

Chapter IV

Segment to Circle

This chapter, titled "Segment to Circle," delves into Jean Little's life experiences as a disabled individual, with a specific emphasis on the social and attitudinal barriers she encountered. Her autobiographical works, *Little By Little: A Writer's Education* and its sequel, *Stars Come Out Within*, offer detailed insights into her upbringing and adult life. The analysis within this chapter centers on how these autobiographical writings portray diverse aspects of Little's life, encompassing her educational journey, experiences within an inclusive environment, medical examinations, immigration narrative, and her persistent endeavours to achieve social inclusion. Through the exploration of Little's journey from being segmented by societal barriers to finding her place within a supportive circle, this chapter sheds light on the complexities of disability, resilience, and the pursuit of inclusion in society.

Jean Little's autobiographical reflections provide invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics of social barriers, illustrating the manifold challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in navigating educational, social, and personal spheres within a society marked by varying degrees of inclusivity. Through a meticulous analysis of her life's narrative, this chapter seeks to underscore the significance of recognising and addressing social barriers to foster a more inclusive and equitable society for individuals with disabilities.

The understanding of disability has evolved significantly with the advent of the social model of disability, redirecting our focus from individual impairments to the broader societal structures and attitudes shaping the experiences of individuals with disabilities. This model underscores the pivotal role played by social barriers—ranging from policy and legal constraints to societal attitudes, physical limitations, economic disparities, and cultural and social constraints—in creating an inclusive or exclusive environment for individuals with

disabilities. Within this paradigm, the emphasis is on identifying and dismantling these barriers to facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities in all facets of life.

Scholarly insights exploring social barriers shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of societal involvement and attitudes. Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein's exploration in *Inclusion, Disability, and Culture* illuminates the challenges faced by inclusive education movements due to insufficient, “community commitment and negative societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities” (40). Brett Smith and Andrea Bundon, in their discussion of the UK social model of disability, in the article “Disability Models: Explaining and Understanding Disability Sport in Different Ways,” emphasise the societal oppression experienced by disabled individuals, attributing disability not to impairment but to social barriers—structural and attitudinal impositions by society. Oliver, in *Understanding Disability*, advocates for the removal of societal obstacles to enable complete “social inclusion and citizenship for people with impairments” (18).

The discourse within scholarly literature emphasises the primacy of societal barriers over personal restrictions of impairment. In *the Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, proponents of the social model reiterate that impairment assumes no role; the focus remains steadfastly on the “social barriers” contributing to disability (366). Additionally, Abberley et al.'s perspective defines disability as an outcome of the “social barriers” ingrained within society (418). Colin Barnes et al., in *Disability Studies Today*, highlight the social model's assertion that disability stems from social arrangements that restrict activities through the “erection of social barriers” in various areas of life (40).

In *Little By Little: A Writer's Education*, Jean Little shares her experiences from childhood through adulthood. As indicated on the book's cover, published by Penguin Books Canada Limited, it is described as, "*Little by Little: A Writer's Education* is an unforgettable account of the joys and challenges of growing up, of family, and of love. It is also a tribute to

the resilience of the human spirit." Consequently, Jean Little serves as an inspiring example for individuals with disabilities, largely due to her parents' unwavering support for inclusivity and education.

The life of Jean Little is intricately scrutinised through the lens of the social model of disability, which places less emphasis on the impairments of individuals and instead focuses more on the social barriers and exclusionary forces they encounter. This perspective is articulated by Tom Shakespeare in Lennard J. Davis' book *The Disability Studies Reader* (5th ed.). Shakespeare acknowledges that "It is not the disabled person who is to blame, but society" (199). Nevertheless, Jean Little encountered significant challenges in accessing education and experiencing inclusion due to societal obstacles. Consequently, the social model of disability is employed to illuminate and analyse the issues and difficulties that Little faced within society.

Flora Jean Little, in her formative years, exhibits characteristics of perceptual slowness, physical clumsiness, and a sense of physical inadequacy, largely oblivious to her underlying disability. Her siblings, notably Jamie, Hugh, and Patricia, initially respond to her differences with mockery and exclusion from their shared activities, primarily stemming from their limited comprehension of the nature of Little's impairment. Nevertheless, Little's parents, both medical professionals, astutely discerns anomalies in her visual perception and promptly identifies the underlying issue.

The article titled "The Right of Children with Disabilities To Education: A Rights-Based Approach To Inclusive Education" *UNICEF* underscores the significance of early identification of disabilities in children, stating, "Early identification and assessment to ensure that any developmental delay, impairment, or particular difficulty experienced by the child is identified and addressed as early as possible in order to ensure the provision of appropriate support and care." This proactive approach not only helps individuals like Little

evade unnecessary social challenges but also ensures they receive optimal guidance for leading a stress-free life.

Little frequently becomes the target of mockery by her brothers and friends due to her poor vision. In one such instance, her friend Marilyn, while climbing, mentions that her mother has instructed her to prevent Little from participating in risky activities because of her visual impairment, stating, "She told me not to let you do anything dangerous because you have bad eyes" (*LBLAWE* 3). This situation has a detrimental impact on Little's mental well-being as she is subjected to hurtful remarks.

In the article titled "Teasing disabled children: facing the childhood shame of my actions," *URevolution* Judith A. Vessey and Katherine M. O'Neill express their poignant views on the bullying experienced by individuals with disabilities, emphasising the importance of teaching children that hurtful words and behaviours can inflict emotional pain, stating that "Children with disabilities can often be teased or excluded."

According to Davis's *The Disability Studies Reader* (5th ed.), individuals without disabilities oppress people with disabilities, as the social model demonstrates that "the problems disabled people face are the result of social oppression and exclusion, not their individual deficits. This places the moral responsibility on society to remove the burdens which have been imposed, and to enable disabled people to participate" (198). However, it's essential to note that prior to a specific incident, Little had no concerns about her vision. Following this incident, she reflects, "Children could be bad, yet not eyes" (*LBLAWE* 3), clearly illustrating that Little experiences bullying due to her low vision.

Little derives significant moral support, particularly from her mother, which empowers her to explore the world without fear. When confronted with ridicule, Little experiences a surge of anger and admits, "I was furious. I was also a little frightened" (*LBLAWE* 4). The continuous stream of disparaging comments takes a toll on Little. She

seeks clarification from her mother concerning Marilyn's mother's comment about her vision, inquiring, "She says I can't climb the tree because it's dangerous if you have bad eyes. I don't have them, do I? I can climb the tree, can't I?" (*LBLAWE* 4). Little's mother's response is pivotal, as she reassures her, saying, "You do have bad eyes, she said, but you go right ahead and climb the tree" (*LBLAWE* 4). Consequently, Little's mother provides her with indispensable support, bolstering her confidence to confront the world.

