

LEARNING CURVES

CONTINUING EDUCATION • JOB TRAINING

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LOVE LEARNING

BY DEBORAH NOEL

As the late American journalist, Christopher Morley, once said “There are three ingredients in the good life: learning, earning and yearning”. If you will note, he put “learning” first because without learning the other two seem, well, rather shallow. We all know of people who earn and do not appear to be learned (should I say... Super Models? Reality TV stars? Anyone who passes us in the queue of life.) and we certainly know that yearning may precede the learning (Gambling addictions, credit lines and dare I say it..., broken hearts.). We often think of learning as a journey to a destination. When I graduate college I can be a (insert profession). When I finish this course I can make (insert dollar amount). However, learning can be both the journey and the destination. There are

no rules saying that learning has to have a defined purpose. The advantages to learning go far beyond advancing one’s career.

Some of these include the following: Learning can help us develop our natural abilities. Sometimes we don’t realize our talents until we allow ourselves the opportunity to explore. I have a co-worker who started taking piano lessons at the age of 50 for no other reason than he had an interest in the piano teacher. He soon discovered that he wasn’t that interested in the teacher but he turned out to have a natural talent in music.

Learning opens our minds. Taking a class in philosophy may not increase your salary but it can sharpen your debating skills. Courses in the humanities allow for free exchange of ideas and viewpoints. Listening

to or taking part in stimulating discussions allows us to see the other side of an issue.

The more you learn the more you want to learn. Learning creates a curious, hungry mind. The more you discover about history, current events, politics, or the culture of other countries, the more you will want to learn.

Learning helps us adapt to change. The world is in a state of constant flux. As we get older we may believe it is difficult to keep up with changes, especially if technology is involved. Trying something new takes away the “mystery” and opens us up to adapting.

CONTINUED ON 3

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TECHNIQUES & METHODS TO IMPROVE FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION

BY AHMAD FERAZ HEMATYAR

Being able to focus and concentrate are the keys to increasing your productivity. It doesn't matter what you're working on, whether it's a report for work or a hobby, a project or a task at home. If you can't focus on what you are doing, it will take a lot longer to complete the job.

Whether you're being distracted by employers, coworkers, phone calls, family members or random thoughts and worries, every time you restart a task you have to spend time getting back up to speed or back into a productive frame of mind.

Many people struggle to stay focused on a single task or project for an extended period of time. In fact, recent research reveals that almost half of all interruptions are "self-interruptions," where people interrupt themselves and start working on something else without any external trigger distracting them.

The good news is that focus and concentration work a lot like a muscle. Just as you can increase the strength and power of any muscle through exercise, you can increase your ability to focus and concentrate through practice.

Here are a few suggestions for building your focus "muscles".

1. Practice Concentrating

An athlete doesn't just engage in his sport during competitions. He practices various aspects of his sport when failure or success don't matter. Likewise, practice concentrating when you don't have to so that you'll perform better when you do. The next two suggestions are exercises to help you practice.

2. Focus on an Object in Your Environment

Pick an object in your environment and just observe it. Notice its colors, textures, shapes and any movements it may have. Don't analyze anything about it, just watch it and notice

it. If your mind starts to wander, bring your attention back to the object. Set a timer and practice for one or two minutes at a time.

3. Observe Your Breathing

This exercise is similar to observing an object, but you're going to focus on your breathing instead. Close your eyes and just notice your breath flow in and out of your lungs. Don't try to do anything with it. Just practice putting all your focus and attention on it.

4. Practice Separating Yourself from Your Environment

When reading or working at the computer, imagine sound-proof walls coming up around you and separating you from your surroundings. This is particularly useful if you have to work in a noisy or busy environment. Practice this intentionally for a few minutes.

5. Set Focus Goals

Having something to shoot for can help you focus on your work. Start out with a simple challenge, like focusing for 5 or 10 minutes without distraction. Once you've conquered that simple goal, start stretching yourself to 15 minutes, and then 20 minutes. Keep increasing the goal until you can focus for 30 minutes without interrupting or distracting yourself.

6. Limit Focus Time

Don't focus intensely for more than 60 minutes at a time. Just as your body needs a rest from time to time, so does your mind and the harder it's working the more often it needs a break. After 50-60 minutes, take a small break to renew your ability to focus.

7. Use Artificial Stimulants in Moderation

Stimulants like caffeine and sugar may give you a short term boost, but if you overuse them, they can cause anxiety, irritability and make it harder to focus. If you use

a lot of caffeine, try to gradually reduce your use to a more moderate level.

8. Write down Distracting Thoughts

Rather than trying to suppress distracting thoughts while you are working, write them down so you can come back to them later. This will automatically release the nagging thought and free your mind to focus on what you are working on right now.

9. Use a Do Not Disturb Sign and Turn off TV, Radio, Telephone, E-mail, and Internet

Let others know that you don't want to be disturbed and eliminate as many avenues of interruption as possible. Sometimes this may mean coming in to work early when there are fewer distractions or working in an unusual location, like an unused conference room.

10. Reduce Distractions Ahead of Time

If you know something is likely to come up during your focus time, try to deal with it before you get started. This includes getting a snack or drink if you are likely to get hungry or thirsty while working.

11. Notice Yourself Getting Distracted

If you catch yourself getting distracted by wandering thoughts, just notice that without judgment and bring yourself back into focus.

12. Do Something Physical to Reestablish Your Focus

Sometimes you need a physical cue to reestablish your focus. For example, writing, or typing or picking up a pen can help you get your mind back to the task. Or use the 'Tunnel Vision' method and cup your hands around your eyes like blinders on a horse and aim your vision at the work to be done.

13. Develop Greater Interest in Your Task

It's easier to focus on something you're interested in. Think about any aspect of the task that

makes it interesting. If the subject doesn't interest you, maybe you can find interest in how the task will benefit you or someone else. Or maybe you can focus on the skills involved in performing the task. Challenge yourself to improve your performance over time.

14. Recognize Conditions that Promote Concentration

When do you find it easiest to concentrate? When the light is bright or dim? When there's silence or when there's background noise? Do you concentrate better in a cleared space or do you focus better surrounded by clutter? Can you concentrate better when you're alert or when you're calm and maybe a little tired? Plan your highest leverage focus periods for when circumstances are best.

15. Create a Space for Focused Work

Once you know what conditions promote your ability to focus and concentrate, intentionally set up your workspace and working environment to incorporate as many of them as possible.

