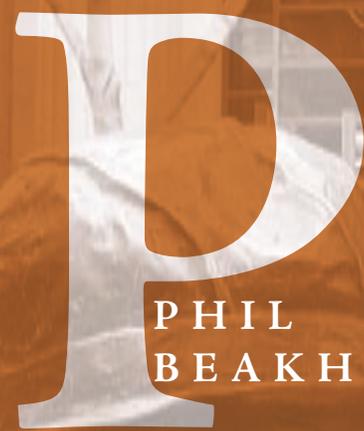
- The literacy statistics are not about the immigrants who come to Canada. Most of the immigrants who come to Canada are highly skilled professionals and investors. Many of these people can benefit from English as a Second Language (ESL) training but ESL is not the same as literacy. When immigrants do not have adequate literacy skills in their first language specific programs have been designed to build the language and learning skills they need.

- Literacy is strongly connected to productivity and position in the global economy. A recent study showed that a 1% increase in average literacy rates would yield a 1.5% permanent increase in the GDP (Coulombe, Tremblay and Marchand, 2004).

- Literacy is not just for understanding but also for thinking and responding. To choose to fully participate in civic life, people must have the skills to find and act upon information. Literacy barriers can be a contributing factor which forces people to the margins of society.

The facts have been included for you to think about as you enter these 6 peoples' lives for a brief moment. The photographs and 'notes' that follow will speak to these facts in a lived way.

I invite you to meet our photographers...



PHIL
BEAKHOUSE

*Thank heavens
for that special friend*

History

My early years were lost through a misdiagnosis of a brain tumour. The doctors thought that the brain tumour that I was born with would dissolve by itself. At the age of 25, I finally had it removed surgically. Due to not having developed those neural channels where the tumour was, my siblings and bosses saw me as stupid and wrote me off as dumb. In reality, the tumour stopped my learning and I just never learned how to read and write. That is until a new friend encouraged me to join PALS in the mid 90s. My world opened up. My bosses and siblings no longer shun me and now view me with new respect. A freedom and ever growing confidence, previously denied me, is changing my life. Thank heavens for that special friend.

I am proud to have been working for the Alberta Government since 1973.

I believe

- Literacy changed my life and can change other people's lives.
- Developing literacy skills has given me confidence to become a public speaker, a board member and a student representative.
- My long-term employment has only been made possible by my willingness to address my personal literacy issues.



P PHIL BEAKHOUSE

Literacy is the way to go



I was always in a hurry to learn – literacy is a one step at a time journey. This means I have to have patience with myself.

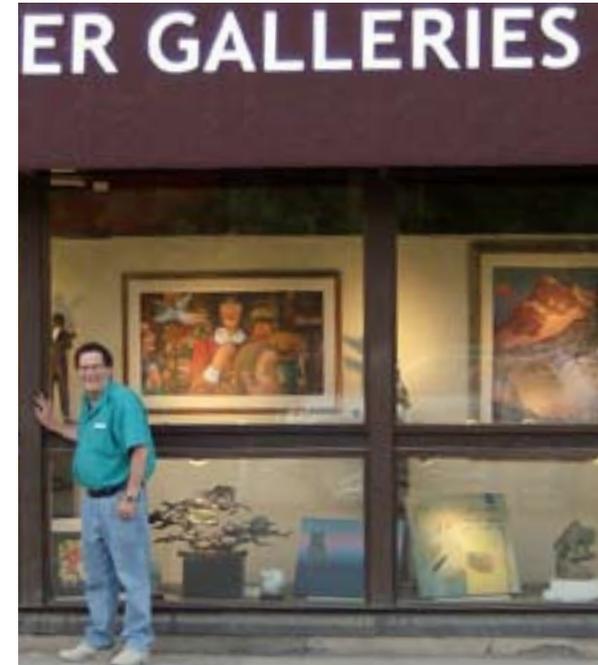
Teacups

My cup was always empty. Now it's a bottomless cup I can share it with all my friends and family.



