

Ode to a Philanthropic Investor



by Thelma Fayle, July 2014

Editor's note: Thelma is a strong supporter of the CFB and of its mission. She is especially concerned about the lack of quality blindness skills training available to blind Canadians. This poem is her initiative to help bring needed awareness to the issue.

Ode to a Philanthropic Investor

I want to write a book –
I want to sit at my computer and write a book
that I wish had been written in Canada
a hundred years ago.

I want to write about five working-age blind people's experiences as they gain skills and
confidence at a training centre in the U.S.

I want to hear from the five people every week of the nine-month long, live-in program they
attend.

I want to take notes and ask them questions –
and find out what is happening to them
as they work hard to transform their own lives.

I want to track what will happen to this group of blind Canadians,
who have had to settle for less until now.

I want to know what this chance
to learn new skills feels like to them.
I want to know if it is scary and exciting.

I want to tell readers of my book what happens
when working-age blind Canadians get a real chance –
to learn at centres of excellence,
instead of being shunted to a charity
for a cane or talking book.

I want to help sighted people understand
that telling blind people to go to a charity
to deal with their blindness is insulting.
I want to make sighted Canadians imagine
what it is like to be told to take the serious medical issues of their children to a charity.

I want to try to begin to undo whatever it is
that has shaped most sighted people's fear of blindness
that causes us to shiver and shake in our boots
at the very thought of being blind.

I want readers of my well-researched book to know
that blind people today, in Canada, have been diminished
by condescendingly sympathetic attitudes about blindness.

I want to write about the resolve of the five participants
in a way that will inspire others in our community.

I want to use my digital recorder – to capture
the five participants laughing with a resounding joy
that runs deeply through their whole bodies –
when they come back to Canada and tell about the nine months
that changed their lives.

I want to describe how the five grew and gained confidence,
and looked back on how far they've come.

I want to watch their faces light up
as I take notes about their most meaningful parts.

I want to write about the exciting new jobs they search for
when they come home and chase their passions.

I want to write about how they feel
about being able to get jobs and work hard

and go out to a nice restaurant on a Saturday night –
like everybody else.

I want to interview the ones who will be inspired
to follow in the footsteps of these five mentors from B.C.

I want to dedicate my book to Ken Westlake,
an accomplished, quiet and private man
who stood up at the Canadian Federation of the Blind
convention a few years ago and spoke
joyfully and vigorously
about how the program changed his life.
I want to thank Ken for the chill
he sent up my spine.

I want to interview Elizabeth Lalonde
and find out the status of her seemingly impossible dream –
of opening an immersive training centre right here in Canada – one day,
to be run by the blind, for the blind.

I want to thank Graeme McCreath in my Acknowledgement section
for his agitated and courageous voice
in his book, *The Politics of Blindness* –
we heard you, Graeme, we heard you.

I want to wave my book in the air at a book launch –
and shout out to the spirit of Helen Keller:
“We get it, Helen, we Canadians are finally doing
what you told us to do a hundred years ago.”

But,
I need \$36,000 for tuition for each of five working-age blind Canadians
to attend world-renowned independence training centres
in the U.S. where they will receive essential blindness skills
and pre-employment skills training –
unavailable in Canada.

Is there a philanthropic investor out there with a spare \$180,000 to pay the participant’s ways.

I’ll write the book for nothing. I just want to see it done.

Please contact the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB): info@cfb.ca