16. Practice the Other Important Rule

To increase the length of time in which you can comfortably focus, every time you feel like taking a break force yourself to go five minutes more and then take your break. Do this until you can focus for 50 minutes without taking a break. These simple tips and exercises will help you develop your focus muscles and enhance your ability to concentrate on a single project for extended periods. Pick your favorite one and start implementing it this week so that you see your productivity develop.

Ahmad Feroz Hematyar is Business Sales Development Director for Central Asian countries with DataWind Inc. in Toronto. Please forward your concerns and suggestions to his email at afhematyar@yahoo.com.

WEA IN PRINT

BY ANGELA WALCOTT

It isn't every day that the non-profit organization for which you volunteer graces the front pages of the daily newspaper let alone receives a 'mention' in an award-winning novel. The latter was the case in Anne Michaels' 1996 novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, which won the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Guardian Fiction Prize, the Trillium Book Award and was adapted into a film by producer Robert Lantos in 2007.

I had heard so much about the title time and time again but had never actually got around to reading it. I wanted to remedy that situation. On a whim, while visiting a friend in London, England, I asked her to borrow a copy from the local library for me.

Let's just say that the pacing of the first chapter had me hooked. Both gripping and raw, *Fugitive Pieces* tells the story of seven year old Polish boy, Jakob Beer, who flees his Nazi pursuers. With his rescuer, Greek geologist Athos Roussos, he settles in a small town in Greece and eventually emigrates to Toronto.

As I read on, I learned about the effects of the Second World War, the rations, the raids and life in general in Greece. Several chapters later though, I faltered. Right there on the page in black and white were the familiar letters WEA. I did a double-take as I saw these three initials neatly tucked on the page and thought to myself--could it be? I read the passage again just to be sure there was no mistake, WEA (Worker's Educational Association) had been mentioned and its role in the community outlined for its readers. The organization which, among other things, offers courses through University In the Community and produces the publication Learning Curves, which you are now reading, has been instrumental in promoting life-long learning in Canada, and receives a mention from this author.

Apart from spotting WEA on the page of this best-selling novel, what I enjoyed about *Fugitive Pieces* was how Michaels effortlessly incorporates haunting elements of lyrical prose at every turn. Giving Toronto a voice by naming

familiar parts of the city that I have come to know personally, made the story more relatable to her story. It also helped to 'brand' the city to the point where The City of Toronto became a character of sorts. In fact, The City of Toronto literally became a character of sorts.

Anne Michaels' latest release is the poetry collection *Correspondences* for which she collaborated with visual artist and writer Bernice Eisenstein. The book made the Canadian Shortlist for the 2014 Griffin Poetry Prize which awards two literary prizes of \$65,000 each and an additional \$10,000 to shortlisted poets.

You can read more about the Griffin Prize here:

www.griffinpoetryprize.com/awards-and-poets/shortlists/2014-shortlist/anne-michaels/

Angela Walcott is a Toronto-based freelance writer and member of the Worker's Educational Association of Canada as well as the Professional Writer's Association of Canada.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hello all,

This is my first time picking up and reading your magazine at my local library. I REALLY enjoyed your article "Digital Photography Lesson #3" by Andrei Sajeniouk as I graduated from an IT program 15 years or so ago after which I worked for 8 years in a software support capacity.

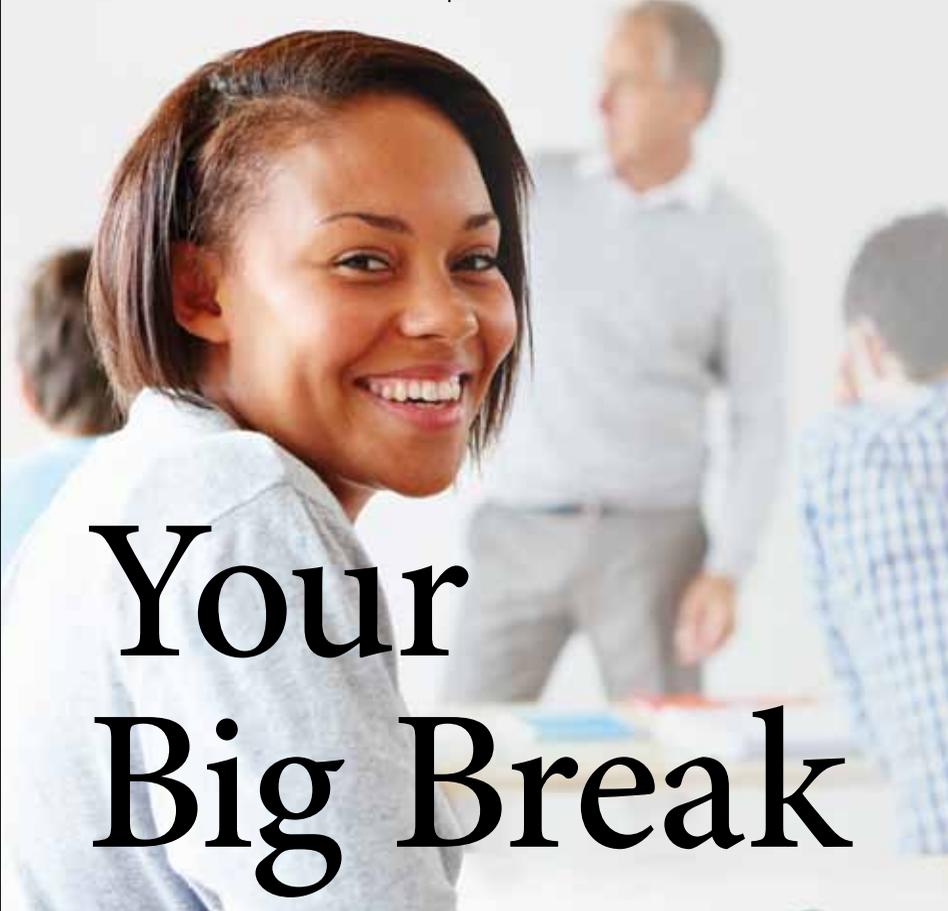
The language is clear, without obfuscating glitzy jargon and I especially like the images showing the result of the technique being described.

My only wish is that it wasn't so brief since I like to learn; however, even Toronto Board of Education courses are out of my price range nowadays.

Congratulations and many thanks to Learning Curves and to Mr. Andrei S. A good teacher brings out the best in pupils I think.

Lou Ceconi

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LOVE OF LEARNING

BY DEBORAH NOEL

CONTINUED FROM 1

Learning increases our social circle. I recently took a Malaysian Cooking class, not necessarily to become a better cook, but to meet more people in my community who shared my “adventurous” taste in cuisine. Whatever your reason for doing so, taking classes is a great way to meet people.

