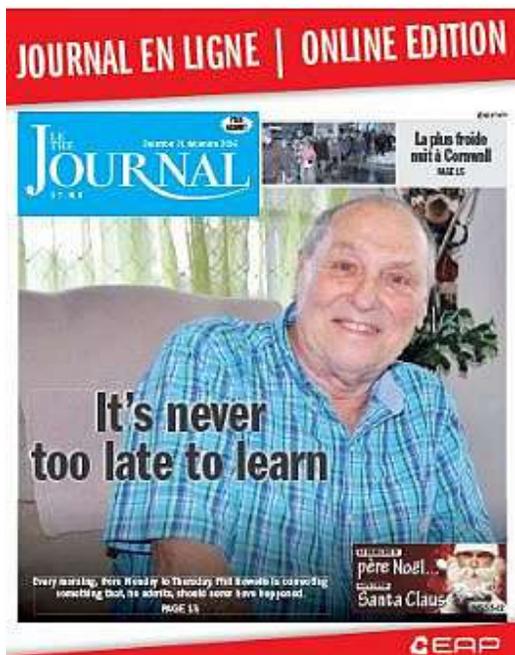




## G.E.D. Preparation Learner Testimonial



### Phil's Story

#### It's never too late to learn

Francis Racine/The Cornwall Journal

Every morning, from Monday to Thursday, Phil Howells is correcting something which, he admits, should never have happened.

"I was a kid and I can now admit that I was cocky," explained the 74-year old man who's actively pursuing his GED. "I thought I knew everything. Boy was I wrong!"

Howells left high school in ninth grade. "It was very different back then," he recalled during an interview with The Cornwall Journal. "We didn't have calculators or cell phones. Sure we had a guidance councillor, but he was also our gym teacher."

The man therefore left school, never to return. "Teachers would give us the strap if we didn't listen," he said. "When I got home, if my father saw that I had had the strap, he'd beat me."

Phil Howells is hoping to obtain his G.E.D. (high school equivalency) next summer. In the meantime, he religiously attends morning classes at Tri- County Literacy Council, Monday to Thursday.

Soon after, he obtained an apprenticeship in a press room for the Huntington Gleaner. "I was paid \$44 a week," he explained.

The work would have been considered hazardous by today's standards. "We had to work with ink that was made of lead at the time," he added. "I still remember having to do wedding invitations. The couple wanted it with gold lettering, so I had to mix all sorts of colors together, and then put the gold sparkles in it. And to think that I breathed all of that."

In addition, Howells stresses that he could have easily had blood poisoning if he had ever cut himself. "It was easy to get cut over there," he admitted. "With all of the lead, that would have caused blood poisoning for sure."

Sometime later, the man was offered a position with the Glengarry News. "It paid a lot better, \$160 a week," he said. "That was a lot of money back then!"

He therefore moved to the area in 1969. But although Howells still considers himself a Quebecer at heart, he admits that one factor influenced his move. "It was in the thick of the FLQ years," he recalled. "I remember having my car searched at gunpoint by the army. That's when I told myself it was time to leave Quebec."

With his new salary, Howells was able to buy a \$10,000 home in Lancaster and settled there. Yet although he did not have a high school education, he still managed to climb the ladder of success.

"To make more money, I used to pump gas here and there for a gas station," he expressed. "This one day, a spokesman from Texaco Canada approached me and asked me if I wanted to oversee one of their stations in Lancaster. I answered yes."

They sent Howells to take classes in order to learn how to "do things their way."

Fast forward some months and Howells now had 17 employees under him. He also possessed three tow trucks and a restaurant. Everything was going great, until he was diagnosed with cancer.

"I told the doctor I didn't want chemotherapy," he said proudly. "Then he told me that I better sell my tow trucks, because he didn't think my wife could drive them."

Howells sold his restaurant, his tow trucks and made it known to Texaco that his days with them were over. "I survived the cancer," he acknowledged.

### **Working on his bucket list**

But although he fared well for himself, Howells expressed that he always had a bucket list. At the very top of it, was obtaining his high school diploma. "It's been on my bucket list for 50 years now," he said, laughing lightly.

He therefore approached Tri-County Literacy Council in order to do so. "I've had a lot of encouragement from people all around me," he admitted. "My partner Sharon and my two daughters are great to me."

The hardest part of working towards his diploma isn't all the work he must do, and the many new things he must learn, but rather, starting the whole process. "To me, going there in the first place was the hardest thing to do," he mentioned.

While in his first classes, which started in early September, he approached the instructor and brought up something that makes Howells such an incredible human being. "I was worried I was taking the spot of a younger person who truly needs his or her high school diploma," he stated. "I was ready to leave. You know, kids nowadays need a grade twelve education to pick up trash for the city."

But fortunately for Howells, he was told that there was enough room for him. The man is therefore the oldest student in his class. "It doesn't bother me, being the oldest in the class."

In his morning classes, the man learns from an array of subjects, such as Math, English and History. "I'm doing Algebra right now," he explained. "It's funny, because when I left school, we were doing Algebra!"

Howells admitted though, that this time around, it seems easier. "I have an easier time learning now," he added.

The man is a hard student. When he finishes class, he walks all the way back to his Cumberland Street apartment complex, and loses no time doing his homework. "I made myself a nice little office where I can do all of that," he revealed. "I sometimes also go on Math websites. They are really good."

So what is the student's advice to potential high school dropouts? "Don't do it! Whatever you do, don't drop out of school. When I left, it was easy for me to find a job, because back then everyone was hiring. But now, you'll have a very hard time without your grade twelve education."

### **Wants to make his grandchildren learn**

Following his mother's death, at the age of 95, Howells undertook a project that keeps him busy to this day. "It all started when I gave the eulogy at my mother's funeral in Kingston," he recalled.

In it, the man highlighted all the things his mother saw throughout her many years on earth. "She came to Canada from Scotland in 1919," he explained. "She saw so many inventions such as the television, the evolution of cars and all of that."

Then came the idea to put pen to paper, or finger to the keyboard if you will. Howells constantly writes down what he lived through, the things he saw all around him while he was growing up. Yet, although his work has 55 pages and keeps growing, he admitted that it will never end. "I don't want it to be finished," he smiled. "I want my grand children to add to it. I want them to write down what they see, so they can show it to their children and so on."

It's no surprise then that even in the harshest weather; Howells puts on his hat, mitts and coat and walks the miles it takes him to go to class. After all, he's a man on a mission; a man who wants to learn and is prepared to work for it.