Despite enduring numerous insults, Little tenaciously pursues new endeavours, wholeheartedly immersing herself in activities akin to those in which her brothers partake. An illustrative example is her pursuit of music lessons under the tutelage of her grandmother, mirroring her brother Hugh's interests.

In contrast to Hugh, who rapidly grasps the nuances of musical skills, Little grapples with the intricacies of the learning process. Contemplating her challenges, she reflects, "If I just went slower, I could make it work" (*LBLAWE* 9). However, over time, she succumbs to the belief that mastering music is an unattainable goal, largely due to her struggles in comprehending her grandmother's instructions. Regrettably, instead of offering support, Hugh's laughter in response to her difficulties exacerbates her distress, leading to tearful moments that further "blurred my vision" (*LBLAWE* 10). Nevertheless, guided by her grandmother's patient mentorship and encouragement, Little persists and ultimately triumphs in committing the lyrics to memory.

Little's curiosity about her vision leads to an illuminating revelation by her mother, "Because you were born with scars on your corneas. The cornea is like a window in the front of the eye. It has to be clear if you are to see. Yours were all misted over. We could not see your pupils at all" (*LBLAWE* 16). This moment is transformative for Little, as it dispels the uncertainty surrounding her struggles with navigation, object comprehension, and her inability to partake in activities like tree climbing.

Despite their demanding work schedules, Little's parents demonstrate exceptional attentiveness to their children's well-being, enabling the early detection Little grapples with the realisation that she cannot read as proficiently as the rest of her family, with her visual impairment being the root cause. She takes pleasure in listening to stories and words, regardless of who is reading them, remarking, "Whichever one read, I loved listening. The only trouble was, so much of the time they were too busy" (*LBLAWE* 19). Consequently, Little becomes reliant on others to read books for her, leading to feelings of inadequacy and frustration as she waits for someone to assist her. She expresses her desire for independence, saying, "If I could read to myself, I would never have to wait for one of them to be free" (*LBLAWE* 19).

Little's mother plays a pivotal role in facilitating Little's access to education. With gainful employment and sufficient financial resources, the family is able to afford the necessary medical care and assistive technology required to meet Little's specific needs. In response to these requirements, "Little's father provided Little a study desk specially made for her and also gave her large-print books from Canada to enable her to read independently" (*LBLAWE* 20). This demonstrates the unwavering commitment of Little's parents to providing her with the essential support required to ensure her smooth and obstacle-free educational journey.

Despite the provision of large-print books, Little still encounters difficulties when reading due to her visual impairment. To address this challenge, Little's mother steps in to provide academic assistance. Despite the presence of pictures and enlarged prints in the books, Little's eyesight issues make reading a challenging task. She resorts to an unconventional method of reading by touching the book with her nose, illustrating the need to hold the text close to her nose in order to discern the letters or words. This unique reading

approach reflects the extent to which her visual impairment influences her reading experience:

When I did eventually progress to reading an actual book, it was a lovely big one with cream-coloured pages and large, clear type. Even so, I had to put my face very close to the page to be able to see the shapes of the words, and my nose brushed against the paper as I tried to read. The book had a good smell.

Not all books had that wonderful smell, I was to learn. (*LBLAWE* 21)

Little's primary challenge while reading is the perception that the letters are in motion, as she explains, "They often wavered and sometimes seemed to jump" (*LBLAWE* 21). Little's mother clarifies that it's her eyes that are moving, not the letters, and she imparts to Little the diagnosis, stating, "You have nystagmus. That means you have trouble keeping your eyes focused on one spot for more than a second at a time" (*LBLAWE* 21). Despite these visual obstacles, Little remains undeterred as she derives immense joy from reading, expressing, "Little by little, reading became my greatest joy. I still had trouble keeping the letters from jiggling, especially when I was tired. And the books I read before I was seven were fat only because they were in enlarged print" (*LBLAWE* 22). Her sole aspiration is to read independently while participating in a regular school, eliminating the need to rely on others to read books for her.

At the age of seven, Little moves from China to Hong Kong to consult an eye specialist. During the examination, Dr. Ling, the eye specialist, administers a test using a chart containing capital letters, which Little unfortunately fails. She is unable to identify a single letter on the chart. Dr. Ling conveyed the results to her parents, stating, "20/200ths visual acuity in the right eye, he said to my parents, but only 12/400ths in the left" (*LBLAWE* 32). Following the assessment, the doctor recommends that Little wear glasses to improve her vision beyond her current level.

Little harbours anxiety about starting her new school in Hong Kong and is apprehensive about speaking in front of unfamiliar classmates. She and her brother Hugh are both enrolled in the same inclusive school to pursue their education. To prepare for their new environment, they seek information about the school's dress code. Each class at the school consists of twenty-five students, with the majority being foreigners from the business class. The school uniform is described as follows, "It consisted of sleeveless cotton dresses in pastel pink, green, blue, or yellow. Each dress was trimmed with white rick-rack braid. And every dress had matching underpants" (*LBLAWE* 34). Despite her initial reservations, Little's mother's reassurances make her eager to attend school and embrace the learning experience.

On the first day of school, Little experiences a sense of awkwardness and unease. When the teacher instructs the class to read, Little's turn comes, and she begins reading with the book held close to her nose. Unfortunately, her unconventional approach to reading prompts her classmates to ridicule her. Feeling embarrassed and reluctant to continue reading, Little finds that even with her glasses, reading remains challenging, lamenting, "But I still had to hold my book so close that my nose brushed against the page. Everybody stared. Nobody noticed my good reading" (*LBLAWE* 35).

Consequently, Little becomes self-conscious in the presence of her classmates and keeps the book close to her nose, resulting in ink smudging her nose. Despite the laughter directed at her, she refrains from reporting the incident to her teacher, fearing the social stigma associated with tattletales. She shares her thoughts, saying, "When the teacher walked into the room, I longed to tell, but I didn't. I knew tattletales were despised by everyone. I spat on the corner of my handkerchief and scrubbed my short nose until it felt raw. But a red nose was better than a nose smudged with printer's ink" (*LBLAWE* 35). This ordeal leaves Little feeling apprehensive about remaining in the classroom without the presence of the teacher.

Little endures cruelty from her fellow classmates in the classroom, and she becomes acutely aware of the different way they perceive her. Recalling her mother's promise of "riding lessons," which was meant to bring her joy, she now associates school with discomfort and unease (*LBLAWE* 36). The behaviour of her classmates raises concerns from her class teacher, leading to discussions with Little's parents regarding her enrollment in inclusive schools.

The classroom atmosphere, coupled with the unkind gestures of her peers, instils fear in Little about attending school and erodes her enthusiasm for learning. Her profound disappointment is reflected in her statement, "I was gradually learning that if you were different, nothing good about you mattered" (*LBLAWE* 36). Consequently, the hostile environment created by her classmates challenges the anticipation of attending inclusive schools and receiving an education, highlighting the impact of peer interactions on individuals with disabilities.