Learning is healthy. Whether it is mastering a new cuisine, learning to play the piano or just being able to use a computer, most learners report an increased sense of self-esteem. Whether your learning is self-directed or in a classroom setting, exercising your brain is as important as exercising your muscles! Studies are now showing that continuing

to learn as you age can reduce incidents of depression and increase cognitive functioning.

There are many ways to add learning to your life. Most universities offer free (non-credit) classes online. Throughout Toronto and the GTA school boards such as the TDSB offer community classes in everything from computer basics to genealogy. Check them out!

www.universityinthecommunity.ca

www.coursera.org

www.tdsb.on.ca

www.thelifeinstitute.ca

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.

SCHOOL BOARD ADULT STUDENTS E-MAIL YOUR TRUSTEE

School Boards are governed by elected trustees. All these trustees have just been elected in the recent municipal elections for a four year term. Some were elected for the first time.

The new trustees may not be aware just how many adult students there are, and those who were reelected need to be reminded how important school board adult education programs are to thousands of adult learners.

Learning Curves is asking our readers to write their trustees, tell them

what you are studying and why. Teachers, you could make this a class project.

Go to the websites or phones for the school boards, listed in the Learning in the GTA and Toronto Schools for Adults found on page 10 of this issue, tell them where you live and ask who your trustee is. Email this trustee about the course you are taking and why it is important to you.

If you like, email Learning Curves a copy at learningcurves@hotmail.com. We would like to publish some of these in our next issue.

ACCESS BUSINESS COLLEGE HELPS STUDENTS LIKE OLEG

Access Business College held its graduation celebration on November 14th and as usual I was warmed by the family feeling generated by Sonia among the teachers, staff and students and among the students themselves, those who were graduating and those who were doing their courses.

Access Business College is a career college, a sector of adult education that offers students the benefits of small class sizes, and therefore individual attention to your learning needs and close learning relationships with your fellow students. They also work hard to help you find work after your courses as your success ensures theirs.

At this graduation I met Oleg, who had chosen to add Web Design skills to his skills and, as he told me, he chose to do so at a career college where he would get lots of individual help. Oleg's instructors and Oleg were clearly enjoying their reunion. Oleg was clearly a favourite with his fellow graduating students, and current students. I could see why his engaging personality would keep everyone's spirits up as they tackled their course work and planned their job searches.

Students were graduating from courses in Banking and Financial Services, which helped them to prepare for the licensing exams for the Canadian Securities Course and the Canadian Investment Funds course. The high marks received on these external examinations attested to the personalized help students had received in improving their understanding of these fields.

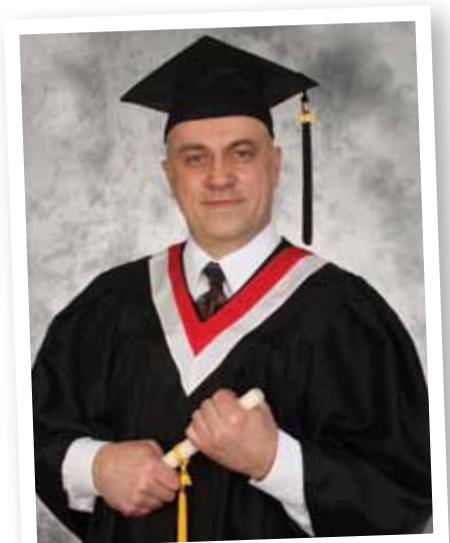
Web Design, Banking and Financial Services are only two of the programs that

Access offers which are very relevant in today's labour market. Property Administration is another—think of all those condos, rentals, government buildings, shopping malls! Property administration is ranked top of the Second Career Indicator.

If you are worried about the cost of going back to school, Sonia of Access Business College works to understand your personal circumstances in order to identify funding sources that could support your education, Second Career, WSIB, OSDP, and others.

For the new year, make it a resolution to go back to school to get a better job.

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YOU CAN DO IT! GO TO UNIVERSITY

People who dropped out of high school, or just didn't do very well, often think they will never be able to pursue a post-secondary education and enter a career of their choice; however that is not true. They can do it. The Millie Rotman Shime Academic Bridging Program provides access to the University of Toronto for those aged 19 and up who have been away from formal education for some time and don't meet the usual university entrance requirements. Thomas Socknat, Academic Director of the Program, says "A lot of people just don't think they could ever qualify for university studies, especially at U of T. They need to know that the Academic Bridging Program is designed to provide a second chance for people like them—"non-traditional" students—to explore and pursue post-secondary education."

Take, for example, Matt Hitch. He felt he had blown any chance of attending university until he discovered the Academic Bridging Program. Now he is a third year student at U of T and loving every minute of it. Roberta Miggiani was a high school drop-out until the Bridging Program offered her the opportunity to prove she could do university level work. This year she received an Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree with High Distinction. There are hundreds of similar

success stories of people who literally "changed their lives" by accessing a university education.

Students enrolled in the Bridging Program take one of three courses and upon successful completion they automatically enter the Faculty of Arts and Science with their first credit towards a U of T degree. They also benefit from free access to a career educator, a learning strategist, a series of study skills seminars, assistance with writing at the Academic Writing Centre, and personal attention from their instructors since all classes are relatively small. Financial assistance is also available.

The students themselves have diverse backgrounds, including a number who are "first generation"—the first in their family to pursue university studies. Most students who complete the program hail it as a "life-altering experience" and go on to earn their university degree.

For nearly 50 years, the Academic Bridging Program (located at U of T's Woodsworth College) has been helping mature students access a university education and yet, for some reason, it still seems to be one of the best kept secrets in town. Don't be shy—apply. There is still time to register for the academic term beginning in January 2015. For more information check out our website: www.wdw.utoronto.ca/bridging.

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ELIZABETH MERCHANT'S LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY SERIES



This article is the first in a series highlighting the educational aspects of cultural centres in Toronto.

The Japan Foundation, Toronto (JFT) located at 131 Bloor Street West, is our focus in this issue of Learning Curves.

There are a variety of programs, services and events which are accessible to anyone with an interest in Japan and its culture. One does not have to speak Japanese, as all of the centre's programming is provided in English or in Japanese with English subtitles.

Many of the courses are grouped into three categories: Arts and Cultural Exchange, Language education and Japanese studies.

To keep language learners motivated classes are fun and encouraging. For example in a past intermediate Japanese class, the students learned about Japanese newspaper writing and worked together to create their own newspaper.

