



An old gardening manual and a photograph of her and her son tilling are relics of a time when Lyford’s business was in full bloom.



Standing on the steps of her incomplete and long overdue house, Lyford feels hesitant to abandon this project and to move on with her life.



PIONEERING

Photos & Story by Mary Barber

In Diane Lyford’s eyes, there is much more than just an uncompleted house at risk. Parting with her former home means she would be both selling her business, and selling her memories. The house remains unfinished, soon to become a monument of her previous life.

Lyford, 52, walks a familiar path that leads to her former homestead of 30 years. She still finds beauty in the overgrown fields surrounding her house. She points at the shrubs and damp dirt promising at one time they were abundant with flowers from her business.

The importance of education for everyone is being emphasized all across Canada. With improvements to colleges all across the country, the access to post-secondary degrees is growing. Many women who just like Lyford have been denied of their education are beginning to change their gender roles.

According to Statistics Canada, the 21st century has seen a shift in gender roles. Family structures are changing with the number of single-parent households increasing.

Lyford said that completing her education was always met with little enthusiasm. She had a lot of resistance returning to school.

“My ex-husband didn’t nurture that idea,” says Lyford. “He said I didn’t need any of it, and I felt that my education had been robbed of me.”

During her high school years, Lyford was expected to heavily contribute to the family, helping to support her mother. This was Lyford’s catalyst for losing her education. Eventually Lyford was con-

vinced by her mother to quit school and to get a part-time job.

“She convinced me to quit because I wasn’t very good at standing up for myself,” said Lyford.

Lyford came of age when segregated gender roles were predominant. The career and professional advancement of a woman was rendered as less important by social standards, and because of this, education was gender specific. For Lyford, housekeeping and child care had been deemed a priority above education.

At 52 years old, finishing your high school education can be a humbling experience.

“As an adult, going back to school takes a great deal of humility” Lyford says, with her high school report card present.

Lyford has enrolled herself at the Quinte Adult Education Centre - a facility based on community learning alternatives for adults in pursuit of completing her high school diploma.

Lyford’s learning is affected by the experiences she brings every day. Since this is Lyford’s first time living on her own, free of her ex-husband’s oppression, her experiences so far have taught her that taking an active role in life is important.

Most importantly, Lyford says, is that she is given information that will help her improve the situation of that of her children, so that she can provide them with a place of safety away from their father. Lyford states that it’s never too late to return to school, because “learning and life is synonymous.”



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Part of returning to school for Lyford means to rediscover her love for art as a means of therapy and rejuvenation.