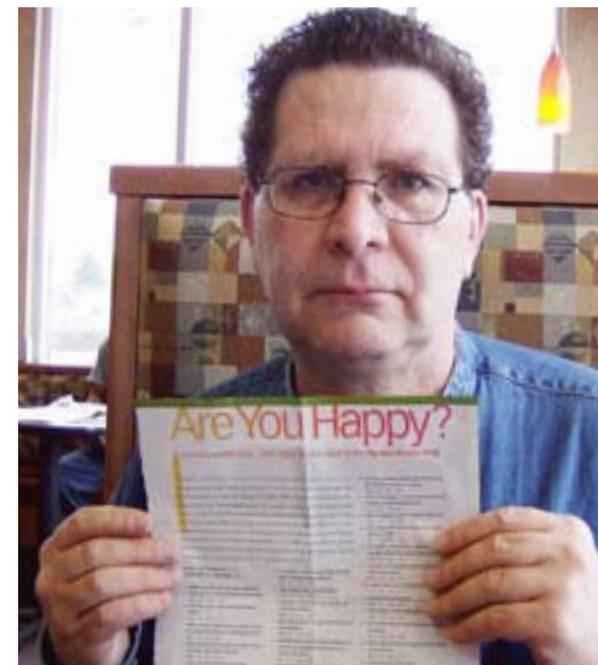
Signs

Before I would just walk along the trail. Never have a clue. I was just walking. Now I have a direction.



Art Gallery

I went into an art gallery once. A literacy tutor I had seen just an hour before asked me “what are you doing here?” I felt like she was saying I didn't belong. I like to visit art galleries. Now I can explain to my friends what that picture means to me.



Are you Happy?

My friend gave me this quiz. I could read it all. It made me feel very confident. I'm a happy camper now.



Hansard

In April of 2006, I was part of a team of learners who had public speaking training through Literacy Alberta. The team was called BLAST. I was asked by the Minister of Advanced Education to come to the legislature to be recognized for my literacy achievements. I wanted my whole speakers team there so we were all invited. This photograph is from a page of the Hansard, the official record of the legislative business of the day. I feel I am as good as the next person. My name will be in Hansard until the end of time. My name and all my BLAST buddies names.

L LIL GALLANT

*I've been sober now
for 15 years*

History

I was raised in Prince Edward Island. I was poor growing up and was taken out of school to plant and pick potatoes. In our house, books were a luxury. Many nights there was not enough food to go around. I believed that all I needed to learn was how to become a good wife and mother so I didn't believe that I needed a formal education. I became a single mother of seven children and am now a grandmother of sixteen, great-grandmother of six, a partner, friend, volunteer and compassionate woman. I hid my poor literacy skills from my children, became an alcoholic and finally decided to sober up and go back to school when I was 50 years old. I've been sober now for 15 years. For the first time in my life, I discovered that drugs and alcohol could never give me the high I get from being able to read and write.

I am proud to be a facilitator, for a book group, at The Learning Centre.

I believe

- *Education is so important that everyone should have the opportunity to learn.*
- *I wouldn't be where I am today if not for the support and encouragement I received from literacy programs.*
- *It is never too late to learn.*



LIL GALLANT

Literacy is the way to go



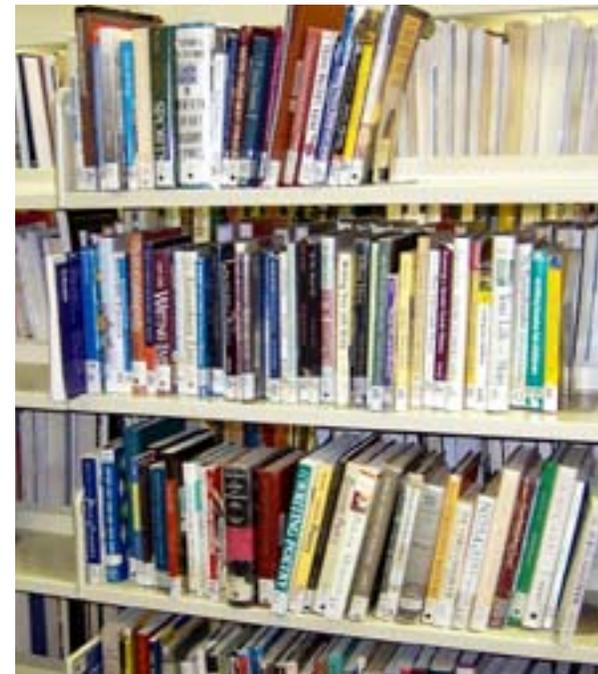
I felt useless to my children. They gave me so much and I never gave back to them. I wanted to learn to read for my children. Every one of them has their Grade 12. I made sure of that.

