

Learning Together

Don Simmons' first job after college was to teach English and French to high school students in Long Beach, California. While a teacher, he used his French speaking and reading skills and signed on to be a tour guide for the National Education Association (NEA), taking NEA members around the world. "I toured in over 100 countries, in all seven continents, including Antarctica," he said.

After teaching for 14 years he decided that he was ready for a change. "It was a quite a leap," he recalled, to give up teaching, California and enter the corporate world.

He moved to Philadelphia and worked at Strawbridge & Clothier as a personnel manager for six years, then became a bank corporate trainer in 1983 at First Pennsylvania Bank, now Wells Fargo. Don retired from the bank after 21 years and began looking for other opportunities.

While he loved traveling, he wanted to do more to help the community. He spotted an article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* about a retired dentist who was volunteering at Center for Literacy (CFL) and thought volunteering at CFL would be a good fit for him.

Not only was it a good match for Don, volunteering at CFL turned out to be an excellent choice for the students that he began to tutor. Rose Hopkins' fear of reading vanished after several sessions with Don. "Before I came to CFL I told myself I would never be able to read. I'm no longer afraid. Now, I'm on a roll for improvement. I no longer have a fear of reading."

"Any money that is spent to support CFL for someone to arrive at the point that they can overcome the fear of reading and writing is worth every penny spent. That is the reward that I get, for someone to overcome their fears," said Don.

Don asked to tutor a small group of students instead of having the usual one-on-one sessions. In addition to Rose, he tutors Euphemia Yormie and Ashley Wilson twice a week. He sets up a situation which he describes as "an environment in which the learners will value the learning themselves. I show interest, put the burden of learning on the students." He has been tutoring all three for over a year.

For the first time, Euphemia was recently able to fill out a job application on her own. Rose did not realize that she is very good at math. Ashley, who has a high school diploma and needs to beef up her math skills, plans in three months to go to Community College of Philadelphia or take on-line college classes, and study early childhood education.

"The highest compliment is that they come to class," said Don. Euphemia, who is from Liberia and has four children, comes to tutoring after a 12-hour evening shift as a certified nursing assistant. Ashley works two part-time jobs, then comes to tutoring. Rose takes a bus part-way, then walks to her sessions.

Despite these hardships, the doors at CFL will always be open for Rose, Euphemia and Ashley to pursue their dreams.