

STRUGGLE

By: Linda Pummel

About a year ago, I decided I wanted to write my own autobiography. I wanted to tell others about my life long struggle with not being able to read or write.

Everything was a challenge. I couldn't even write a simple note. "I went to the store, I'll be right back," took twenty or thirty minutes. I could read some, but only by sight and by remembering. For me, to write that note, I would have to look in the newspaper or the telephone book for the words. I couldn't use a dictionary because I couldn't sound out the words. I know my alphabet, but if you can't sound out the word, the dictionary is useless. There were so many obstacles in my life because I couldn't read or write well.

One of these obstacles was when my son was 6 months old. I had to go back to work, but I didn't have a driver's license. I had to get one. I was so petrified about taking the written test for the permit. I was sure I would fail. I got the book from the Department of Motor Vehicles. I studied as much as I could and went for the test. When I opened my test booklet, I almost cried. The answers had to be written out. I failed the test. The woman working there told me I could take it again. I asked her if the test would be the same format. She told me that there were several different tests. She handed me a new test. I opened the booklet, and to my relief, the questions were street signs and multiple choice. I was so happy. I passed with only one wrong!

Another obstacle was work. I worked at a nursing home on and off for 30 years and nobody knew about my secret. I had even gotten a promotion as a Supervisor of Assisted Living Facility, but after a year I decided my role was too risky. If something happened where a patient got a wrong medication, there would be an investigation. If they found out I couldn't read or write I would surely get blamed for the mistake. I didn't want to take that chance.

I finally took the steps to change my life 7 years ago. My son was in the Navy and he was stationed in Scotland. I had no way to communicate with him. I wanted to write him a letter, but I didn't know

how. I knew this had to change. My caseworker gave me the number to the Adult Literacy Project. This is where my journey began.

With this disability, it is not easy. You have to do things over and over again, so your mind picks it up. You don't want people to know, so you hide any way you can. Stop hiding! Get help! You are just hurting yourself if you don't. It is never too late to start. I did get help. I've been in this program since 1998, and look how far I've come. In 2001, I was voted as Outstanding Student of the Year in the Palm Beach County Library System! I know I am on my way to becoming an author. Thank God for the Adult Literacy Project.

Linda Pummel has been a student in the Adult Literacy Project for seven years. She has had many years of experience assisting patients in nursing homes.