Bus Stop

When I first came to Edmonton in 1979, my 3 youngest kids took a bus to school. Everybody was taking a bus. I figured 'I can take a bus'. But I couldn't read the sign. I got on the first bus I saw. I was lost for 2 ½ hours.



I made this collage to show what I am now compared to what I was then. My eyes are open to the world now. Just because you are a literacy student doesn't mean you can't do things.



Library Books

There were never any books in my home when I was a kid. We were never read to.



I had my oldest son Joey for 3 months then my mother said he had to go. He went to the Children's Aid. A judge and his wife reared Joey. They gave Joey a good chance at learning, he had his Grade 12. As an adult he worked on the PEI ferry. He died 2 years ago.



Back in those days, women were supposed to stay home. Women weren't supposed to learn. This woman is strong. I am a strong person.

P

PAUL
RUOT GALUAK

This is a great country!

History

I am an immigrant from Southern Sudan who came to Canada four years ago. I spent a good portion of my teen life being a child soldier in Sudan and living in a refugee camp in Kenya. The first time I saw a book was in the refugee camp and that day was the day that I knew I was going to learn to read. Although I speak four languages, I had no formal education until I came to Canada. Today I go to university, am married and have 2 children. This is a great country!

I believe

- *Literacy is a right for all adult and disadvantaged persons.*
- *Literacy should be a cause that involves everyone in our society.*
- *All adults can learn regardless of their ages because I know a person who was 30 years old before he learned to read and he eventually became a university professor.*



P

PAUL
RUOT GALUAK

Literacy is the way to go



I immigrated to this country looking for peace, security and knowledge. I want to be able to give love, opportunity and security to my children. When I was my son's age, my father never had time to play with me because he was away most of the time.

love, opportunity and security

develop skills related to learning

Today my children O'Chang and Nyadoar have a reason to smile. I am giving them what I never had an opportunity to get from my parents.



a reason to smile



I can't remember what toys I used to play with but I know my children play with toys that help them develop skills related to learning.



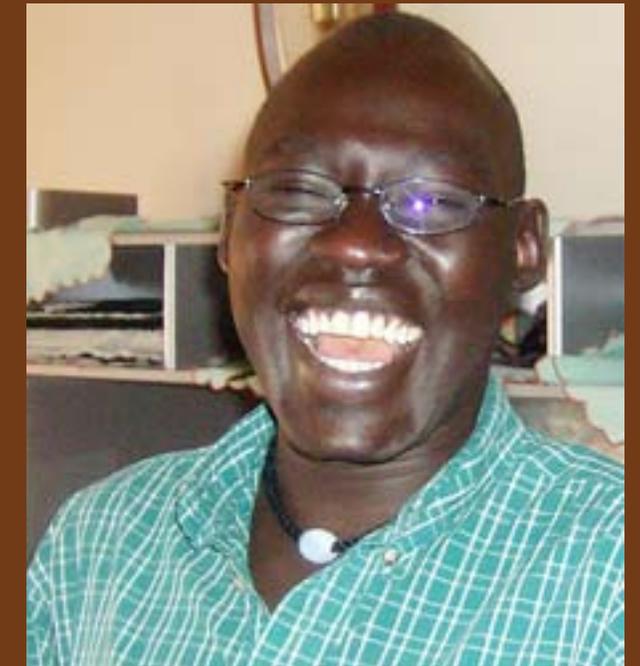
O'Chang is learning to ride a bicycle. It is not as hard as when I was learning to read and write.

my world was insecure and unpredictable



O'Chang feels confident, secure and safe in the world. When I was a boy, my world was insecure and unpredictable.

I am happy!



I am happy!
I am going in the right direction in my life. My wife Rebecca provides me with the support I need to achieve my goals. I am accomplishing most of what I am pursuing today.

