



Yamaska Literacy Council

**Celebrating  
30 years  
of learning**

# Roadways



*Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer. ~Author Unknown*

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**Happy Volunteer Week! ~April 10-16th**

**Thank you for volunteering**

**for the Yamaska Literacy Council!**

Inside this issue:

30th Anniversary	2
Prison literacy	3
Good Reads reviews	4



## You're invited to an Open House

Come check out the new YLC office:

*505, rue du Sud, suite 203, Cowansville.*

To celebrate our new office and our volunteers, we would like to invite you to an Open House **Monday, April 18th, 2011, 10-11:30 am.**

**Please join us for a cup of coffee and a muffin.**



### May 2nd Election: Interactive Resources for Adult Learners

The Canadian Literacy and Learning Network has created an Interactive Election Tool, with plain language explanations and literacy activities for adult learners during the election period. There are suggestions for activities that will help learners make informed decisions about the election, make their voices and votes count, and develop their vocabulary and understanding of elections and democracy.

To access the tool, visit the CLLN's Learner Area and scroll down to 'Interactive Election Tool': <http://literacy.ca/themes/mcl/learners/index.html>



This is **YOUR** opportunity to nominate a deserving adult learner and/or educator for a prestigious award that recognizes personal achievement. Entries must be received in Ottawa by midnight (EDT),

Friday June 3, 2011.

For more information, call the office or follow the link:

[http://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/emailcampaigns/literacy/literacy\\_2011\\_1.html](http://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/emailcampaigns/literacy/literacy_2011_1.html)

## 30 YEARS OF LEARNING

The Yamaska Literacy Council is pleased to announce that we are celebrating **30 years of literacy service** in our community. Part of our plan for this memorable year will be a publication of council memories. As such, YLC is welcoming current and former students and tutors to submit short stories about their association with YLC. Tell us about your council memories.

**Suggested topics** might be:

- ◆ *Why literacy matters?*
- ◆ *Why I love to read.*
- ◆ *How literacy has changed my life?*
- ◆ *What being a literacy volunteer means to me*
- ◆ *...or share a special memory!*

Stories can be **written, illustrated, or recorded**. They should be no longer than **200 words, or 90 seconds**, if recorded. **All submissions must be received by May 1<sup>st</sup>**. A committee of volunteers will select the 30 stories, to be published in June. We look forward to your submissions.

*There are two ways of spreading light - to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it. ~Edith Wharton, Vesalius in Zante*



## MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW!

To celebrate our successes of the last 30 years, YLC is planning a series of shows to be broadcast on the local community radio station **CIDI 99.1**.

The radio shows will air in the weeks leading up to our 30th anniversary event to be held on **June 11th, 4-6 pm**. More details to follow.

YLC encourages you to listen—it will keep you in touch with your community news and activities.



*How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world. ~William Shakespeare, Merchant of Venice*

# PRISON LITERACY- LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE

Colin McGregor, YLC tutor

**The world of prison is a world largely without trees.**

Doubtless trees pose some sort of security risk, perhaps providing places where people can hide, or can hide their drugs.

But one young maple, 30 feet tall, stands alone in a corner of our gardens, near where the barbed wire fencing meets the world outside our reach. Every week I sit under that tree, at a picnic

table, with another inmate. He is 65. He has run companies, was married twice, fathered several children—some, late in life. But he cannot read a word. We sit, and we read. He always insists on sitting under that lonely maple. He says it is his lucky tree. It is where he first began to make out words.

Looking for causes of crime? There is no more direct statistical link than that between illiteracy and criminal activity. One out of 25 federal inmates has ever stepped foot in a post-secondary college of any sort; over 7 out of 10 prisoners are functionally illiterate in both of Canada's official languages. Illiteracy engenders frustration. People can't achieve what they want, or earn what they think they deserve. They lash out. They steal. They hit. They drink and take drugs. *Le décrochage scolaire* and crime are Siamese twins.

An illiterate inmate cannot read the judge's decision that sent him to jail, or the correctional evaluations that will determine if and when he is ever released. We have long hours to ourselves in a cell. Reading fills time with mental journeys. It is a way to escape mentally. The ancient Romans called the world of writing "The Land of Shadows." For most prisoners this is a sadly inaccessible place.

My 65-year-old wants to read to his kids and his grandkids when he gets out. I have a college education. I was once a writer and a teacher before the system put me here. I am no humanitarian; I am just bored and want to use my training. That's why we sit under his lucky tree. He makes out a sentence, haltingly. He looks up at the leaves, starting to turn auburn colors, and punches the air. "Thank you, Lord," he says in a whisper. "I didn't think I could ever read." I detect a tear in the corner of his left eye. My day is made.

