

Experiences I've Had *by Eric Savage*

When I was fourteen I was in Secondary Two but soon after I was having trouble with my grades. The school's social services suggested that I would be put in a program for slow learners called special Ed. It **SUCKED!** I was there for three years until I was too old for that class. I hadn't learned very much because I didn't do much work.

I was moved to the 16+ program which offered a high school leaving and job training. I lasted only about a year and a half in that class before dropping out of school. I was in Secondary Three in that class. They found me a stage but I screwed it up by going in with a friend and stole from them...which was stupid. I got fired and nearly had the cops called on me.

I was hanging out with the wrong crowd and got mixed up in drugs and almost male prostitution because of my brother. I got in trouble with the law and got a sentence of three years probation. I was eighteen at the time, not a very mature age but we all make mistakes. I was living on the streets of Montreal.

Then I contacted a family on the south shore of Montreal where I stayed for three years. They tried to help me but I was too involved in drugs

to the point where I was sick of life. I tried doing it on my own but didn't get very far. I had no confidence in myself. I wouldn't have tried for my driver's license or filled out a job application on my own. I wasn't reading much.

That year my sister and brother-in-law invited me over for Christmas. The next day they invited me to live with them. I had to abide by their rules in order to live there. My sister and brother-in-law encouraged me to go to school. I looked for financial help from Emplois Quebec and they referred me to Carrefour Jeunesse Program where I received a weekly cheque for my participation. These payments continued for two and a half months. I wanted to take a welding course, and when they helped me find out what pre-requisites I needed, I realized that I needed more education to get there.

Through them I heard about the Yamaska Literacy Council where I met my tutor Martha. She helped me with my self-confidence and helped me realize that I could do well. That was the first time I believed I could do it. I was a mess before I got started here. The first time we met we talked about some of my goals and what I wanted to do in life. The goals we talked about were to get my learner's permit and license. Another was to improve

my reading and writing skills. I also wanted to get into a welding D.E.P. I hope to get a good paying job so I can buy a car.

My first real lesson we spoke about getting my learner's permit. I didn't think the book would get me anywhere so I went online. Vicky, who works for the Yamaska Literacy Council, told me about her kids and how they practised the test over the net. My tutor had me go over the entire book to make sure I could read the words right. When the time came for the test I passed two out of the three sections with only three questions missing from passing the third. The second time I passed and got my learner's permit. I had accomplished one of the many goals I had. Eight months later I went for my license and passed on the first try.

Meanwhile, I was working on literacy books and finished one and got a certificate. I got more self-confidence by getting it and knowing I could do well.

So in September I got into Adult Ed and completed three math books. I was doing really well in French; so they had me do the final test for Secondary three. I passed and am now into Secondary four. I have a long way to go but I can do it and won't give up.

I am going to school every day and doing well. Working with Martha has changed my life for the better. I'm continuing my tutoring with her and going to school as well.

I have made some changes. Those changes got me into school and off drugs. I also quit smoking cigarettes. I started smoking at a young age. I don't miss my old life, I am happy the way I am.

From the time I started working with my literacy tutor I have achieved several of my goals that were set when we first met. I got my learner's permit, driver's license and financial help before going to Adult Ed. My tutoring helped my writing, reading and spelling skills faster than I had thought. It gave me self-confidence and made me realize that I could do well. I am confident that I am going to finish school and get into a welding course but it's going to take a while before that will happen.

Since learning to read my family is happy to see me on a good path and going to school. I'm staying out of trouble with the law and my probation is up in May 2008. It has turned my life around quite a bit, I'm making friends, I'm making decisions on my own and am more mature, more responsible.

I hope that my story will help those who are in need of some direction in their life to look for help the right way.

Eric is the Winner of the Canada Post Individual Achievement award 2008.