K

KATE
NESBITT

History

I was raised in a small mining town in north western Ontario. In grade two my Mom was told to put me in the school for the mentally challenged, but she refused. By grade six I had failed two grades and no longer kept up with my class mates. I dropped out of school in grade 10 at the age of 19 with no real skills for the work force. As an adult I spent most of the time trying to hide the fact that I could not read or write well enough to get by in this world. I have worked most of my life as a waitress or in sales. At the age of 43 I met my first tutor and began to upgrade my schooling. It was around this time that I was told I have dyslexia. Through my literacy journey I became a whole new person. The adjustment for me and the people around me was not an easy one; but one well worth the struggle. Today I am studying for my GED and hope to take college courses in the future.

*I started to see the world
in a different way*

I believe

- Disabilities are also abilities; we just have to find the gifts within*
- If we stop learning, we stop growing.*
- Given opportunity and support, every person can learn at their pace in their own way*
- To change public perception, people with low literacy must speak about their life experiences, challenges and achievements.*



K

KATE
NESBITT

Literacy is the way to go



As I watched my daughter read to my granddaughter my heart was filled with mixed emotions. I was filled with such joy and love watching my daughter read to my granddaughter that my eyes were filled with tears. At the same time I am filled with such sorrow at the memories of not being able to read to my daughter.

memories of not being able to read to my daughter



These days I find myself reading to strangers who have trouble reading for all kinds of reasons. I never thought I would be able to read out loud, never mind to perfect strangers.

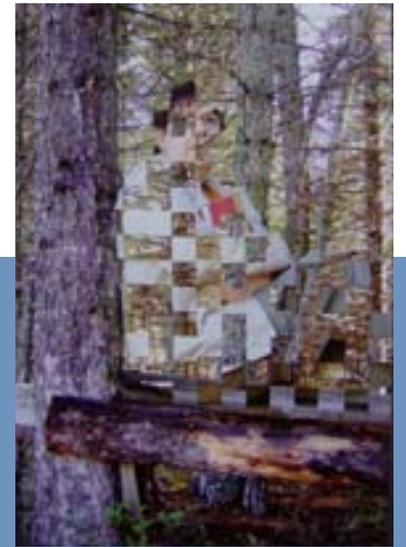


Now it's a bottomless cup



For most of my life I hid my true self from the world. I didn't even know who I was. I lived in fear of people finding out that I couldn't do what others took for granted. I always felt stupid and inadequate. Can you see me in the trees?

When I first started working on my literacy I found my life was changing. The people around me found it hard to except my changes but I fought on to learn. Through this I started to see more of the real me and I liked what I was seeing.

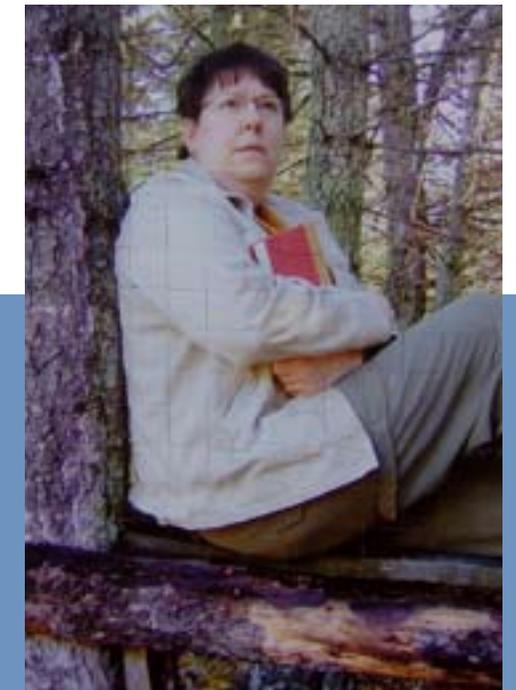


In the first year I won a provincial award for literacy and I was asked to join the board of literacy. My confidence soared and I revealed more of myself to the world.



As I learned to read and write at a high school level, I found that I had an artistic talent. I started to see the world in a different way. I quilted and found I could teach. I started to look at colours and shapes differently and found I was a good photographer.

I found that the more I did for literacy the more I was becoming a whole person, a person with a voice, a person who no longer looked for approval. I now dance my own dance with the music from my heart.



This is me.



G

GEORDIE
PANKIW

I have been a lifelong learner.

History

I was born in Alberta. I have done a lot of things. I worked in the Arctic on a Drilling Rig. I was a train engine mechanic. I went to University for a degree in Philosophy and I had a job driving a truck. When I was in law school, I worked on the trains. Then I was a lawyer. Then I sold fish. I was a reader and a thinker, I read all the time.

