



Christopher Bowers

Christopher Bowers believes in the power of the personal story to educate people, both young and old. He is the Executive Director and facilitator of Community School Interviews and the New Horizon Seniors Program, *The Power of the Personal Story*.

Community School Interviews (CSI) began in 2005, but the process started about 30 years ago, says the Marshall McLuhan Award winning teacher.

“When I left teaching, I thought, ‘which of all the things I’ve done, do I really love?’ and what I really love is talking to people. I am fascinated with their stories. The personal story is one of the most powerful tools for developing self-confidence.”

Through CSI, Christopher involves students in the personal story activity. He provides teachers with handouts to acquaint students with speakers who go into the classroom to tell their personal stories. Students ask questions and, after the presentation, write a journal from which Christopher gleans feedback.

Les Lengyel, a CSI speaker from Campbell River says, “It’s not the experiences we go through in life that are important; it’s what we think of them that matters.”

Les lost his left arm in an electrical accident at the age of seven. The following year, he burnt his right hand, leaving him with only four fingers and partial use of that arm; yet, he has been involved in every natural resource industry in B.C.

“I have received awards from the

The Power of Personal Story

BY VERNICE SHOSTAL

Canadian Home Builders Association for building houses, condominiums and townhouses, and I can’t hold a hammer,” he says. “I hired architects, engineers and carpenters.”

Les has what he calls a knack for turning a vision into a reality.

When he was 50, he smashed his left leg skiing. It took him two years to learn to walk again. Now he walks four kilometres a day.

Students are amazed with the success Les has made of his life and the obstacles he has overcome. “What I learned from Les Lengyel,” says one student, “is that there is no limit to what you can do in life as long as you believe in yourself.”

A realtor with a PhD in Sociology from the University of Paris, Dallas Chapple advises high school students to think outside the box. When she returned to Canada from France with her PhD, Dallas landed a job as a corporate planning consultant with the CBC.

“My retirement date was printed on the upper right-hand corner of my

cheque every two weeks,” she says. Not an ideal way to motivate the natural entrepreneur, Dallas left the CBC and went to work with Mary Kay Cosmetics, where she stayed long enough to own four of the famous pink Cadillacs.

After spending some time in the



Dallas Chapple

U.S., Dallas and her husband returned to British Columbia, where she decided to try real estate. Now, 16 years later, Dallas talks to students about career alternatives.

“A lot of students want to become rich and famous, but they don’t know the career choices out there. They don’t think about creating a job and a career for themselves.”

Dallas says one of her talk themes, “Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles,” fits seniors as well as young students. Seniors who want to get back into the workforce face the same challenges students do – they need more confidence in themselves. She suggests



Les Lengyel

Photos: Peter A. Smith

getting back into any line of work to gain confidence because, from there, “you can go anywhere.”

Besides her full-time career, Dallas gives back to the community in her role as vice-president of the Symphony Board, board member of the B.C. Children’s Hospital and Rotary.



Photo: Bernard Brown

John Anderson

Another CSI speaker, retired Admiral John Anderson came from humble beginnings on a farm and rose to the highest position in the Canadian Forces.

When John was seven, his father retired on a pension of only \$49 a month, but his parents desperately wanted him to attend university. With that same desire, a strong work ethic and the help of a school counsellor, John joined the military in the Regular Officer Training Program and earned his degree.

Highlights of John’s career include his appointment as Commanding Officer of the Equimalt-based HMCS *Restigouche*, Director General of the Marine Doctrine and Operations, head of Canadian Nuclear Submarine Acquisition Project, Commander of the Canadian Navy, and finally, Admiral and Chief of Defence Staff.

One of the many challenges he faced in military life was moving his family 18 times over the course of his career. John tells students if they study hard, they can get ahead – teamwork and leadership are critical.

Retired from his military career, John still works with the Canadian Forces College in Toronto and does contract work with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization with its base in West Virginia. He contributes to the community as past president of the Maritime Museum society, and is a founding member and current president of the Victoria Tall Ships Society. In his spare time, John sings in an all-men’s choir.

workshop for seniors and other groups helps people ask questions of one another to get responses that easily communicate their ideas, insights and experiences.

“The results are absolutely profound,” says Christopher. As one senior participant in the workshop put it: “Ideas flourish and seniors actually start goal setting, rather than waiting to die.”

For more information, visit www.csinterviews.com or call Christopher Bowers at 250-213-5340. **SL**

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