"We offer various courses in Japanese language education targeting learners at all levels," explains Kate Scullin, the Program Officer at the JFT. "For example, we have introductory courses on reading and writing hiragana and katakana, the Japanese syllabaries, for absolute beginners. We also offer more specialized language courses on cultural topics such as anime (Japanese animation), manga (comic books), Japanese holidays, [etc.] for more advanced learners." Scullin added that in addition to language courses for students, the centre also organizes professional development workshops for Japanese language teachers around Canada.

Facilities at the centre include seminar rooms, an event hall where film screenings, art exhibitions and lectures take place and a

library, which according to the website "has approximately 23,000 Japan-related print and audio-visual materials in its collection." To borrow library materials, you have to sign up for a card, but there is no fee. The gallery and library are open from 11:30 am to 4:30 pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and extended until 7pm Mondays and Thursdays; and usually open for two Saturdays a month from noon until 5:00 pm, but the opening schedule for a Saturday can vary from month to month.

I asked if there are any costs for programs and services. "Admission to our gallery is free, membership in the library is free, and most of our programs and services are offered free of charge," Scullin informs me. "Occasionally, there are materials fees associated with some of the language courses."

There is always something exciting happening at the Japan Foundation, whether it is free film screenings or an art exhibit (the work of Ryoji Ikeda and Walter Jule are featured through January 29, 2015), with new events coming up all the time!

For more information please visit the centre's website: jftor.org

A NEW SOCIETY EMERGING

BY ANNE MCDONAGH

In the last issue of Learning Curves, an article, which I wrote *The new, new economy*, described how citizens around the world are transforming their societies little by little by working for the **environment**, for **social justice**, for a truly **democratic society** and a society where people feel part of their **community**. Members of the New Economy Coalition (NEC) consider all four goals inseparable and the achieving of them essential to the new economy because these are the areas that have been most damaged by our current economic system.

Most people don't question our economic system, which we call capitalism. Many seem to think that it is sacrosanct. But it was created by human beings about 200 years ago and can be modified or abandoned by other human beings. In the past, citizens have successfully challenged the status quo. There is no reason to believe that they cannot do so again if they are convinced that change is necessary.

In many ways, capitalism has served us well. It has fostered innovation and efficiency. The profit motive has encouraged people to work hard; capitalism promotes growth. Our standard of living is a result of capitalism. But as an economic system, it is on the wrong side in the new economy for several reasons. Built into capitalism is social and economic inequality. It cannot deal with climate change; though it creates jobs, it has ravaged the environment and exploited workers. For the future, NEC and other like-minded organizations either reject capitalism entirely or envision a greatly modified form of capitalism complemented by elements of socialism.

The Environment

Rescuing the environment seems finally to be on the public's agenda. All over the world individuals and corporations are embracing and creating green technologies. The Global Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement is booming;

individuals alone have pledged to divest over \$2.5 billion in assets. The recent United Nations climate conference was the first not to be declared a failure. Of course, the agreement between China and the United States is a momentous development as well.

There are still many challenges. However, some experts, for example, former American Vice President, Al Gore, are confident that climate change will not spell the end of our planet after all. NEC is working towards the time when there are enough people wanting to create systemic change to a sustainable world order. For the problems of the environment, change seems underway

Social Justice

Regarding Social Justice, there are not many optimistic signs. The most serious symptom of our failure to achieve social justice is the increasing gap between the rich and the poor around the world and our seeming inability to do anything about it. The social safety net that Canadians built after the depression of the thirties diminished the worst outcomes of capitalism. However, the values held by the people who created the safety net have been eroded by the "values" of the free market—capitalist ideology.

In the last three decades, corporations (true blue capitalists) have tried to return society to the days of the robber barons and unfettered capitalism; to duplicate this primitive world, they have tried and often succeeded in influencing the political process with the result that the safety net has been greatly damaged, and regulations to protect the ordinary person have been done away with or made voluntary. Labour laws have been watered down. Unions have lost their membership as their bosses assure workers that a union is not necessary today. The result has been an unprecedented increase in poverty in Canada and the United States (and elsewhere) and an obscene increase

in the wealth of the already wealthy. For ordinary people, jobs are scarce and insecure.

The following statistics indicate how we have failed to care for one another.

- There are about 2.2 billion children in the world; one billion live in poverty.
- To Canada's shame there are about 1.3 million Canadian children living in poverty.
- The poorest 40 percent of the world's population accounts for 5 percent of global income.
- The richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of world income.

Democracy

Democracy in Canada and the United States is broken or at least badly wounded. The citizens of both countries have been poorly served over the last few decades by their federal representatives. In Canada the leader of a majority government has the power of a dictator. In the United States, partisan gridlock has brought government to a standstill. Citizens are not engaged because of these problems. For both countries reform is necessary. NEC wants a revitalized democracy because:

"Today, the majority of people are deprived of a voice in political and economic life. Fundamental flaws in the political economic system permit the concentration of resources

and power, exacerbating inequality and destroying ecosystems. The beneficiaries of this system obstruct efforts to restore communities and livelihoods" (from NEC's website).

Community

Human beings are social animals and naturally form communities because they have a need to belong in a meaningful way. Many people living in big cities and surrounded by strangers have no sense that they belong anywhere. Rarely are they called upon to get involved in their community. NEC envisions a time when community will matter. There will be built-in structures that encourage involvement in the community such as working in community gardens, cooking and participating in communal meals, running enterprises as co-operatives etc. Communities will also have rights and responsibilities to participate democratically in decision-making about issues that affect them..

Those of us lucky enough to have been born in industrialized countries enjoy the highest standard of living in human history. In fact, the serious problems we face are largely due to our success. However, the systems and values that gave us this standard of living will be the death of us if we do not forsake them.

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Who WE ARE



EDUCATION MATTERS

Not all of our members are employees under the TDSB. Our newer members include employees who work under the Viamonde French School Board, the Bloorview School Authority, JIAS and at various early education/daycare centres across the GTA.

Toronto Education Workers (Local 4400)

is made up of approximately **12,000 EDUCATION WORKERS**

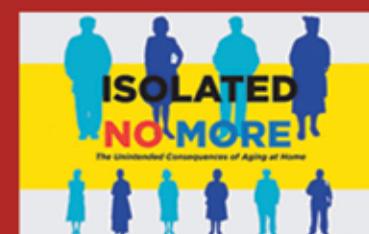
who primarily work within the TDSB (Toronto District School Board).

Under the TDSB alone, there are over

400 ^{JOB} CLASSIFICATIONS

and over **1,000** WORK SITES.

We believe in well-funded community-based education and resources for ALL ages!