I was 42 years old when I had my stroke. I was 13 years old when my mom died of a stroke. She was in her early 40's.

I am 52 and I am going to Mexico. I am playing guitar and I am an artist, I paint. I had to learn to talk, to walk, to play the guitar, to paint all over again. I have been a lifelong learner. I have had to learn some things twice. I still can not read books, but it is coming.

*I have had to learn
some things twice.*



G

Literacy is the way to go

GEORDIE PANKIW

My life has been full of old and new. Before my stroke and after. I hope you see the old and the new in my pictures.

This building is from 1910 and at that time, this must have been really something.



my life has been full of old and new

This building was built as a bank. This is 1 1/2 blocks from my house in Kitscoty, which is 20 kms from Lloydminster. When the Bank closed it was turned into an antique store. Now the antique store is closed and I don't know what will happen to this building.



This was a gas station in Kitscoty. The gas pumps used to be in the grassy spot outfront.



This is the gas station building at night. I often walk past this building at night because its easier for me to see without bright sunlight. This is like old and new .. light and dark.

I say "hey, I am alive, it's ok"



This shot is very special. I chose this shirt because it too shows the old and the new, its before and after.

When people look at me they do not see that I have a brain injury. People make assumptions about what I can or can not do.

When people find out I had a stroke, they say "that is terrible". I say "hey, I am alive, it's ok".

A

ALISON
PEPPER

*I started life
as a very sick baby*

History

I started life as a very sick baby, and that impaired my ability to speak.

It also impaired my ability to learn to read and write. The doctors suggested that I be placed in a group home, but my father said, "No way!" Not being able to go to a regular school, I attended a special school where I was taught the basics of reading and writing. After school, I wanted to do more with my life than sit around – so I took courses in childcare and was able to get a job in a daycare.

I really like working with children, but after 22 years of doing the same thing I feel that I need a career change.

Having limited literacy skills is a problem when looking for a job, so I have been working to upgrade my reading and writing. I have been a student at P.A.L.S. for four years and I am proud of my progress. I am also proud of my family and husband of ten years. They have given me lots of support and encouragement.

I believe

- *Children are our future*
- *Children should learn to read and write, no matter what*
- *No one should be denied the opportunity to have a proper education*
- *It is never too late to learn to read and write*



A

ALISON
PEPPER

Literacy is the way to go

It's an uplifting experience in my life.



Life's Adventure at Ritchie United Church

I have been a member of Ritchie United Church for the last 40 years. I was baptized there when I was very young. I was always part of the Sunday school program. I joined the Sunday school as a volunteer when I become an adult. I was also a teacher's helper with the bible study and helping to do crafts with the children. Recently, I took a big challenge and joined up with the choir. My Dad is in the choir. He joined many years ago. We have choir practice every Thursday. One Sunday, we went to 'jazz and reflections' event, my husband Mo and I sat near the grand piano. One of our friends took a picture of both of us. I enjoy singing in the choir because it helps me with my literacy and pronunciation of words. I enjoy being part of the church tremendously. It's an uplifting experience in my life.

All About My Family



I have a great family, my parents are doing well. I have three brothers, their names are Ian, Cliff and Darrell. I was

a surprise child. I am the only daughter in the family. I was a very sick baby, I had a hard time speaking from when I was a small child to the age of 9 or 10. How Literacy has helped me: I am taking a class at P.A.L.S. (Edmonton) in math. Last year, 2006, I was with the Literacy Alberta Blast team. Learning to be a public speaker. I took lessons learning to stand up and make a speech for lots of people. I did my best. I will continue to work on it. My mentor, Michael, helped me with it. Now I am in this project. I have a good family who looks after me very well and teaches me about life. I am coming up to 11 years of marriage in July 6, 2007 with my husband Morris Pepper.

A Visit with Lorraine



I went to the Grey Nuns Hospital for two years. It is in Millwoods near the Millwoods Town Center in Edmonton, Alberta. I went there to work on my speech and language with my speech therapist whose name is Lorraine. She helped me with my speech and taught me where I have to put my tongue in my mouth to say words correctly. I had a hard time saying the [L] in the middle of the words. I am still working on it. I have a tutor helping me on Mondays after work. I practice at home on the computer. Lorraine was a very nice person to help me during my lunch break from work. She spent two years with me. I will continue to improve my speech and I am learning to pronounce my words quite well. Thank you Lorraine for everything you did for me.