Drawing from Davis's perspective on the social model of disability, he firmly asserts, "The problem of disability is relocated from the individual to the barriers and attitudes which disable her. It is not the disabled person who is to blame, but society" (199). In accordance with the narrative, Little is ready and willing to attend school despite her disability, highlighting her determination to receive an education. However, her experiences in the classroom, fueled by the actions of her peers, cast a shadow over her enthusiasm.

Little's class teacher strongly advocates for Little's parents to enrol her in a Sight Saving class in Canada, emphasising the crucial need for individualised attention and care within the classroom. This decision proves to be highly beneficial for Little's academic development, highlighting the positive impact of special education on children with disabilities. As noted in the article "Importance of Special Education for Special Children" in *Education Today*, special education not only facilitates learning for children with disabilities

but also enhances their cognitive abilities. It fosters an environment conducive to personalised learning, allowing students to derive enjoyment from education and gain confidence, ultimately contributing to their personal growth and development. The article underscores the importance of providing appropriate education to all special-needs children to support their holistic development.

Before enrolling in the Sight Saving school, Little undergoes another examination conducted by Dr. Aylesworth, who recommends her enrollment in a school tailored to her visual needs. In response to this recommendation, Little's parents decide to relocate to a new residence situated in close proximity to the Sight Saving school. This decision brings a sense of comfort to Jean Little, who eagerly anticipates her attendance at this specialised educational institution. Little notes that her classroom and the educational materials designed for children with special needs are meticulously crafted to cater to their unique requirements:

Our classroom was special. The chalk was fat and yellow instead of skinny and white. The blackboards were green. No other room in the Duke of Connaught school had green blackboards then. The enormous dictionary, which lay open on a stand, had large black print. Each desk had its chair attached to it and all of them could easily be moved so you could sit as close to the board as you needed to. The desk lids, which we used for writing and reading, could be tilted up and down like the one I had had in Taiwan.

(LBLAWE 60)

Little harbours concern about the effectiveness of her spectacles in improving her vision. To accommodate the needs of the students in her class, Miss. Burton, the teacher at the specialised school for individuals with visual impairments, adopts teaching strategies such as using large print books and writing on the board with larger letters. Little describes this approach, stating, "When Miss Burton printed on the board, she did it in large letters. The

thickness of the chalk made her lines fat and much easier to see than ordinary chalk marks" (*LBLAWE* 60). While acknowledging that everyone may experience visual challenges to some extent, Little recognises that her visual issues are more pronounced compared to her peers. She notes that although others wear glasses to address their vision issues, glasses provide little assistance in her case. Her mother offers an explanation using drawings:

Mother drew me a picture of the inside of the eye. The cornea was at the front. My corneas were scarred. Glasses could not take away the scars. Behind the cornea was the iris. My iris was stuck to my cornea in places. Behind the iris came the lens. Glasses could fix things that were wrong with the lens. My lens seemed to be fine. (*LBLAWE* 60)

In the Sight Saving school, one classroom encompasses multiple grade levels. Under the guidance of Miss Burton, Little excels academically, as she fondly recalls, "Even though I had less vision than others, I loved Miss Burton's class" (*LBLAWE* 61). This underscores the pivotal role that teachers play in special education classes for children with disabilities, as highlighted in Rebecca Branstetter's article titled "How Teachers Can Help Students With Special Needs Navigate Distance Learning" *Greater Good Magazine*. The article emphasises the crucial role of specialised teachers in providing immediate feedback and support to students in the classroom. Additionally, students may receive specialised services from specialists to develop essential skills related to focus, problem-solving, and emotional or behavioural self-regulation.

Despite her visual impairment, Little exhibits remarkable efficiency in her learning endeavours. She diligently applies herself to reading, writing, and learning, showcasing her strong work ethic and determination. Little's commitment to her education is particularly evident when she learns how to create a basket under her teacher's guidance, intending to present it as a Christmas gift to her parents. Reflecting on this experience, she notes, "I did

not feel cross-eyed all day long" (*LBLAWE* 75). This illustrates her resilient attitude, wherein she does not allow her condition to diminish her self-esteem, but instead, she invests significant effort in her educational pursuits.

At the age of eight, Little's parents arrange for Dr. Aylesworth to conduct another eye examination, which confirms her poor vision. Dr. Aylesworth suggests that Little could attend a specialised school in Brantford focused on preserving sight. However, Miss Bogart, a special education teacher, disagrees with this recommendation and urges Little's parents to enrol her in an inclusive school. Miss Bogart presents a comprehensive argument in favour of integrating Little into a regular school, asserting, "If she goes to Brantford, she'll soon think of herself as a blind child, she said. If she attends a regular class, she'll grow up thinking of herself as sighted and fitting into the sighted world and, after all, that is the world she'll have to live in when the years of schooling are over" (*LBLAWE* 75). Little expresses gratitude for having such a caring and thoughtful teacher.

Little is enrolled in an inclusive school, but she encounters bullying on her first day of classes, with hurtful remarks such as "She's cross-eyed" (*LBLAWE* 78) directed at her. This experience leaves Little feeling anxious and apprehensive about being in a class with children without disabilities. Ranjitha Dawn articulates the notion of oppression faced by individuals with disabilities at the hands of the so-called "normal" population in *The Social Model of Disability in India: Politics of Identity and Power*, describing them as a "vulnerable group" controlled and excluded from mainstream activities (14).

In the context of this novel, Little, being quite small, struggles to cope with these bullies. She experiences fear and distress, recounting, "I did not look to see who had said it. I was struggling to control the tears that were threatening to well up and spill over. Even though this was my first day in a regular classroom in Canada, I knew that crying right then would be a fatal mistake. I did not dare blink. I gazed straight ahead" (*LBLAWE* 78). Little's

unfamiliarity with the inclusive environment compounds her distress and fear in this situation.

Mr. Johnston, Little's fourth-grade teacher, serves as a valuable mentor and provides effective assistance to Little, despite his own disability. In her observation of him, Little noticed, "I saw that there was something wrong with his left arm and hand. He held awkwardly and did everything with his right hand" (*LBLAWE* 79). Nevertheless, Mr. Johnston excels in supporting Little's learning journey. Despite her impairment, Little demonstrates her ability to read with expression, and her teacher acknowledges this skill. Mr. Johnston assigns various activities to keep Little engaged and discovers that she reads, draws, and writes like any other child. However, math remains a challenging subject for her, as she explains, "Since I had skipped grade three, I was extremely shaky when it came to knowing my time tables" (*LBLAWE* 81). Despite excelling in reading with expression, comprehending real writing, and winning spelling bees, Little continues to face difficulties in math.

