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No longer able to work at manual labour, Art Boudreau enrolled in a program to improve his literacy. Now he's an award-winning author.

From illiterate to author, Art poised to win prize

Michelle Martin
Victoria News

VICTORIA • A 47-year-old man injures his knee at work and after surgery the doctor tells him he can't continue working manual labour jobs.

He's not sure what to do because he's illiterate. But the larks start singing when he enrolls in a Victoria READ Society program.

Ten months later he's a published author.

This unusual situation was more than a fairytale for Art Boudreau.

"Basically, it was like my whole life flashed in front of my eyes," he said. "With no education, who's going to hire me? You need a Grade 12 education even at McDonalds."

Boudreau credits the Victoria READ Society for his newfound writing abilities that have enabled his storytelling passion to reach the pages.

"When I started at the READ society last September, I was at a Grade 2 or 3 level," he said. "Basically, I couldn't read."

The Victoria READ society has classes for adult stu-

dents in basic skills and skills for employment.

"They're classes designed to help adults raise reading, writing, and math levels to a point where they can carry on with further training," explained READ employee Janie Harrison.

At present, a person is deemed literate if he can read and write at a Grade 8 to 10 level. Boudreau could not.

To improve his skills, he attended full-time classes that included lessons on using computers.

"I started to write little stories and they got bigger and bigger," he said.

Every year, the students apply to have a learner's event through Literacy BC, and the entire class voted to help Boudreau see his writing published. The other students helped to approach Trafford Publishing, a Victoria-based self-publisher, and Trafford offered to cover part of the publication costs.

Harrison said Boudreau had his classmates' support because he not only was "an incredibly wonderful fellow," but also because "he had a story to tell and he told it well."

"The class always enjoyed reading and listening to

his stories," she added.

Boudreau was inspired to write *Elephant Mountain* from tales he heard in a pub when he lived in Nelson in B.C.'s Kootenays region.

He began writing in December, and the story that emerged involves a young Irishman in the 1880s who went to Nelson looking for gold.

As the story goes, the prospector used to go up Elephant Mountain at night with his mule named Paddy and he'd only light a lantern half way up so as not to be followed.

"People said, 'You've been there haven't you?' When I get right into the writing, it's like I'm there, I can see it, I can smell the air," Boudreau said.

One of the most influential tools the READ teachers taught Bourdeau was how to write dialogue.

"That just opened the big door," he said. "It's like, my characters could speak now."

Elephant Mountain, published June, is a finalist for the Canada Post National Literacy Award, for which the winner is expected to be announced shortly.

But Bourdeau isn't waiting around; he's already writing a follow up to *Elephant Mountain*.