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The following story was written by Daniel Haines, from Edmonton, Alberta. Daniel is part of BLAST, a student speakers' team from Alberta. This team is a group of literacy students who were trained to become professional speakers with [Literacy Alberta](#).

My Story (Part II of II)
by Daniel Haines

Over the years I have coached, been the president of sports leagues, been on local and provincial boards and been a Legion member for over 25 years. In all those cases, you never had to take a course or pass a test to be involved. It was usually a time commitment, going to tournaments, working bingos, selling tickets, or organizing an event.

Even as President, I had a secretary to do any paperwork, I just had to sign my name. If there was a social event, I would always be easy to get along with, and let someone else decide where to go or what show to see. If it was a dinner meeting, I would make reservations at peak time, near the back of the restaurant, so I could walk past the people and see what they were eating. I would always find an excuse to order last so I could hear what everyone else had ordered, and then either order the same as someone else, or ask for the special.

As the kids got older and the workplace got more competitive, it got harder and harder to hide. Each time I'd change employers, I would wonder if this time I would be found out. There seemed to be more and more paperwork. Then, a few years ago an injury forced me to make some changes in my life. For years I had struggled with an addiction and I finally realized, if I was to survive I needed to join a recovery program, but to be successful I knew I needed to be able to read better.

That's when I came to PALS. Over the last four years things have really improved. I am much more confident in my reading and although I may not be ready to write a book yet, I can see I am making progress. Four years ago I would never have dreamed of being able to write much more than a sentence and getting up in public to talk about my "weaknesses" would have been unthinkable. I am still using tricks, there is no way I could write this on my own... not yet anyways.

I have two learning devices that I rely on for a project like this. One is my tape recorder and the other is an assistant - usually my wife. Most people can probably prepare a short speech in a few hours, or maybe a day at most. For me to prepare for a speech or a report like this I need a couple of weeks.

First, I like to take a day or two just to think about what I want to say, then I will start to put my ideas on tape. When I think I have enough material, my wife and I will go over the tape, talk about it, and suggest areas that need work. Then we start to put it on paper. She will type it up for me and read it out loud while I read along with her. Once

the final changes have been made, she will type up the final version and put it on tape for me. That way I can listen and read along.

I will do this for several days, until I am comfortable enough to read it out loud. Whether it is a report for a board meeting, a speech, or a letter, we go through the same process. This is the first time I have shared this much of my story outside of my close circle.

I would never have been able to do this without the support of a number of people. First, my wife encouraged me to "give PALS a try". Then, after a couple of meetings I was paired up with a tutor. This one-on-one learning is just what I was looking for and I am still enjoying working with the same tutor.

Then a couple of years ago I got involved with the Steering Committee for the Students for Students Program at PALS. I wanted to do something to give back. Last year I was honored to be elected to the Provincial Literacy Alberta Board as one of the Learner Reps and [Literacy Alberta](#) gave me the opportunity to go to Ottawa for Literacy Action Day.

I am Alberta's Learner Rep. to the MCL - the [Movement for Canadian Literacy](#). This summer I was elected to the LAN Leadership Team, which is a part of the MCL Board. Without the support of my family, and the encouragement of the staff and volunteers at PALS I would never have dreamed I could accomplish what I have.

They have made it easier for me to be able to look at myself without being embarrassed anymore and to be able to share a bit of my story because if our messages of needing to improve literacy can reach others and help them to help themselves, then we all become part of the solution.