

of changing lifestyles. "Many people here had to go to work at the age of fourteen. There was no time for them to play with words, to play with education," she said.

Often, adults with poor reading and writing skills must keep the same job for lack of the basic skills required to move up the ladder. "They live in terror of losing their jobs," Smith said.

Gilliam remembers struggling on the job and in other facets of life. Reading road signs, hunting regulations and shopping lists, and filling out job applications and tax forms were problems for him.

Gilliam, who used to sketch out pictures as memory aids, carry around a small dictionary and ask his wife and family for help reading and writing, said people with poor literacy use such methods to get around their problem without solving it.

"A person who can't read or spell has all kinds of ways that they can think up to kind of compensate for it," he said.

Gilliam, who worked as a rental supervisor for Roseburg's city parks department, received a shoulder injury and was forced into a worker's rehabilitation program. It was then that he was referred to LCC's free Adult Basic Education program.

Information about the LCC and similar local programs, as well as one-on-one tutoring opportunities, is available by contacting the Lane County Literacy Coalition at the Eugene Public Library.

Lisa Henry, a volunteer tutor coordinator at LCC, said anywhere from two to five prospective students contact the coalition's referral service each week.

Although excited about learning, Gilliam said he was "kind of nervous about going back into the classroom environment."

Apprehension is a typical response for adults returning to the classroom, according to Lamoreux. "The hardest time is when they come through the

door. It's very painful for people to expose themselves," she said.

However, once the process begins it is usually easy for the adult learner to develop new skills, Smith said.

"An adult has all the information they've picked up orally all these years," she said. "They know the meaning of all the words, they know the content; they just need the technical skill of reading."

The adult enrolling in LCC's Adult Basic Education program is tested to determine his or her needs. From this, instructors can develop a specialized program for each student.

The LCC program teaches all basic subjects for which reading and writing are a fundamental part. "What we really teach is how to learn," Lamoreux said.

Although the learning process usually comes easy for adult students, they face other barriers as well.

"They've got all this day-to-day stuff to look after — their

bills, their work, their (spouse) and kids — then they try to squeeze things into their minds. It's kind of hard," Gilliam said.

Lamoreux said many psychological barriers in adult students are constantly reinforced by society. Terms such as "illiterate" and "disabled

learner" give adult learners a negative view of themselves, she said.

"What they hear tends to give them a negative impression," Lamoreux said. "When they come here they always say, 'I feel so dumb.' It's sad that anybody should feel that way

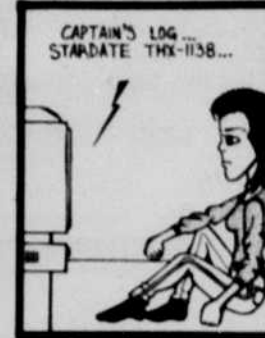
because there's nothing wrong with them."

Henry agrees. "They've been out there in our community for their whole lives. They're working and they have families. They've done everything very well. But reading was just not a priority, until now," she said.

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by J.S. Bock



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