

# MY STORY

by Olive Bernard



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This book was published by Toronto Public Library for Parkdale Project Read, an adult literacy programme in the west end of Toronto.

It was written by Olive Bernard, an adult learner who attends the learning drop-in at Parkdale Project Read. She wanted to write a book about her experiences because she felt it might be useful for other adult learners. The book was produced by the staff and learners in the programme.

For further information about Parkdale Project Read or to request copies of MY STORY write to:

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We reproduce here the text of Olive's story and selected illustrations from the book.



**I came to Canada in 1969.  
I had some friends who came.  
One of them wrote and asked if  
I wanted to come.  
I was a little reluctant at  
first but after some persuasion  
from my mom I decided to come.**

**At first I hated it.  
I was away from home for the  
first time and I missed my  
family and friends.**

**I started working one week  
after I came. I was doing  
housework. The lady did not  
like me much so after a month  
she let me go.**



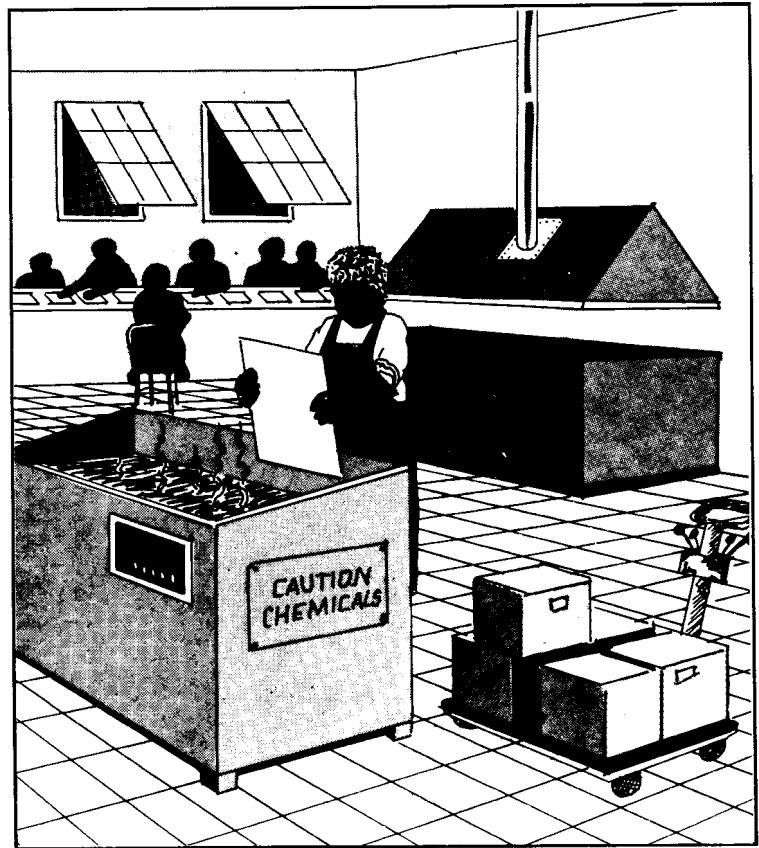
**After that I went to work for  
Mrs. Mason. She lived in King  
City. I had to live in because  
it was so far away.**

**Boy did I work hard for only  
\$35 a week. I asked for a raise.  
She gave me \$5 more. I did not  
think that was enough because  
the house was large and I had to  
take care of the dogs.**

**I kept asking for a raise.  
I was told they couldn't afford  
to give me one because they  
were building a swimming pool and  
buying horses.  
So I left.**

**I worked in a factory where they did electroplating. I became allergic to the chemicals and had to quit.**

**I worked in another factory where they make paper products. I was laid off because the company went bankrupt. I worked in so many places, I can't remember them all.**



**I did not like most of the jobs I did but it was nice to be making some money. I could send things home for my family and buy things for myself.**

**I still missed home but I was getting used to living here. I became a landed immigrant in 1975. I wanted to find a better job than the ones I had been doing, but because I could not read well I didn't know where to start. When I was filling out job applications, I had to ask a friend to go with me to help.**





Ever since I came to Canada I wanted to go back to school but I was too afraid to let everyone know that I could not read. About three years ago, there was an article in the paper about literacy programs in the United States. I wrote for more information about programs in Canada.

They wrote back and told me to go to the Citizenship and Culture building downtown. They told me to go to Parkdale. I did go there and was amazed there were other people there just like myself.



It's a very nice feeling, the way tutors go out of their way to make you feel comfortable. We as learners really enjoy this because it is something we never had when we went to school.

I don't feel so isolated since I started coming to Parkdale. There are days when I feel that things are not going so well but there are days when I feel great.

**Now I am going to a Board of Education Upgrading course and I am working towards becoming a health care aide.**

**I still go to Parkdale where I am learning to have more self-confidence about what I can achieve. A whole new world is opening to me. It is a lot of fun and I will continue with my education for a long time.**



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## **Three Learners Review Olive Bernard's *My Story***

*Olive Bernard's book has been very popular with learners and tutors at East End Literacy. Recently, our "George Brown" morning group read and discussed it, and three learners decided to write their own reviews. They have a lot in common with Olive. They are immigrants who have experienced similar joys and frustrations in Canada and they are working hard to improve their reading and writing skills in a community literacy program.*

First of all I think her story is a good thing. To tell people who are not educated and don't have job status. There are lots of people who have this problem. I think the first step is to give them a chance they did not have.

Olive Bernard is determined to better herself by going back to school and not taking shit or getting pushed around by anyone.

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I read the story by Olive Bernard and it's a very touching story. It tells me that reading and writing is very important to people. It took courage to go back to school in her late thirties. Living in Canada without being able to read and write, no Canadian status and no job skills, it is very difficult to get by. Working for a person who knows your position can be a headache.

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To move to another country is very hard to do, especially when you can't read. I sympathize with Olive. She gives me a lot of determination because her life and mine are very similar.

I found it hard to fill out job applications. I began telling a friend who told me to go to a literacy program. After three years I can write my address and read my first book. It was the best thing in the world. I will continue with my education for a long, long time.