A Story About Fay's Friendship, her dog Grace and my dogs Tovie, Blackie

Last Monday, on April 30, 2007, I went to Fay's house to study. Fay always makes me supper. She is a very good cook. After supper we both start doing our studies. When it is cold Fay drives me home afterwards.

When the weather is warm I ride my bike to work then to Fay's and home after. Fay is a lovely person to have as my tutor. Fay has a small Shih tzu dog, her name is Grace. Grace gets very happy and excited when I come to visit. Grace sometimes licks my face and likes to be held a lot. When I was younger growing up at my parents house I had two dogs. One of the dogs was a Spitz-Terrier, her name was Tovie. We also had a poodle name Blackie. I enjoyed having dogs as my pets. I now live in an apartment and we have 7 birds, 5 budgies and 2 cockatiels. I still miss having a dog of my own. I sometimes look after my brothers dog when they are on summer holidays.



I joined the Students to Students Committee

I am in this program called Student to Students Committee at P.A.L.S., downtown, Edmonton. We meet together at the beginning of each month. We talk things over and plan to go places, or plan workshops. We sell books and Raffle tickets. We go out for supper sometime. We do things together. We are planning to have a day trip to a different place outside of Edmonton, in August 11, 2007. Michael is the leader of Students to Students Committee program at P.A.L.S.

I have three friends named Tina, Bev, Danny. My 'literacy' work is to learn to be in a group of people, to learn to use my speaking voice, to be part of a Committee, to pray for myself and do my best.



My Extended Family at Minchau Day Care

I have been working at Minchau Day Care for the past 11 years. My extended family includes Kelly and his Mom Addelle which we call Grammadelle. Grammadelle comes to the daycare early morning to make breakfast for the children and staff. Papa Tony and Grammadelle have a very nice family and a whole lot of Grandchildren. One of their sons, Chad, played drums in the family band at our wedding. I know the children and their parents very well. They are definitely my extended family. I enjoy being with them. My literacy has helped me keep my job for 11 years. Working as a member of a team gives me a lot of experience that I use everyday in my life. This past year I received an increase of my wage. I make \$10.00/hr. I am so proud of my accomplishments.

I am so proud of my accomplishments.



A Story about Minchau Day Care

The daycare is in Millwoods across from Minchau Elementary School. The Daycare is 12 years old. It was opened in 1995. I work primarily with the babies. I work in the toddlers and preschool room occasionally. I communicate with the parents really well. Here are some of the children's names Emily, Bruce, Kyanna and Alan. We have many children at Minchau Daycare.

Acknowledgements

Thank you
I am so proud of my accomplishments.

Thank heavens for that special friend.
My eyes are open to the world now



ORGANIZATIONS:



Leslie Gallacher



Leslie Gallacher



Berniece Gowan



Diana Villeneuve

Dr. W.E. (Billie) Thurston
Women and Fair Income Working Group
website: <http://www.fp.ucalgary.ca/wafi/>



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David Beart
Portrait photographs

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Développement social Canada



GIFTS

A round of Applause for our mentors:

Peter Cutting - Volunteer tutor, photographer, adventurer
Terry Gilbert - Volunteer, parent, athlete, private consultant
Tony Tighe - Volunteer, parent, news anchor/reporter
Barry Chugg - Volunteer, parent, videographer

