

NB Literacy Learners Writing Contest

By: Crystal Drew

2019 Adult Learner Achievement Award Winner

Literacy Coalition of NB-PGI Dinner and Auction, May 7th, 2019

By the time I was 17, I had changed schools 10 times and lived in six different cities. The novelty of being the new kid was long gone, so I started doing everything I could to stay home from school. The more time I missed, the more anxious I felt going back.

My life turned into a constant battle of avoidance, falling behind and being lost. I sank deep into an anxiety disorder. Asking for help seemed impossible and education became increasingly meaningless. Eventually, all my willpower to finish school fizzled out and I left high school in 2013 without any credits.

I was angry with myself. I watched my peers working and graduating, things that seemed so normal to everyone else. I thought, *this is not the life I should have had.*

At 19, I was broke, young and without an education. I was living back in my hometown of Saint John where I leapt at the offer of a full-time cleaning job. For the next three years, I thought of the life I should have had while scrubbing room-sized shower stalls in big, beautiful homes.

Everything changed this past summer when I was laid off, but I felt more relief than heartbreak and took it as an opportunity to seek out The Learning Exchange in January of 2019.

At 23-years-old, I jumped full-time into the Community Adult Learning Program to study for the GED tests. I had fantasies of what I wanted to do with my life but had been too scared to consider them a real possibility.

I felt included almost immediately. Hearing bits of my classmate's life stories, while each unique, helped me realize I am not so different than everyone else.

My journey here as a learner has become so much more than just getting my GED. I find myself curious at the mention of a presentation or a new program, instead of instinctively shying away.

I've attended every weekly guest presentation and joined in the Money Matters course. The people who work here contribute to an environment that breeds learning at its core. In class with facilitator Dale Kilpatrick, a comment about the weather could lead to an interactive lesson on meteorology, or a tip on accurate news sources. I'm learning things about myself and my capabilities every day – and it's exciting.

In a little over two months, I've written and passed two of the GED tests. With help from coaches, I've also obtained my learner's drivers licence and applied to the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design. I was ecstatic when I received an acceptance letter into the Foundation Visual Arts program for the 2019-2020 academic term, on the conditional basis of receiving my GED certificate.

Learning as an adult has a new, multi-faceted meaning. I know now there is power in education, and how social studies, science, math, reading and writing weave its way into our everyday adult lives. Since returning to learning, my future is almost tangible.

The life I should have had will be whatever I want it to be.

Teacher: Dale Kilpatrick of the Saint John Learning Exchange