

With tutor's help, man finds a world of words

- KATIE DUNN News-Post Staff
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Joyce Routzahn, who has been tutoring readers since 1978, smiles while working with Ed Moss.

Photo by Doug Koontz

Ed Moss could read, but not well. He wrote, but his words were barely legible.

The father of three spent two and a half years traveling weekly from his home in Jefferson to see Frederick County Literacy Council volunteer tutor Joyce Routzahn in Middletown.

"She tore me down and put me back together," Mr. Moss said. "It was the best thing that ever happened to me."

One evening a week Ms. Routzahn, a retired teacher, would sit down with Mr. Moss at a table in her wallpapered kitchen and go over vowels, words and sentences, consistently motivating Mr. Moss.

"This lady, she's like the energizer," said Mr. Moss. "She is a very patient lady. She challenges me at all times. If she can do it and she's up in years, and I'm 45, then I can."

Mr. Moss said he was able to get by in school, but knew he was missing some of the fundamentals of language and writing.

Mr. Moss went to Ms. Routzahn for help while also coaching football, basketball, working full-time as a construction inspector for the City of Frederick and taking night classes at the University of Baltimore.

"My hunger for learning exploded," he said.

Mr. Moss pursued his bachelor's degree for 14 years after getting his associate's degree from Frederick Community College. Going to Ms. Routzahn, who has tutored 26 Literacy Council students over 25 years, helped Mr. Moss with basic reading and writing, which in turn helped him get through his college classes.

Some people were surprised that he was not embarrassed to be going to a literacy tutor.

"I don't feel ashamed. I knew my weakness. I built on my weakness." Often people respect you more when you admit your weaknesses, said Mr. Moss.

He had a good attitude, said Ms. Routzahn. "He is a positive person. A positive outlook is part of our teaching. It's about building confidence."

With a lot of encouragement from Ms. Routzahn and his family, especially his wife, Mr. Moss stayed motivated. He soon moved on to the Literacy Council's challenge series, as Ms. Routzahn continued to help him.

"At times I was going really fast," said Mr. Moss. "Other times I'd have to pull myself back."

Over the years his professors at the University of Baltimore noticed that his essays were getting better, Mr. Moss said. "The improvement of my writing skills went off the wall."

Ms. Routzahn noticed his progress too.

"The words kept getting longer and longer," she said. "I had to do more homework because I couldn't keep up with him."

In January 2002, Mr. Moss graduated from the University of Baltimore with a degree in history. His family and Ms. Routzahn joyfully attended his graduation ceremony.

Mr. Moss is now president of the Brunswick Railroad Museum and continues his work as a construction inspector. He has persuaded some of his friends to get help from Literacy Council volunteers.

Ms. Routzahn keeps in touch with many of her former pupils. Now Mr. Moss and Ms. Routzahn often meet for lunch at the Frederick Diner to share stories.

"You can make good friends through education," said Mr. Moss.