

As a housewife, Dorothy's one ambition was not to be heard and not to stand out in a crowd. Now a grandmother and author of three books, she enjoys her role as public speaker at literacy conferences across Canada. When a Laubach tutor from the Fredericton Literacy Council recognized Dorothy's learning disability as dyslexia, it started a long, hard road in learning. Forming a support group called 'Second Chance Learners,' she believes that "it is never too late to learn."

After being away from school five or six years, at the age of twenty, I went back to that one-room school, to get an education. I had always wanted to be a missionary. I didn't think of all the training that I'd have to do. A lady in our community said, "You need to be able to write letters and write them well, so that people back home will know what you're doing on the mission field, so that you can raise support." That, I guess, was one of the things that always has stuck in my mind, that I needed to be able to write letters. That's why I wanted to go back.

At that time, I got a teacher who must have taken a dislike to me, or the fact that she had one more person to teach when she already had thirty students. I went until April and realized that with my math, I could never get anywhere. I never made more than 10 out of 100 all the time I went to school. The teacher would get me up to the board and get these little kids to go up and put down the answer. I knew it but I couldn't put it down right. I'd reverse them. It amazes me no teacher ever realized that I was just reversing. Numbers don't click at all in my brain. (Don't ever quote me on dates and ages.) Without math, I knew I could not get into high school. I decided to drop out at fifteen and go to work. My father wasn't able to claim me on his income tax, so I was really a bill of expense to him.

I was married and had my four children before I had an opportunity again. It was because of my husband's health. They were going to operate on him and take out his voice box. He was unable to use the written word.

We lived in Burton when our kids were just little. It seemed they always wanted a note for something. I would have to go from Burton to Fredericton where my sister lived.

Dorothy...

I personally experienced the changes literacy brings to lives. What I wanted most was an education, realizing I couldn't do anything without one. Discovering my dyslexia was a defining moment in my life. The self doubts, the frustration, and all the times I felt stupid and embarrassed were erased. Gone. At age 50, I had this feeling in the core of my being that I could move forward. I could learn. I could read. I could do math...well, maybe not mat...but I could do a lot of other things.

She would write me a note. I saw many cold days, putting those little kids in the car to get a note for school. That always seemed to be one of the things that was hardest for me and I did not have the ability to write it. Because my sister was a director of nursing, I did not want to say things that my grammar would give away that I did not have an education. I was always trying to hide that fact.

Our daughter went to the unemployment office and saw the pamphlet about how to learn to read and write in the privacy of your own home. That very night I was able to sign up and Thelma Kolding, the coordinator, set me up with my tutor, a retired schoolteacher. My husband and I, we went together. My tutor, Margaret McGibbon, said she never had a student in all her teaching that was so eager to learn as I was. I was just like a sponge. If she and I could not meet, we would do our lessons on the phone. I learned to read because we took it slowly. I continued until I graduated.

At the storefront youth program, the teachers thought they were gonna teach me math. They did everything they could one day. When I left, the whole three of us were crying, because they tried so hard. I took them flowers and said, "Math is NOT my thing!"

I like to talk to people who can make a difference, like doctors and health professionals who have no idea. You know they've never cleaned their teeth with haemorrhoid cream or Brylcreem. I have done those things when I wasn't able to read. Even to this day, I stay clear of yellow labels. If anybody ever needs to know what to do with consomme soup, ask me. I have bought that so many times for tomato soup because it looks like it. I've worked with groups out of Ottawa on packaging and labelling. I'd go as a learner and when they'd show me something and describe it, I would say, "No, I wouldn't have any idea what that was." I feel that I have made a difference in so many people's lives. To me, the more I speak, it's just more of a challenge. My career was telling people of the need of literacy (training). Thelma Kolding always says, "You have been our missionary."

An excerpt from an interview with Dorothy Silver, Fredericton NB (pg. 62 of Live and Learn)

There is a saying I came across that says something about the course of my life. It goes like this, ***"Education is what you get from reading the fine print. Experience is what you get from not reading it."*** Another I like says, ***"Don't be afraid to attempt something new. Remember, it was amateurs who built the ark. It was professionals who built the Titanic."***