Little's academic achievements in the inclusive classroom provoke envy among her peers, who respond by teasing her rather than offering support or comfort during class. Little is subjected to hurtful comments from her classmates, who taunt her with the words, "Cross-eyed! Cross-eyed!" (*LBLAWE* 81). This relentless teasing leaves Little feeling fearful and despondent about her peers' treatment of her. As she walks home alone one day, a group of boys begins to chase her, causing Little to become terrified and flee while crying in terror. It is important to note that engaging in such behaviour with individuals who have impairments, especially by those without disabilities, is detrimental and unhealthy. Little reflects on this experience, stating, "I had not realized before how fast I could run. I also had not realized before how much I had depended on my two brothers for protection" (*LBLAWE* 82). Ultimately, she reaches home with bruised and bleeding knees.

The actions undertaken by children without disabilities can have harmful consequences and should not be endorsed. Such behaviours can subject children with disabilities to physical and psychological harm, leading to a reluctance to attend school and fostering a pervasive sense of apprehension when confronting the world. The book *Factsheet: The Social Model of Disability* published in *Inclusion London* elucidates the prevalence of oppression, discrimination, and social obstacles frequently encountered by individuals with disabilities, which do not stem from their inherent impairments. It underscores that these challenges emerge as a result of societal structures and organisation. Within the context of the book, Little expresses apprehension regarding her peers' menacing conduct towards her, underscoring the imperative need for heightened awareness and comprehension of the difficulties faced by individuals with disabilities.

Little engages in a conversation with her mother about the ordeal she has experienced. Her mother expresses an apology, albeit in a less-than-pleasant tone, stating, "I'm so sorry you had such a bad time" (*LBLAWE* 83). In an effort to alleviate Little's fears of her classmates, her mother provides comfort and imparts a valuable lesson, saying, "But you'll have to learn to laugh at teasing, Jean. If I walked you to school each day, you would never make friends" (*LBLAWE* 83). Consequently, Little's mother endeavours to facilitate her integration among peers. However, this endeavour takes an unexpected and tragic turn.

The neighbour, Mary Weber accompanies Little as they visit 'The Children's Library,' an outing that Little finds genuinely thrilling, cherishing the entire experience. Despite her initial trepidation in an unfamiliar environment, Little's enthusiasm remains undiminished. During their visit, they encounter the librarian, Miss Metcalf, who proceeds to collect Little's information for the issuance of her very first library card, a moment Little recounts as follows, "Miss. Metcalf handed me my first library card" (*LBLAWE* 87). This gesture fills Little with joy and excitement at the prospect of accessing library resources.

Little firmly believes in the transformative power of reading, asserting that following her visits to the library, "I stopped being 'Cross-eyed'" (*LBLAWE* 89). She has a distinct method of selecting reading material, stating, "With my impaired vision, it was easier for me to read short paragraphs than long, solid ones. I also liked books with people in them, and people tended to talk" (*LBLAWE* 89). Consequently, books become Little's steadfast companions, and her unwavering passion for reading endures despite her impairment.

In the face of new physical challenges, including frequent headaches, discomfort while chewing, and one-sided baldness, Little grapples with anxiety and stress. To address these issues, her parents take proactive steps by scheduling an appointment with a dermatologist. As per the assessment of the dermatologist, it is determined that Little is experiencing one-sided baldness on her head, attributed to dermatitis induced by stress. The dermatologist prescribes a viscous ointment for her mother to apply to the affected area and reassures Little that her hair will regrow. Reflecting on the physical challenges she faces at the age of nine, Little muses, "It is part of life, I thought, trying to work out what was bothering me, and I am forgetting it. This is something that is just mine" (*LBLAWE* 92). While occasional frustration and powerlessness creep in, she resolves, "But I determined to do my best to remember more. I would hold onto special moments and ordinary, everyday ones, too" (*LBLAWE* 93). Little encourages herself to embrace a joyful life by cherishing both remarkable and everyday memories.

Currently attending Victory School in the fifth grade, Little harbours concerns about her environment and peers in the inclusive school setting. Miss Marr, her fifth-grade teacher, shares a common experience with her previous teacher, Mr. Johnston, as they both had polio. Consequently, Miss Marr treats Little and her classmates with care and sensitivity within the classroom. Little's impression of her new teacher is favourable, as she reflects, "I liked Miss Marr a lot. And, even though we had only met an hour ago, I thought she liked me, too"

(*LBLAWE* 95). This indicates that Miss Marr is attuned to Little's challenges and emotional state in the inclusive classroom, contributing to a sense of comfort and security for Little.

In light of the challenges posed by impairments, the establishment of an inclusive classroom environment can prove to be demanding for children with disabilities. Drawing from Tom Shakespeare's insights in *Disability Rights and Wrongs*, it is emphasised that society bears the responsibility to adapt and create an environment devoid of barriers, with the onus not resting upon individuals with disabilities to conform or accommodate themselves. As Shakespeare aptly states, "If people with impairments are disabled by society, then the priority is to dismantle these disabling barriers, in order to promote the inclusion of people with impairments. Rather than pursuing a strategy of cure or rehabilitation, it is better to pursue a strategy of social transformation" (30).

Little's visual impairment complicates her ability to effectively engage with her surroundings, including viewing the board, navigating the classroom, and maintaining her designated space. As she reflects on her desk within the inclusive classroom, Little remarks, "My desk was new and varnished a shiny golden brown. It had been provided for me because, in theory, it could be moved to wherever I could see best. It was, however, far too heavy and unwieldy for Miss. Marr or me to shift. All that special desk did was single me out even more" (*LBLAWE* 96).

In the context of an inclusive classroom, it is imperative for children with disabilities to have a friend who can significantly influence their social, emotional, and intellectual development. When Little finds herself without anyone to interact with, she experiences a profound sense of isolation within the classroom. The arrival of Shirley Russell, a new student described as a War Guest, introduces a sense of diversity, yet she becomes readily embraced by her peers, prompting Little to observe, "She was different, too, but everybody wanted to be her friend" (*LBLAWE* 96). As Little watches her classmates engage with a girl

from a distant country, she becomes acutely aware of her own exclusion, leading to feelings of disappointment and distress.

At the behest of their teacher, Shirley willingly agrees to befriend Little and extends an offer to assist her whenever needed. Her immediate and affirmative response to the teacher's request fills Little with delight, as she eagerly anticipates the prospect of a new companion. Bursting with excitement, Little exclaims, "I could not believe this was really happening. Shirley Russell was actually going to be my friend" (*LBLAWE 97*). In the quest to create a comfortable and inclusive environment for children with impairments, fostering companionship is essential.