PORTFOLIO POWER: INVEST IN YOURSELF

BY: LISA TRUDEL

Do you want to learn how to use a portfolio at a job interview or performance review? Do you want to find out how a portfolio can help to describe your accomplishments? Do you want to grab the attention of an employer at an interview?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, it might be time to consider creating a traditional portfolio, or online portfolio, that represents your professional life.

There are various types of portfolios yet only one that you would show to your boss at a performance review or to potential employers at a job interview. For example, there is the “Personal Master Career Portfolio” that you would never show anyone. It is simply an organized way of keeping track of your accomplishments during your working life. There is also a “financial portfolio” which is confidential and one that you might not even want to think about on a regular basis unless you are near to retirement.

The portfolio to consider is the “Targeted Career Portfolio” which is a professional scrapbook and collection of documents to showcase your work story. It can be a traditional style using a 3-ring binder or artist presentation case, with a maximum of 25 sheet protectors for your documents, or an online version including a blog or website.

A portfolio is just one of several self-promotional essentials. There is the resume, cover letter, reference list, business cards, LinkedIn Profile, and interview outfit that reflects your image and communication style, and a portfolio to help answer questions at an interview or performance review. A portfolio provides accountability and demonstrates a professional responsibility to your present or past employers, volunteer work and education. It is the paper evidence that connects to the statement “If it isn’t in writing, it never happened.”

To create a traditional portfolio you will need to select a presentation folder or binder, sheet protectors and divider tabs or pages if you want to show that you are very organized. The materials you collect and assemble should be items for specific goals. For example, your portfolio for a performance review will be different from a portfolio for a volunteer job, or educational program or new employment.

Examples of materials to include in your portfolio are:

- Cover page: with your name and date
- Table of Contents
- Copies of Resume
- Reference List
- Letters of Reference
- Thank you Letters or Emails
- Copies of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates
- Certificates of Accomplishment
- List of Awards

- Work Samples that represent meeting deadlines, contributions to staff development and commitment to life-long learning.
- Professional Association Achievements
- Outline of Upcoming

Educational Programs

Once you have created your portfolio, when do you use it? At a job interview, it is a judgment decision that you alone have to make. For example, at an appropriate question, you can present your portfolio to highlight your accomplishments and skills while you are answering the question. Portfolios can score points yet not everyone will be as excited as you are about it so be careful about how you introduce it. Try to read the situation and if the learning style of the interviewer is visual, it might be worthwhile to use. If the interviewer has an auditory learning style, it might be wise to just keep it in your briefcase.

If you are in doubt about using a portfolio, at a job interview or performance review, try critiquing your portfolio by asking yourself:

- Why are you creating this portfolio?
- Is the content appropriate and is there too much or too little detail?
- Is the portfolio self-explanatory?
- Is the design suitable?
- Have you proofread your portfolio?
- Are there spelling or grammar errors?

Change your portfolio as you change, and select items that illustrate accuracy, knowledge, career advancement and resourcefulness.

In summary, a portfolio can help you think about who you are. When you sequence your materials, you think more broadly about your collection of talents, and this analysis can always help you to improve your interview skills. Interviews and performance reviews are teaching and learning experiences. By using a portfolio, you get to be the teacher, while your employer is the student as you describe the skills and abilities that comprise your career.

If you want to find out more about how to invest in yourself by creating a portfolio, or other job search essentials, contact the Centre for Education & Training Employment Services (www.tcet.com). Challenge yourself to discuss your career planning and job search ideas with specialists who want to help you achieve career success.

Lisa Trudel is a Career Specialist with the Centre for Education & Training. She works at their Toronto Parliament Services location and can be contacted at: ltrudel@tcet.com

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.

BROCK ADULT EDUCATION: PREPARATION FOR MANY CAREERS

BY ERIK DIXON

In today’s economy, a career in adult education can take many forms. Stella Han, Academic Advisor in the Centre for Adult Education and Community Outreach (CAECO) at Brock University, started her journey in 2003 as the first international student in the Pre-Service Program in Brock’s Faculty of Education.

Passionate about education, Han has become involved in many areas at the University, including helping to guide current international students through Brock’s Mentorship Plus program.

“I have also been providing free workshops on university academic policies for Intensive English Language Program (IELP) students, to prepare them for a smooth transition to their undergraduate studies.”

After completing a MED in 2007, Han continued to work in various roles at Brock in research and eventually academic advising. She became one of CAECO’s Academic Advisors in 2012.

Currently, CAECO offers a BEd as well as a Certificate in Adult Education, and is one of Canada’s most recognized adult education programs. Incorporating innovative e-learning technologies and the expertise of faculty and subject matter specialists, the Centre offers a robust academic program of courses.

“When I was a student in the MED program in 2008, I worked on a project introducing distance teaching – which was still a relatively new teaching concept,” says Han. “At the time, CAECO was the only program in Ontario that offered distance teaching.” CAECO now offers learners options of engaging in small, site-based courses or entirely online courses on a part-time schedule. This allows them to balance academic, professional and personal life goals.

“When I discovered that CAECO was in search of a second academic advisor, I realized that this was the opportunity for me to work with a great team in a program I have passion for,” says Han.

“The staff in CAECO work towards one goal, which is to provide the best learning experience for our students.”

As one of two academic advisors within the program, Han works closely with current students to help them navigate the various course offerings and degree requirements, all while maintaining a personal connection that often leads to their staying connected well after graduation.

CAECO graduates apply their degrees in many sectors — business, industry, health care, government, financial services and manufacturing — where training and development require a solid foundation in the principles and practices of adult education.

Outside of her work at Brock University, Han has continued to broaden her experience in education, teaching Mandarin courses for the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN).

“The class is made up of 19 high school students and 12 adults,” says Han. “The variation among the students in age, language and culture is huge.”

Han says that some of her students hope to establish businesses in the Niagara Region, and are using the courses she is teaching as a first step towards connecting with the local Mandarin speaking community.

“A couple of my students are currently studying in the Goodman School of Business [at Brock University],” says Han. “Their goals are to establish business with China or Mandarin speaking clients.”

With diverse and continually growing experience in the field of education, Han believes that education plays a critical role in today’s society. “Ideally, education should prepare and enable people to have a meaningful and enjoyable life,” says Han.

“I would like my students to develop a solid base of fundamental knowledge and skills in the subject areas that they are passionate about and to apply those to contribute to the society that they live in.”

To find out more about Brock University’s Centre for Adult Education and Community Outreach, visit www.brocku.ca/education/futurestudents/adulted.



