

## THE BELLS ON FINLAND STREET

What a sense of achievement and pleasure it was to finally be able to read a book in English. It was, “The Bells on Finland Street” by Lyn Cook. I had had to learn to read in English after arriving in Canada from Holland. I had missed reading so very much as it was a passion of mine from Grade One on as soon as I learned to read.

This book affected me on many levels. I related to Elin who was nearly the same age as I was when I first read the book. My family were immigrants who were poor during the first years we lived in Canada after coming to this country in 1951 from Holland. My Dad worked underground in Creighton Mine, and carried a lunch pail to work every day. Elin’s father whom she called Isa also worked in the mine but the specific mine was not mentioned in the story. That didn’t matter as our fathers’ experiences were the same.

Lack of money was always a concern for my parents and hers as well. Consequently, hard work was the norm. Her mother stayed home, partly because she spoke English poorly and to take care of Elin’s little brother. My Mom was also a stay at home mother for similar reasons taking care of our sick baby Marianne and my little brother Franky. The English language was a problem for her as well as she didn’t have contact with many people outside the home.

Loneliness for our grandparents was also a common theme with Elin and with me. It underlined the difficulties of being so far from our home countries although Elin was born in Canada and I was not. Lack of family support made life harder especially when Elin’s father suffered an accident in the mine. In our family, baby Marianne was hospitalized numerous times with my parents not having any family to support them when she died at one year of age.

“The Bells on Finland Street” will always have a special place in my heart. I have read countless books since discovering that little book at the Creighton Mine Public Library and enjoyed them all. However, numerous times I have returned to my first English book and loved reading it every time.

(388 words)