Little gratefully accompanies Shirley to the prayer area, appreciating the assistance in moving from one place to another. However, their camaraderie takes a disheartening turn when one of their classmates offers Shirley gifts in exchange for discontinuing her companionship with Little, prompting Shirley to accept the proposal and depart with the girl, leaving Little abandoned in the middle of the area. This abrupt turn of events leaves Little deeply upset, leading her to shed tears of disappointment. Seeking solace, she shares her feelings with a nearby tree, reflecting, "A tree is better than a human," as she finds solace in the presence of at least one companion (*LBLAWE 98*). It becomes evident that Little is deeply troubled by the unkind behaviour exhibited by her peers.

Little's faith and trust in friendship and others is shattered, leading her to harbour deep skepticism and a reluctance to place trust in anyone again. The pain and dissatisfaction stemming from this situation weigh heavily on her. In response, she embraces her newfound independence and takes charge of her own navigation, resolving, "I counted my steps on the way in, I'd find it tomorrow without any help from Shirley Russell" (*LBLAWE 99*). These social barriers persist within an inclusive school, prompting Little to confront them head-on and fiercely advocate for her own well-being.

Despite contending with her impairment, Little exhibits effective learning capabilities. She invests additional effort into her studies, with the sole exception being mathematics, a subject she harbours a strong dislike for. Little's dismay mounts when Miss Marr announces a math test one day. The test proceeds as Miss Marr reads the questions, granting the children time to record their responses before moving on to subsequent questions. Little requires more time for contemplation before she can commit her answers to paper and ultimately leaves one of the ten questions unanswered, her paper remaining blank. Following the test, Miss Marr instructs the students to self-assess their work while she reads out the correct answers.

Little's paper remains blank. She diligently records these responses as instructed and marks them with a tick. When Miss Marr inquires about who achieved a perfect score on the test, Little raises her hand, only to be met with silence from her classmates, who issue threats, asserting, "We don't intend to be friends with a cheater," as she acknowledge cheating on the test (*LBLAWE* 102). In the face of her longstanding desire for a friend, which has remained unfulfilled, Little finds herself terrified. She rationalises her decision, reflecting, "I had no choice. I longed for friends. In spite of Shirley's snub, I still hoped that someday it might happen. I couldn't risk turning the entire class against me" (*LBLAWE* 102). Thus, Little decides to confess her cheating to her teacher, taking into account all these factors.

Little subsequently admits her cheating to Miss Marr, but her teacher's response elicits no immediate reaction. Later, Little learns that Miss Marr was already aware of her actions, a revelation that leaves her profoundly surprised. Miss Marr inquires whether Little had cheated intentionally, to which Little responds, "It just happened... when you could not get the answers fast enough to keep up. Wasn't that the way it was?" (*LBLAWE* 102-103). Little is astonished by the understanding displayed by her teacher, acknowledging the question with, "Yes. That's just what happened, I told her, staring at the floor and trying not to cry. I'm no good at my time tables..." (*LBLAWE* 103). Ultimately, Little concedes to cheating on the

test due to her inability to recall the times tables swiftly. Miss Marr acknowledges this admission without reproach, demonstrating empathy and comprehension of the circumstances.

In comparison to her earlier years, Little demonstrates increased wisdom and resilience. In her earlier days, she was prone to tears and would empathise with those who bullied her. However, she now faces individuals who intentionally taunt her with the aim of causing distress and harm. For instance, a couple of boys from her school engage in stalking Little as she walks home from her school. Overwhelmed by fear, she seeks refuge in her home for several days. This scenario exemplifies the social oppression experienced by individuals with disabilities, and at her young age, Little struggles to comprehend the reasons behind such treatment. Initially, she contemplates confronting her tormentors and offering concessions in exchange for their cessation of harassment. Nevertheless, she eventually realises that fleeing or crying out in response to bullies is not her chosen course of action.

Little harbours a strong aversion to being taunted by her peers with the repeated phrase "Cross-eyed, cross-eyed" (*LBLAWE* 111). Given her parents' medical background, she turns to them for an accurate description of her visual issues. In response, her mother provides a detailed explanation, describing her condition as "strabismus, nystagmus, corneal opacities, and eccentric pupils" (*LBLAWE* 112). Little commits this information to memory. The following day, when the boys engage in teasing her as she walks home from school, she boldly confronts them, loudly proclaiming, "I have corneal opacities and eccentric pupils" (*LBLAWE* 113). This declaration prompts them to pause and regard her with disapproval before she continues on her way home. This time, she arrives home without shedding tears, which offers her a renewed perspective and a sense of relief.

Little gradually nurtures a growing passion for reading, dedicating her leisure time to crafting imaginative short stories. These stories reflect her deep love for reading and writing,

captivating young readers with their brevity and intrigue. Her engagement in this creative pursuit not only serves as a source of personal fulfillment but also prevents excessive rumination on her circumstances. Both her parents and teachers recognise and appreciate her talent, further motivating Little to explore and cultivate additional skills.

Little experiences profound fear and distress upon learning about World War II, particularly due to her status as a child with a disability, which intensifies her family's anxieties. During this tumultuous period, Hitler's brutal actions targeting individuals with disabilities are widely known, contributing to heightened concerns. Little's anxiety deepens when she watches a movie depicting Hitler's rule, recalling, "I had even seen Hitler himself, small and yelling and waving his arms, and watched people giving the Heil Hitler salute and cheering" (*LBLAWE* 116). Consequently, this exposure exacerbates Little's wartime depression.

Following her father's return from the Navy, Little experiences a sense of melancholy. Nevertheless, she seizes the opportunity to reveal her latent writing talent to him, of which he was previously unaware. She embarks on the practice of maintaining a daily diary chronicling her experiences, firmly asserting, "Real writers kept diaries. I would become a writer" (*LBLAWE* 126). This initial endeavour sparks her interest in composing poetry and stories. Although her aspiration is to craft longer stories akin to established authors, she grapples with extending her narratives beyond a few pages. Faced with this challenge, she opts to explore the realm of poetry, where brevity can be a strength.

Driven by her desire to create a standout poem and a thirst for poetry-related literature, Little dedicates herself to writing a holiday-themed poem, hoping for her father's appraisal. When she shares the news of her poem with her father, he responds with a mix of excitement and astonishment. In her own words, "He looked as excited as I felt. He thought writing a poem was important. Wonderful, even" (*LBLAWE* 130). Watching her father read

her poetry, Little awaits his feedback with a degree of apprehension. As her father's expression transforms, Little acknowledges the need to invest more time and effort in her poetry to achieve improvement. Her father provides valuable guidance and comments, explaining, "This is what poets call a first draft. Good poets work over their poems for days sometimes, till each word is perfect" (*LBLAWE* 131).