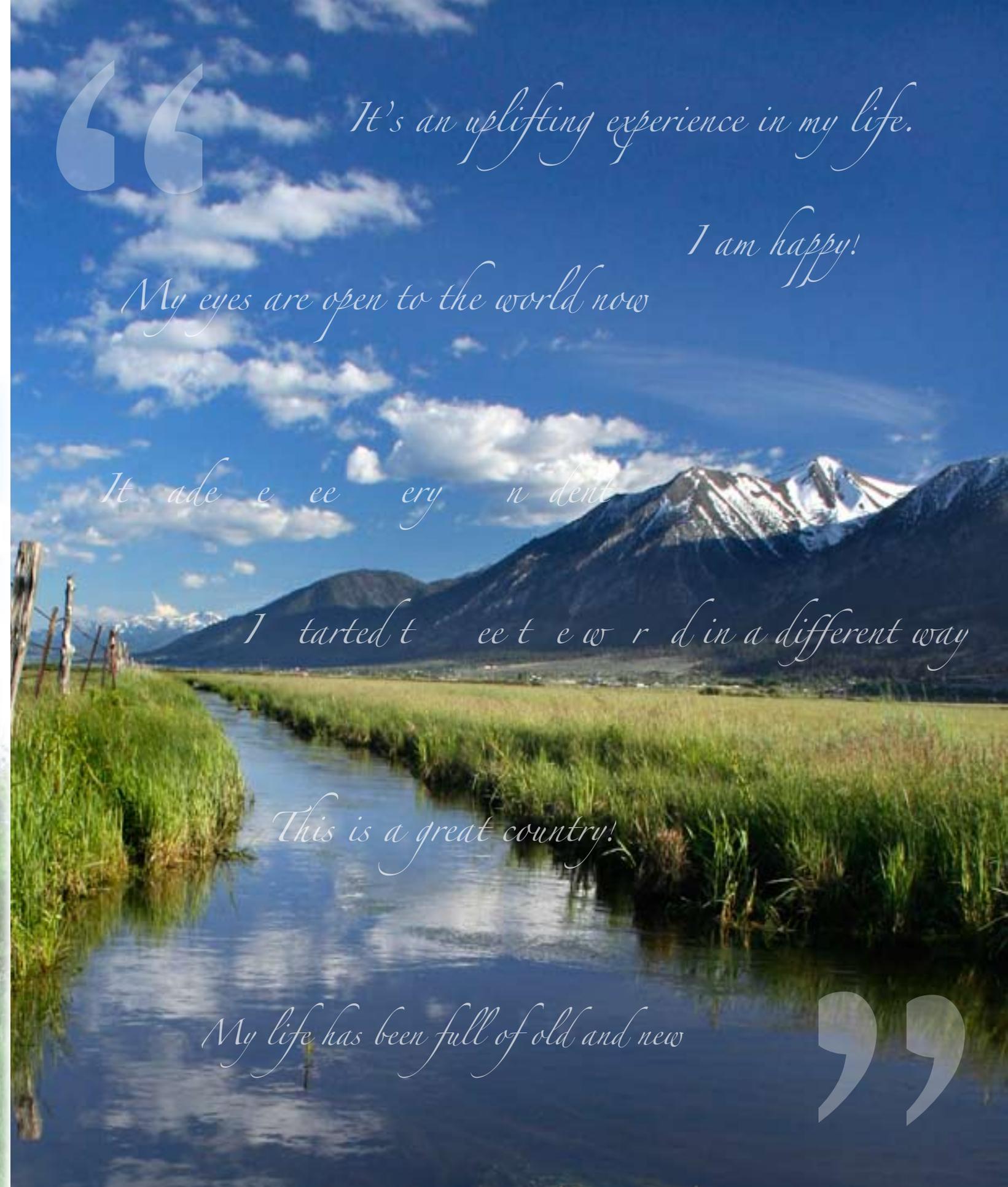
Without these volunteers we could not have had the laughter, support and discussion this project needed.

Thanks also to Marguerite Cawthorpe for helping with details, dinner and dishes on opening night.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Thanks to Mike McIntyre for giving me the 'intentional hope' passage we used. It set just the right tone.
- (2) Government of Canada, Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan- Canadian Response, 2003. full document available at: <http://www.hrdc.gc.ca>
- (3) the "Did you Know..." portion of this document are taken from Literacy Alberta fact sheets available on the Literacy Alberta website: <http://www.literacyalberta.ca/> And from 'Literacy – for a life of learning' policy document, 2006

Within each individual section all photos were taken by or with direction from the participants



“ *It's an uplifting experience in my life.*

My eyes are open to the world now *I am happy!*

It adds every element

I started to see the world in a different way

This is a great country!

My life has been full of old and new

”

The Way In is a project intended to create a path into the very whole, full lives of 6 Albertans who have at some point in their lives been involved in literacy and learning programs. Each of these people found their way to literacy programs along different life paths. This book does not reflect the lives of all literacy students. This book is a 'snapshot' of these 6 people's lives.



the way in
WORD ON THE PRAIRIE