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ADULT LEARNING IN THE GTA AND TORONTO SCHOOLS

When we think of schools, we think of children's education but they are a key provider of adult education. To get the picture just try getting a parking spot on a weeknight at an adult education centre. Seasoned adult learners know the early bird gets the spot.

School Board Continuing Education courses are the most affordable adult education. For the 99% who are struggling to stay afloat and feel they can't afford to upgrade their education to get a better job have a look at the school boards. By taking a school board course you can start yourself on a path to college, university and a better job.

Most school boards have several adult education centres that offer all or some of the following: English classes (ESL or LINC or ELT) for those who have English as a second and in today's world possibly a third or fourth language; a place to earn a high school diploma at an adult day school or in an evening course; pick up practical skills for a job not only in computers but for jobs like personal support work, hairstyling, carpentry and others, and in co-op programs to gain work experience, LBS Literacy Basic Skills programs now called Essential Skills where you can get basic upgrading help with computers, math and English- for first language speakers; general interest courses which cover a broad range of language learning (French, Spanish, Mandarin etc), arts, crafts, music, computers, dance, cooking, etc. and some school boards sponsor; Employment Ontario Centres, to find work or access retraining through Second Career funding as well as Newcomer Information Centres. Some boards offer online credit courses.

Each GTA and Toronto school Board is organized slightly differently but they offer similar programs for free or at a low cost. You need to shop around in case you miss a program that is unique to that one board and perfect for you. When asking around it is better to tell people your goals than to ask for a specific course as they may know of a course that would help you but you hadn't thought existed. For instance, if you say "I'm an engineer from back home, I want to upgrade my English and get a related job." you would be referred to an Enhanced Language Training to upgrade your technical language and these ELT (enhanced language training) programs have a co-op work placement in a your field. Whereas if you say "I want an advanced ESL class" you would be referred to a ESL 7/8 class.

The adult day school programs where you earn high school credits offer academic and career counseling, they even help you fill out college and university application forms.

Public and Catholic School Boards

There are two school systems in the province— one public and the other Catholic. Both offer courses to adults. The following is a guide to finding adult programs in each.

LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC BOARDS Peel District School Board

www.peelschools.org/adulteducation
Click on Quick Links for Adult ESL, LINC, Credit and LBS.

There are three main campuses offering a wide variety of adult learning opportunities including ESL, LINC, Secondary School Credit and LBS.

Mississauga Campus -100 Elm Drive West
A block south of Square One
Call 905-270-6000

Brampton Campus 7700 Hurontario
Street Unit 300
just South on Steeles on Hurontario
Call 905-791-6700

Bramalea Campus -25 King's Cross Road Unit 3
East of Bramalea Recreation Centre
Cal 905-791-6700

York Region District School Board

www.yrdsb.ca
Click on Community then Continuing Education.

Dr. Betty Stephenson Centre for Learning.
36 Regatta Avenue, Richmond Hill
Call 905-884-2046

Offers high school credits, credit night school, and a Personal Support Worker program.

Uplands Learning Centre
8120 Yonge Street, Thornhill
(Just south of #7 on Yonge street)
Offers day, evening and weekend non-credit adult ESL classes.
Call 905-731-9557 for information about this site and over 30 other ESL sites

Also at Uplands and other sites.
Literacy Basic Skills programs
(English, Computers and Math Upgrading) and LINC classes too

Durham District School Board

<http://ddsb.ca>
Click on Program then Continuing Education

There are three main centres where high school credits, english as a second language Literacy Basic Skills and computer training are offered. DDSB offers Pathway Programs such as Personal Support Worker, Building Maintenance, Hospitality and Office Administration

E. A. Lovell Continuing Education Centre
120 Centre Street South
Just south of the civic centre.
Call 905-436-3211

Pickering Learning Centre
1400 Bayly Avenue
Just east of the GO Station
Call 905-831-3118

Computer Training Division
2nd Floor Suite 155
Oshawa Shopping Centre
Call 905-579-6041

Halton District School Board

www.hdsb.ca Learning Curves delivers to Oakville which is just west of Mississauga and served by the Halton District School Board.

The Gary Allan High School
www.garyallan.ca
1330 Montclair Oakville.
Call 905-5845.7542

The Centre for Skills Development and Training\
www.thecentre.on.ca
Employment Servies
465 Morden Road , Oakville
Call 905-845-1157

Immigrant Serivces
3295 Abbeywood Drive, Oakville
Call 905-847-8345

Toronto District School Board.

www.tdsb.on.ca

This school board has remained the largest provider of adult education in the province for over 160 years. The home page banner leads you straight to their offerings by clicking on adult learners.

There are many centres in the following program areas: Adult Credit programs; night school and adult day school; general Interest programs under Learn4Life. Then there are employment services through their Next Steps Centres. Learn English classes and Settlement services are well dispersed throughout the city.

Adult Day Schools
Here you can earn credits towards a high school diploma.

There are five centres. Each have similar programs and some have programs unique to that Centre. Be sure to check them all out before deciding.

Burnhamthorpe Adult Learning Centre (BCALC)
500 the East Mall, Etobicoke
Call 416-394-7130
www.burnhamthrope.org

The BCALC web site identifies a special education program for those with learning disabilities.

City Adult Learning Centre (CALC)
1 Danforth Ave. Toronto
Call 416-393-9740
<http://schoolstdsb.on.ca/calc>

The have in addition to a PSW program and Registered Practical Nurse program in collaboration with George Brown College.

Emery Adult Learning Centre
3395 Weston Road North York
Call 416-395-3325
www.emeryadult.com

They have a specific co-op program for internationally educated teachers.

Scarborough Centre For Alternative Studies (SCAS)
720 Midland Scarborough
Call 416-396-6739]
www.scasonline.com

The SCAS website notes a pre-apprenticeship program in carpentry, a growing labour market with the aging and retirement of Canada's skill trades workers.

Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre
38 Orfus Road, North York
Call 416-395-3350
www.yorkdale.net

Their website lists a Pathway to Health Sciences at George Brown College. They also note in their co-op programs, dental assistant, dental technology, office administration- medical and hearing instrument specialist, all growing labour markets with the aging of the population.

The SHSM program, Specialist High Skills in the Field of Energy, is a very relevant program for the growth in energy conservation .employment.

Continuing Education (General Interest Courses)
www.learn4life.ca

There are over 37 centres and fortunately the Winter program calendar lists courses offered by site starting on page 36. You can scan the calendar online and often they are available at the larger centres and at public libraries

In Learn4Life courses, you can take a hobby; stay fit, learn a language (French, Mandarin, Spanish, etc.); or gain new skills, many of which are work-related skills such as computers or accounting or customer service.