Little is taken aback by her father's remarks, discovering that he values her budding talent as a poet. Despite having aspired to be a poet himself, he pursued a medical career, but he expresses pride in his daughter's writing endeavours, declaring, "I would have liked to be a poet, Jeanie. I became a doctor instead, but I'm so proud of you. I'll love having a poet for my daughter" (*LBLAWE* 131). This affirmation fills Little with contentment and pride, knowing that her father's involvement serves as a means to nurture her writing skills. She recognises that she has the ideal reviewer right at home.

Little's mother encourages her to attend the camp with the hope that she can establish her own friendships. Despite her reluctance, Little is obliged to spend fourteen days and nights there. Initially puzzled by her mother's insistence, she eventually comes to the realisation that her mother understood her needs all along. In her own words, "But deep down, I knew that she did understand. That's why she was sending me. It was time I made friends with children who were not characters in books. She hoped camp would help" (*LBLAWE* 133). Despite her genuine efforts, Little laments that "she failed to make any friends at the camp," where she experienced teasing and exclusion (*LBLAWE* 134). This underscores her deep yearning for companionship, despite the obstacles she faces, and her disappointment in not being able to forge a single friendship due to her condition.

When her mother urges her to attend the C.G.I.T. meeting, it underscores her mother's persistent efforts to facilitate inclusion in Little's life. Initially resistant, Little is reluctant to go, convinced that she won't make friends. She vocalises her frustration, exclaiming, "I don't

want friends someday. I want them now! I wailed. 'Why did God make me cross-eyed? It's not fair'" (*LBLAWE* 135).

Little resigns herself to the belief that she won't make friends. However, she soon encounters challenges during the meeting, particularly when she requires a partner for dance practice on the first day. To her dismay, no one is willing to be her dance partner. Furthermore, she expresses frustration with their instructions, which use terms like "there" and "here" to describe dance positions and moves, terms that pose significant challenges for someone with visual impairments. In her own words, "There are no terms that are more difficult for a person who is blind to understand than 'there,' 'here,' 'these,' or 'this,'" she declares, her frustration evident (*LBLAWE* 136).

After encountering several setbacks, Little finally finds a partner in Marion Paton. Marion becomes her companion and guides her through the intricacies of dance. Little expresses her delight, recounting, "I copied what she did. We bowed to each other. We twirled around. We skipped forward and back. I was having fun" (*LBLAWE* 136-37).

Following their dance practice, Marion introduces Little to Marg and Miss Cowie, both of whom exhibit exceptional kindness towards Little. This quartet engages in various activities, including sharing poems, singing, and participating in a worship session. Little's astonishment at having companions of her own is palpable as she describes the swift transition, saying, "Then, in an incredibly short time, we were standing in a circle with crossed arms and linked hands, singing Taps" (*LBLAWE* 137). After enduring taunts, challenges, and yearnings for companionship, Little experiences a profound sense of gratitude and joy at having found friends. With an exuberant smile, she recounts the day's events to her mother, declaring, "My face must have been shining as brightly as my seven stars" (*LBLAWE* 138).

The C.G.I.T. meeting concludes, and Little transitions to the eighth grade at Victory School, where Mr. Benham serves as both the principal and her class teacher. Mr. Benham's teaching style extends beyond the confines of textbooks, a fact that greatly pleases Little. She reflects, "I did not see that he was also teaching us that education does not come only from between the covers of books, but from the worlds outside the classroom door" (*LBLAWE* 141). Mr. Benham introduces various poets and their renowned works to enhance students' understanding and vocabulary. This approach encourages more effective writing by exposing students to a wide range of words and their meanings through extensive reading.

As an example, Mr. Benham once reads Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" aloud to the class, emphasising pronunciation and comprehension. He engages the students by questioning them about the definitions of unfamiliar words. When the word 'swain' is raised, Little eagerly raises her hand and confidently offers her interpretation that 'swain' means 'pigs.' She recalls her response with pride, stating, "I said triumphantly, extremely proud of myself and my amazing vocabulary" (*LBLAWE* 141). However, Mr. Benham corrects her gently, explaining that 'swain' actually means 'Sweetheart.' Little learns the accurate definition of the new word and recognises that her extensive vocabulary, while impressive, can sometimes lead to misunderstandings due to her reading prowess.

Little shares her passion for reading and writing poems and stories with Mr. Benham, who, in turn, encourages her to explore other authors and their works by visiting the library. Despite already possessing a children's library card, Little, now thirteen years old, expresses a desire to borrow adult novels. Mr. Benham not only assists her but also educates her on library procedures and the availability of diverse literary genres. Little reflects on this experience, stating, "Mr. Benham had not just lured me into the Adult Library. He had taught me that all the good books did not have white cards in the back. There was a whole section of poetry here with a blue card in every book" (*LBLAWE* 146).

Entering grade nine marks the beginning of high school for Little, where she faces a new challenge. Unlike her previous schooling experience, where she had one teacher per grade, she now encounters nine different teachers, one for each subject. This transition presents a daunting task as she must explain her impairment to each of her nine teachers, which proves to be a significant challenge. Additionally, navigating the school's layout becomes problematic as her grade nine classes are located in an older building, making it challenging for Little to access her classes independently due to her impairment.

This situation reflects the observations made by Paul Abberley, as mentioned in Tom Shakespeare's book, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*, about the societal barriers that “exacerbate impairments” (35). Little's struggles on her first day of grade nine highlight the difficulties she faces, and she reflects, "Confusing as it was, I survived that day. We had no classes, just trekked from room to room, learning our timetables and the names of texts. I went to bed that night tired and tense but thinking I might be able to manage" (*LBLAWE* 149).

On the second day of her grade nine, Little attends an economics class taught by Miss Cray. During this class, the students are instructed on how to make cookies. Despite her impairment, Little faces challenges in following the recipe correctly, resulting in her cookies turning out as hard as rocks, as she candidly states, "Mine were as hard as rocks" (*LBLAWE* 150). Little's anxiety is palpable in Miss Cray's class, where she constantly feels on edge.

One day, Little is asked to retrieve tea towels but struggles to locate them due to her impairment. Fearing scolding from her teacher, she decides to explain her impairment to Miss Cray, hoping for understanding and assistance in future classes. However, Little is left deeply disappointed by Miss Cray's fiery reaction and harsh words, as her teacher shouts, "You should be in an institution. I'm paid to teach normal students; not abnormal ones. I can't be expected to change my teaching for somebody like you. Your parents should know enough

not to send you here. You don't belong in a regular school" (*LBLAWE* 150). This hurtful encounter deeply affects Little, as she feels rejected by her teacher.

In response to this distressing experience, Little decides that she will no longer attend school and insists that her parents arrange for a home tutor to continue her education. She firmly states, "If I have to be educated, I'll have tutors at home. I've read books about children having tutors" (*LBLAWE* 152). Even in the face of adversity, Little's determination to pursue education remains unwavering. This decision reflects her strong belief in the value of education and her resilience in overcoming challenges and obstacles.

