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THE WOMAN WHO COULDN'T READ... BECAME A PLAYWRIGHT

"I was brilliant at games at school, but when it came to reading a book or writing things down, I just didn't bother," explains Sue Torr. "I didn't want to bother the teacher. I left at the age of 15, unable to read and write." Embarrassed, Sue kept her illiteracy a secret, even from her husband, a sailor, all through their 16-year marriage. "At first, he used to write me letters. When he was on leave, he'd ask, 'Why don't you ever write to me?' I'd give him some excuse. I didn't want him to think I was a dunce," she recalls.

"One night my mother-in-law said, 'Sue, what's on TV tonight? Could you just have a look in the newspaper?' I picked it up and pretended to look. 'There's nothing much on,' I said. 'What's on the second channel?' she persisted. 'Just a load of rubbish,' I said. In the end, I left the room and ran upstairs."

According to a 1996 study by the UK-based Basic Skills Agency, 19 per cent of 37-year-olds have low or very low literacy and 23 percent have low numeracy. Sue sums up the feeling: "You live in fear. You've got a twinge in your stomach every time reading is mentioned." Finally, Sue admitted her secret. "I was with a bunch of children. They were going through a book and knew all the words. One child asked me to help her and I sat there struggling with it. This little girl said, 'You can't read that word, can you Miss?' I said, 'No, I can't.' She said, 'But you're old. Why can't you read?' I felt terrible."

Sue signed up for adult literacy classes and attended them for the next three years. Then came the turning point. One day, her teacher asked her to write down a list of what you could and couldn't do if you were illiterate. "I just kept writing and writing," remembers Sue. "My teacher understood my writing and took it home to type it out." She then took the typed manuscript to a local writers' group. With their help, it became her first play. *Shout It Out* was performed at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, and on local radio. It won a Sony Radio Award. She then raised \$35,000 to produce

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