

Learning to read is changing my life **by Godfrey John, YLC student**

I ask myself why I didn't learn to read or write because all my family can read except me and one of my brothers.

I was born on the island of St. Vincent and lived there until I was 13. I went to school, but I just couldn't learn. The teachers all hit us with a strap when we couldn't read or write something, so I got beaten a lot. Often I got sent to the headmaster, but I would wet my hand and hit it on the wall to make it look sore. Then I went back to my teacher and pretended I was beaten by the headmaster!

Something happened to me when I was seven. Two big men took my schoolbooks and used witchcraft on me. That's when I started going backwards in school. We call it voodoo.

I felt very bad about not reading. I was very good at sports, so I would think, "How the hell I can't get it" with reading?! Other people find it easy, so I would think, "what's wrong with me, I'm stupid." Then I would cry. Afterwards, I would stop trying.

I came to Canada when I was 13, and decided to improve. I went to St. Laurent Elementary school. But I still couldn't learn to read and write. As I got older I wanted more; it was hard not to be able to read street signs and names on buildings. I can make up and sing songs, but I can't write the lyrics down. When the other kids would be reading comic books and telling stories from them, I would feel bad and left out. If I met a girl and she is smart, she might ask me to read something. I would find an excuse, so I couldn't form close relationships because people would find out that I can't read. I would look at 6 and 7-year olds who could read and wonder why I couldn't.

I went to Sir Winston High School from grades 9 to 11. My friends would help me by reading things to me and writing things for me. I also learned the "tricks of the trade", like avoiding and distracting and talking a lot.

When I was 27 I went to adult education classes. There were a lot of students, all at different levels which made it too hard for me to learn to read and write. So it was frustrating.

Now I have been learning one-in-one with the Laubach Literacy and I am really learning to read. My family can be proud of me, and I know that I am not stupid. It is a good feeling.