Learning English

There are three program areas, ESL 85 sites, LINC Centres 14 of these and Enhanced Language Training, ELT four centres here.

English as a Second Language
Of the 85 sites where courses are offered, six of these offer intake support.
www.elstoronto.ca

Toronto
Bickford Centre
Call 416-393-0528
Jones Avenue Adult Centre
Call 416-393-9645

North York
Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre
416-395-4980
Overland Learning Centre
416-395-5080

Scarborough
Winston Churchill Collegiate
Call 396-6909

Etobicoke
Mimico Adult Learning Centre.
416-338-4300
Language Instruction for Newcomers.
Many of the 14 centres offer child minding services.
www.linctoronto.ca

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We Are by M.E. Nelson

They look, they whisper, they talk, they ask who are they in wonder!!
 Let us explain, we are women, we are mothers,
 we are wives, sometimes we are fathers.
 We are women who have stayed long after they, who
 should have remained, have gone away.
 We are sisters, we are aunts, we are cousins, and we are friends.
 We are the ones who have become mothers while we were still young
 When the ones who were our mothers have
 died, or have left us and gone away.
 We stay and you or they often wonder and say, who do they think they are?
 The who that we are remains long, long after those who
 we love should have stayed but have gone away.
 We are lovers, we love our families and our friends,
 and we are always there to wipe a tear
 To give a hug, a smile and always a bit of advice
 We are women, we are born strong, we protect our
 own, with our backs against the wall
 God knew who he created when He created
 us, He did not create us from dust
 But from bone, so we can stand alone
 And during this time while you were looking the other way
 We grew to be those strong people who are made out
 of a material that can stand the test of time.
 We are women strong and free, who have become who we are
 And we can say proudly, this is who we are, we are
 women, who are proud of who we have become,
 Women of integrity and love. So, my friend, that is who we are!!

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- provide a few homemade meals to help save time
- proof read their papers or tutor them in your speciality

**Adults learners, tell your loved ones
what would help you learn**



ADULT LEARNING IN THE GTA AND TORONTO SCHOOLS

CONTINUED FROM 10

Enhanced Language Training
 www.elt4employment.ca
 Call 416-395-8270

There are four centres which offer enhanced language training (business English skills) in Engineering, Customer Service and Administration, Accounting, Information Technology, Sales and Marketing, Hospitality, and Financial Services.

These ELT programs offer 8 weeks in class and a 6 week work (unpaid) work placement to gain practice

Employability Skills

This program used to be called Literacy Basic Skills. This program is for English speakers who need to upgrade their skills in English, Computers and Math for further education or employment. There are 26 sites where these programs are offered and three intake centres.

Etobicoke Call 416-394-3809
 Toronto Call 416-393-1995
 Scarborough 416-396-6904

LEARNING IN THE CATHOLIC BOARDS.

Durham Catholic District School Board
 www.con-ed.ca

There are four main centres for ESL,
 High School Credit, PSW, LBS

Oshawa Campus
 692 King Street, East
 Call 905-438-0570

Ajax Campus
 458 Fairall Street Unit 7
 Call 905-683-7713

Welcome Centre
 ESL & Linc Programs
 458 Fairall Street (corner of
 Westney Road & Fairall St.
 Across from the Ajax Go Station)
 Call 289-481.1336

Whitby Adult English Language Classes
 Giffard Centre
 1003 Giffard Street.
 Call 905-666-1255

DCDSB offers of General Interest courses.
 in Languages (Spanish, French, Sign)
 , Fitness, Cooking and Business
 Call 905-683-7713

DCDSB offers a Personal Support
 Worker Program Call 905-438-0570
 Oshawa or 905-683-7713 Ajax

York Catholic District School Board

www.ycdsb.ca
 Call 416-221-5051
 Click on Departments then Adult Program
 YCDSB offers and extensive ESL program
 Computer and General Interest classes. .

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

www.dpcdsb.org/cec
 There are two ain centres for ESL, High School
 credits, and a Personal Support Worker program

St. Gabriel Adult Learning Centre
 Malton
 3750 Brandon Gate Drive
 Call 905-362-0701

Brian J. Fleming c Adult Learning Centre
 Lakeshore
 870 Queen Street West.
 Call 905-891-3034

DPCDSB offers a broad range of General
 Interest courses at several different sites
 Call 905-891-9283

Halton Catholic District School Board
 www.hcdsb. Org

Click on Programs then Continuing
 Education/Adult Education.

Learning Curves delivers to Oakville
 which is just west of Mississauga and
 served by the Halton Catholic
 District School Board

Thomas A. Merton Adult Learning Centre .
 171 Speers Road,
 Oakville
 Call 905-7555 Ext 223

This Centre offers ESL and high school credits.

Toronto Catholic District School Board
 www.tcdsb.org
 Call 416-397-6600

This Board offers a full range of language
 programs, English as Second Language.
 Language Instruction for Newcomers,
 Enhanced Language Training. For those
 who speak English, upgrading in English,
 Math and Computers through Literacy Basic
 Skills or now referred to as Essential Skills.

On their website under programs
 and services, choose Adult Education.
 They have 31 locations.

Adult Continuing Education Programs for the



DURHAM CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Check out the following learning opportunities – Serving Durham Region
www.con-ed.ca

High School Credit (OSHAWA CAMPUS; AJAX CAMPUS)
Personal Support Worker,
ESL, Linc, Computers for ESL
Correspondence (at home learning)
Adult Upgrading - Literacy and Basic Skills (MTCU Funded)
Night school, Summer school, E-Learning, Computer Courses
Microsoft Office Specialist Training

Oshawa Campus 905 438-0570 & 905 626-6631
Re-engagement Program - 905 438-0570 Ext. 8448
Ajax Campus 905 683-7713 & 905 626-6631
Whitby Centennial Building Campus ESL & Linc – 289 481-1226
Welcome Centre ESL & Linc - 289-481-1336
Adult Upgrading LBS Program 905 438-0570 Ext. 8444
International Languages 905 683-7713
Interest Courses - 905 683-7713



Kathleen Wynne, MPP
 Don Valley West

*All the best for the coming
 Holiday Season and a
 Happy New Year!*



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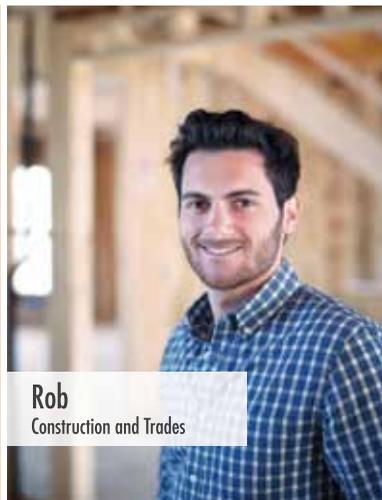
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SARAH'S HONOUR

PART TWO BY MINA WONG

In part one, we learned that eighteen-year-old Sarah came from Tehran during the Gulf War to marry forty-year-old Yousef. After the birth of her daughter May, Sarah discovered Yousef already had a wife and child. She left with May. The police helped her find a shelter, and when she found proper housing, Sarah studied English and then worked at a nursing home for two years. When Sarah sustained a serious back injury, she had to quit her job. While receiving workers' compensation, she thought seriously about a different kind of work that had less physical strain.