There is a prison school staffed with teachers who care. But school is scary to people who had trouble with school rules when they were young—and a jail school has lots of rules. There is a prison library. But a library is intimidating to those with limited reading skills. Every shelf is a reminder of their weakness. Jail is no place to show weakness. We are not allowed to receive books through the mail—they could contain drugs, we are told. There is no Internet, and the few computers here are occupied as soon as one is available. Reading must be struggled for in prison. A group of volunteer literacy tutors from Cowansville, mostly retired teachers, visit the prison chapel two Fridays a month. They train inmate tutors—there are four of us now—and work with students. The chaplain, himself once a teacher, makes coffee and provides space. Books are brought in. Glittering certificates are given out—it's important to mark and celebrate success. Between these visits, it is up to us.

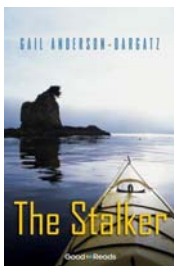
It is a gray, windy Saturday. The prison factory does not need me today. My 65-year-old is emotional. "When I get out," he tells me, "I'll be able to read to my grandchildren, you know. I won't have to say, 'I'm busy, go ask your mother.' They'll be shocked." A smile creeps across his lips. Illiteracy is something to be hidden if you're a large, muscle-bound man with responsibilities and pride. The secret gnaws at a man's soul. The illiteracy rate among senior citizens in Brome-Missisquoi County, where the jail sits, is two-thirds. The older you are, the less likely you are to be able to read. Illiteracy is a senior's curse everywhere. My 65-year-old is not alone.

We are under his lucky tree when it starts to rain. Tiny watermarks spread across the open pages of our book like ink blots on a Rorschach test. Indoors, recreation rooms are packed with poker players. We have nowhere to go. My 65-year-old shrugs his shoulders. "We can come back tomorrow, right?" he asks. "Unless my shoulder acts up. Boy, I'm in pain a lot." He raises his arm to show me where it hurts. The pain isn't that bad, really. He is just scared that one day the progress he is making will stop, that suddenly he will not be able to read.

Nothing I say will calm his fears. The next day, he might come back. If not, I will bring my novel and read alone under the lucky tree, with the gentle breeze as my companion. For an hour I will not be in jail. I will be in the Land of Shadows.

# YLC STUDENTS WRITE "GOOD READS" BOOK REVIEWS

*Congratulations, QELA has selected these reviews to post on their BLOG.*



## **The Stalker**, by Gail Anderson-Dargatz / Review by *Linda Martin*

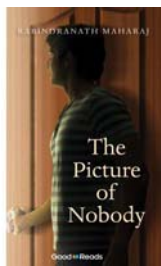
Gail Anderson-Dargatz is a best-selling author (Recipe for Bees) from British Columbia. She teaches creative writing.

Her short story *The Stalker*, is a mystery story that takes place on Vancouver Island during the Summer. Mike is getting strange phone calls, but it's business as usual at his sea kayak tours. Mike, his cook Liz, and two clients, George and Sam, set out on a trip. But the phone calls keep coming!

George wants to see an Indian burial site. Mike can't keep George from going, so they find themselves on an unmarked island. To make matters worse, a storm is blowing in from the sea and there is no way to make it back to the coast.

Who is making the strange, threatening phone calls? *The Stalker* will keep you guessing till the very end!

I recommend *The Stalker* to anyone who likes a good adventure story. It kept me spell bound. Thank you Gail Anderson-Dargatz!



## **The Picture of Nobody** by Rabindranath Maharaj / Review by *Hugo Jesús Gámez Pineda*

*The Picture of Nobody* is about an Ajax, Ontario teenager, Tommy, born to immigrant parents. Tommy feels alienated because he believes Arabs like him are seen as terrorists. He works part-time as a cleaner. He sends a Twitter messenger saying something bad about a man who had said a racial insult to him. The man disappears, leaving behind a family. Tommy thinks he might be responsible, but when he discovers the man simply left his family, Tommy feels better.

The man's wife takes Tommy's cleaning job. As an immigrant, I related to this. I recommend this fantastic book for teenagers.



## **Easy Money** by Gail Vaz-Oxlade / Review by *Miguel Sandoval*

Reading this book, at first, I thought it was about dirty money. I remembered what my mother said: "Easy money, easy go."

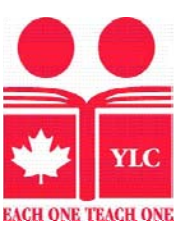
I was pleasantly surprised. The book explains easy-to-understand concepts on managing a budget. It was simple to read, and it made sense.

I think that the author explains exactly what I need to know to be smart about my money. When I control my money, I can make money work for me, and not the other way around.

I recommend this book. Everybody should know how to make a budget and how to save for a rainy day.

**NOTE: Reading guides are available for all books in the Good Reads series. Follow the link:**

<http://www.abclifeliteracy.ca/en/goodreads/promotion>



**Yamaska  
Literacy  
Council**

203-505, rue Sud  
Cowansville, QC J2K 2X9

Phone: 450-263-7503  
Toll-free: 1-866-337-7503  
E-mail: [yamaskalit@endirect.qc.ca](mailto:yamaskalit@endirect.qc.ca)  
Website: [www.yamaskaliteracy.ca](http://www.yamaskaliteracy.ca)