Little's parents empathise with their daughter after learning about her humiliating experience with Miss Cray. With their progressive and understanding mindset, they make an effort to comfort Little and encourage her to return to school to continue her education. However, Little feels disheartened and pities herself as a result of the hurtful encounter with her teacher, Miss Cray. The emotional impact of Miss Cray's harsh words has left a deep mark on her, and she is reluctant to face her teacher again.

Despite Little's reluctance, her parents believe in the importance of inclusion and want her to return to school. They hope that Miss Cray will also come to regret her hurtful words. Little's father takes the initiative to explain this to her, helping her understand the value of returning to school for her education and personal growth:

Jean, what has happened to you should certainly not have happened, he said. But before we do anything impulsively, let's try thinking. You say you can be tutored. If it comes to that, I am sure we can arrange it. But sitting in this house with a tutor, you will have no friends your own age. You don't just learn history and French at school; you learn how to get along with people. Think what a triumph it would be if you could show Miss Cray how wrong she is. (*LBLAWE* 153)

After carefully considering her parents' advice, Little decides to commit to attending school regularly. It proves to be a wise choice as she experiences tremendous support from everyone at school, even without her asking for it. Despite her disability, she puts in a significant amount of effort into her studies. Her classmates offer assistance in various ways, providing her with notes to help her keep up with the coursework. Nevertheless, there are subjects like geography, French, and algebra where her best efforts still result in poor performance. However, with additional tutoring at home, she manages to pass these subjects and successfully completes grade ten.

One of her teachers, Miss Freeman, instructs her in home economics, specifically teaching her how to sew. While imparting these lessons, Miss Freeman makes a statement that Little finds uncomfortable. She suggests, "Blind people are wonderful knitters" (*LBLAWE* 155), which prompts Little to assert herself. She rejects the stereotype and responds, "Some blind people undoubtedly were. I was not" (*LBLAWE* 155). Despite excelling in reading, Little struggles with knitting, and Miss Freeman's assertion troubles her, as she has worked diligently but hasn't seen success in this particular skill:

But there I sat, my snub nose pressed close to the small print, utterly content and openly different. Reading was worth being different for. Little by Little, I was sorting out when and whether belonging really mattered. Little by Little, I was choosing to be me. Little by Little, I was discovering what brought me joy and learning its price. (*LBLAWE* 156)

After her classes conclude, Little immerses herself in books, dedicating her time to reading and also delving into her own creative writing, including stories, poems, and prose. To facilitate her writing, she uses a typewriter, highlighting the significant role that assistive devices play in her education. One of her stories features a fifteen-year-old girl with an elder sister and twin younger brothers, and her father was quite impressed by it. Little attributes her

inspiration to L. M. Montgomery's books, which she read and reread to gain a deeper understanding of writing.

Little's father takes an active interest in her writing endeavours and offers her valuable advice. He encourages her to introduce conflict into her stories, emphasising that nobody leads a life devoid of challenges, and stories should reflect this reality. Little is not entirely convinced by her father's counsel at the time, but she holds onto it in her mind.

Jean Little's parents play a crucial role in her development, providing understanding and unwavering support. Her father recognises her writing talent from a young age, even compiling all her poems into a single book, which she considers her ultimate Christmas gift. Little cherishes her father's dedication and meticulous editing during this process, marking a significant moment in her writing journey:

From beginning to end, Dad was in complete charge. He went through the poems, improving on the metre here and there, asking me to rewrite sometimes, not listening when our opinions differed, adding words and phrases of his own. I have never had a tougher editor. It was a fine preparation for working with 'real' editors later. (*LBLAWE* 164)

Her debut book is titled "*It's a Wonderful World*" by her father, who is highly motivated and determined to assist both his daughter and her work in establishing a presence in the writing industry. He believes that mentioning her age was important for readers to know, as it highlights the achievement of a published novelist at the age of fifteen. He remains upbeat and supportive of her book's publication (*LBLAWE* 164).

As time passes, Little begins to experience frequent nose aches, a condition stemming from an incident at the age of twelve when she is struck by a tree while playing hide and seek. This incident ultimately leads to a host of problems, including recurring breathing difficulties. Consequently, Little's parents arrange for her to undergo a corrective surgery in

early December at “Toronto General Hospital” (*LBLAWE* 178). However, this surgery brings about additional challenges, including mental trauma and disruptions to her daily life.

Furthermore, Little embarks on her next poetry collection, which she begins at the age of seventeen. She mentions, "I wrote two Christmas poems about Joseph and Mary's thoughts as they approached Bethlehem" (*LBLAWE* 177). This collection of poems is later published in the weekly publication known as *Saturday Night*. Upon the publication of her poems, Little's parents and siblings are delighted to receive a copy of her work. She has the opportunity to touch the book and experience the tangible sensations, and she is unable to contain her excitement at seeing her own work in print. She especially admires the front page, even though the text is too small for her to read. In this moment, Little's father comes to her aid, reading the lines to her. The experience of holding her published book leaves her with a profound sense of fulfillment:

I stared at the page. The poems were printed with black type on a white background. They were framed by a picture, drawn in white lines on a black background. Right beside the poems walked Joseph leading the donkey on which Mary rode. Underneath were a cow, a sheep and an angel in front of the Bethlehem Inn. At the top were a scatter of village houses, a palm tree and six stars. (*LBLAWE* 178)

Little's parents are elated that their daughter has chosen a path in writing and has the opportunity to earn from it. Her payment of thirty dollars from *Saturday Night* magazine brings joy to her father, who remarks, "They are paying you for the poems" (*LBLAWE* 180). While the monetary compensation is not the only reward, Little receives abundant praise from fellow authors, editors, and the general public, stating, "The publication of the poems made a sensation among my teachers and even impressed my classmates" (*LBLAWE* 179). This newfound recognition and attention make Little feel “like a celebrity” (*LBLAWE* 181).

Little's sense of accomplishment and her ability to contribute productively, such as having her work published in a magazine, fills her with gratitude and astonishment. She is unable to believe she is being paid for her writing, and the recognition and praise she receives at school, from teachers and even her principal, Mr. Hamilton, leaves her feeling “proud” and eager to continue her education (*LBLAWE* 181).

Despite becoming a well-known writer, Little still faces instances of exclusion in her life. At a dance event, she is expected to participate. The rules are simple: when the music stops, you find someone to dance with. As the music plays, Little approaches a man, but to her dismay, he turns to her and exclaims, "Oh, God, no!" (*LBLAWE* 183), completely ignoring her and leaving her in the middle of the dance floor. Feeling embarrassed and hurt, Little moves closer to the record player. This incident serves as a stark reminder that exclusion remains a part of Little's life.