During that time, Sarah read newspapers every day for current events and job listings.

"I needed a different job, something not so hard on the body as nursing homes. I also looked for college programs. I read about Ryerson in a newspaper. I thought maybe it was a college with night classes. I called the number and got a calendar in the mail," Sarah said as she summed up her post-injury turning point.

"I couldn't wait to study at Ryerson, but before that, I had to take care of some business with Yousef.

"Since I left with May that day for the police station, Yousef looked for us everywhere. When we left, I only took my papers, May's birth certificate, house keys, and about three hundred dollars." Sarah's pinched eyebrows told me she had left something important behind.

"When we left in a hurry, I forgot my family pictures. They were all I had of my parents. But it wasn't safe to go back for them. Yousef and Niki would be there. "Yousef told my parents I had left him, but he wanted his daughter back," Sarah added. "I had already told my parents about Niki, about Yousef's other child, and why I left with May," but my parents said I must do the honourable thing.

"To me, honour was to not live with Yousef's wife. Honour was to raise May as a good Canadian. Honour was to be brave in this darkness." Sarah's determination was unmistakable.

But, there was the problem of May and her baba. Divorcing Yousef was not hard. He had no case. But May didn't have a chance to know her father. Sarah revealed the dilemma with her precious daughter and an unfaithful husband.

"When May was old enough to ask, I told her about her baba, and I asked if she wanted to see him." Sarah stared at her tea whenever she felt conflicted.

"My divorce papers were signed when May was four, in 1989." Still staring at her tea, Sarah continued, "But after that, it seemed possible for May to start seeing Yousef. May should have a choice."

As May grew older, she started visiting Yousef and Niki and her half brother Reza. Sarah said, "She's fifteen and makes her own decisions. She lives with me but they are also her family.

"May brought back all my family pictures. She simply said to Yousef that they should be returned to me."

After sharing her deepest concerns about May and Yousef, Sarah told me about her education.

"Ryerson seemed like the right school for me, but I wasn't sure about my English. Back in Tehran, I had four years of English in high school. In Toronto, I finished all my ESL. So I took a chance." Sarah's smile meant things had worked out.

"I had nothing to lose, right? With workers' comp and May in daycare, I registered for one psychology course. I just needed a babysitter. I thought about taking May with me to night school, but she was just three and I wanted her to be sleeping when I got home. I was very lucky a neighbor could watch May for twenty dollars every Tuesday night.

"I was a mess at first. Yes, I had a big psychology book and a big binder, but I thought everyone stared at me like I didn't belong."

After a few weeks, Sarah realized how important psychology was to her. "It was very hard work with assignments and tests, but I loved studying Freud, Jung, Erikson, Skinner, Bandura. Suddenly everything made sense." Her eyes sparkled with memories of discovery.

"When I took statistics as the second course, psychology was my best friend.

"I asked my professor where I could find psychology jobs. He said most jobs needed more education, but not to give up if I wanted to pursue psychology. I guess I was born under a bright star" Sarah said excitedly. "My professor knew a colleague looking for an office assistant – can you believe it? I got the job, three days a week." After all these years, Sarah was still incredulous about her good fortune.

"I learned so much about assisting a psychologist. At first it was just answering the phone and booking appointments. But I understood statistics and testing. I helped with psychometrics. In about a year, we were swamped with assessing autistic children and counseling families. So, my job turned full time. After four psychology courses, I sent all my transcripts from Iran, ESL, and Ryerson to Waterloo. They accepted me into first year psychology by distance and it was perfect! With work and May, I could only take one course at a time, but I have just one more research seminar left."

The evening before I left Sarah's building, we visited over Persian tea. May joined us and said proudly "You know Mom gets her psychology degree this Christmas." May was beaming.

Since her father's death, Sarah has been working on bringing her mother to Canada.

When mother finally gets here, May and I will take care of her. I will do everything to protect my family", Sarah and May nodded in unison.

Always a dutiful daughter, Sarah was a resilient young bride and a loving mother who raised May on her own, and definitely set an example for every new Canadian in search of success.

Mina Wong is a teacher of social sciences and adult education, Mina enjoys celebrating the lives of adult learners and their successes.

DEAR ELCEE



**Dear Elcee is a feature in every issue of Learning Curves.
Send your questions about education, training, careers, jobs to:**

**Elcee – The WEA of Canada
157 Carlton Street, Suite 205
Toronto, On M5A 2K2**

Dear Elcee

I went to University and worked for a couple of years. Just recently, I was diagnosed with a serious illness and am now faced with student loan payments I can't afford to pay. I am not working and am receiving disability payments. I am afraid that if I don't pay I will end up having bad credit but if I do make my monthly payments I won't be able to afford rent. What can I do?

Broke in Burlington

Dear Burlington,
I am so sorry to hear about your illness but applaud your desire to make good on your student loan payments. You are very smart to want to keep your credit in good standing. Both the Canada Student Loan and Ontario Student Assistance Program have made allowances for people who experience difficulties in paying back student loans. Very low income-earners make no payments on OSAP until their income grows to a certain level. If you are a person with a severe permanent disability and can't work or go to school, and you're having trouble repaying a student loan, you could also be eligible to have your loans forgiven.

The website www.osap.gov.on.ca states; 'Contact the National Student Loan Service Centre and ask to have your call forwarded to the Canada Student

Loans Program. The Canada Student Loans Program administers the Severe Permanent Disability Benefit on Ontario's behalf.

You should also know:

If you are in repayment and have a permanent disability that does not meet the definition of a severe permanent disability, you may be eligible to apply for repayment assistance through the Repayment Assistance Plan. The Repayment Assistance Plan helps borrowers with permanent disabilities pay off their loans in ten years.'

Good luck.

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.



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Toronto District School Board

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