Encouraged by her mother, Little decides to dance alongside her brothers, Jammie and Hugh, and practice for a performance. While Little enjoys dancing, she often feels inferior to others due to her impairment. Due to her brother's coaching, she excels in dance practice, learning the moves and steps. Little revels in the experience of dancing, dressing up for the performance, interacting with fellow performers, and participating in her first genuine dance program. Dancing with her brother Jammie, she exclaims, "When Jammie and I began to dance. I found that Hugh's coaching had worked. I knew what to do howling with my feet. What's more, I loved doing it" (*LBLAWE* 186). The performance is a success, and everyone in the audience appreciates it. The judges even commend her and her brother, noting, "You were the only couple on the floor doing proper ballroom waltzing" (*LBLAWE* 186). This experience demonstrates that Little is included in a dancing performance alongside individuals without disabilities.

Little's father is willing to go to great lengths to fulfil his daughter's wishes. He puts in tremendous effort to transform her notes into a book, resulting in her work being featured in several magazines. To further support her, he even creates a pseudonym and writes a letter praising Little's work after her books are published. The entire school celebrates Little's recognition, but she only discovers later that it was her father's doing. Feeling deeply disappointed, she initially couldn't forgive her father for this act. She remarks, "My fond father was the kind of parent every aspiring writer should be lucky enough to have" (*LBLAWE* 182). Little holds onto this resentment until she reaches the age of thirty, never sharing this secret with anyone.

Another instance of her father's efforts is when he introduces her to the renowned poet Mr. Macdonald, who is also a Rotarian. During the introduction, Little's father mentions, "She writes poems, too, though she's still a beginner, of course," (*LBLAWE* 190), hoping to enlist Mr. Macdonald's assistance in nurturing her poetic talent. Mr. Macdonald generously offers to mentor her and shares advice on addressing her visual issues by suggesting a daily tablespoon of "blackstrap molasses." He claims, "Your vision would improve markedly. It has helped me so much. One tablespoonful a day!" (*LBLAWE* 191). However, it's revealed that Mr. Macdonald benefits from this remedy as well, as he faces his own vision issues in old age and takes the same medication regularly.

Little is on a promising journey toward becoming a prolific writer. During her school days, she writes poems, and a few of them are successfully published. However, she recognises the need for proper guidance and learning to refine her language and writing skills. Her father connects her with a few experts he knows, including E. J. Pratt, who works at Victoria College. Mr. Pratt meticulously reads her poems without skimming, taking the time to provide thoughtful feedback. Little receives both praise and criticism for her writings. She is pleased to hear that her poems "had a sound of Swinburne" (*LBLAWE* 193), but she

also receives constructive criticism, “But, Jean, you must stop using these contractions. They are an insult to the integrity of the English language...If you work a little harder, you can write a better poem without such abominations” (*LBLAWE* 194). Little takes Mr. Pratt's criticisms to heart.

As she leaves, Mr. Pratt encourages her by saying, "Keep on writing. We'll hope to see you at Vic one of these days" (*LBLAWE* 194), which brightens Little's day. She eagerly shares Mr. Pratt's comments with her father. This paragraph highlights Little's passion for writing and her determination to pursue her dream, with her father's deliberate support.

The next significant milestone for Little is her college graduation. She can fulfil her undergraduate requirements by passing her grade twelve exams. Unfortunately, she initially fails all of her grade twelve exams due to not prioritising them while focusing on poetry and fiction writing. However, upon realising her mistake, she diligently works to improve her grades and successfully passes all of her grade twelve subjects on her first attempt. Little reflects, “I began to work. I had extra help from my teachers. In June, I passed every exam” (*LBLAWE* 195). Rather than becoming disheartened or anxious about her situation, she puts in the effort and achieves success in every subject.

Little is set to pursue a B.A. in the "English Language and Literature Programme" at Victoria College (*LBLAWE* 196). She's excited about her new college journey. However, her initial excitement wanes after a conversation with the college's principal. According to him, regular attendance and learning can be challenging for someone with a disability. He suggests that she consider distance learning, which would allow her to choose her courses, avoid exams, and obtain a degree. The principal states, “You don't really want a degree. You want an education” (*LBLAWE* 196).

Little is taken aback by this suggestion. She desires to attend college in person to receive a comprehensive education, make her own friends, and be a part of a welcoming

community. Rejecting the principal's advice, she asks if she can give regular attendance a try, indicating her willingness to take on a challenge despite her limitations. Little's determination shines through.

Little eagerly anticipates her time at Victoria College but is burdened by her father's health issues. Her father suffered a heart attack and was hospitalised just before her college journey began. Despite this setback, she proceeds with her college enrollment. What makes it even more challenging is her decision to stay in the hostel. Being in a new place without any familiar faces to assist her is daunting. Her college experience turns into a struggle as she faces difficulties finding her way to classes, leading to occasional lateness and missed topics. Amid these challenges, she does make two friends, Sally and Sandy, which is a silver lining. She's relieved that they don't mind befriending someone who is blind. Little admits, "My first week at university was mostly a nightmare, despite my new friends" (*LBLAWE* 199).

Additionally, accessibility issues with the hostel and the institution itself prevent her from having regular meals. Despite her father's reprimands and criticisms, she manages to improve her performance and earns an "A" in her final exams. Reflecting on her father's role, she notes, "He simply needled me into revising my own efforts" (*LBLAWE* 204). Finally, Little successfully completes her first year of college.

Little gradually ventures outside of her comfort zone in an effort to learn and write more. She continues to engage in conversations with her father about her daily activities, and he continues to spend time with her despite his illness. During the summer vacations, Little embarks on the first draft of her manuscript but struggles to produce enough content, resulting in a book with only hundred and nine pages. Her father is delighted with her debut novel and encourages her to submit it to the editors at McClelland and Stewart, who rejects her submission. Little humorously remarks, "I had a sneaking feeling that someday I might be

grateful to Mr. McClelland for turning it down" (*LBLAWE* 206). Subsequently, she becomes engrossed in her college coursework.

Little encounters discrimination due to her disabilities at her school, particularly when she expresses a desire to play basketball with her classmates. Her questioning, "that you don't really need a basketball player? All you need is a human being?" (*LBLAWE* 207) highlights her frustration when she is excluded from the game. The referee's silence and the other players' unwillingness to accept her into the game lead to Little's anger and tears. The incident deeply affects her.

Sally and Sandy, two of Little's closest friends come to her defence by engaging in a discussion with the referee, asserting that there are no rules against visually impaired individuals playing the game. However, when the game begins, Little initially observes from the sidelines. It's only when the ball reaches her that she realises the uncertainty on the court, with no one, including herself, knowing what to do next. There is a moment of silence as people freeze. Despite this, the opposing team's players are curious to see how Little will handle the ball. Hearing Sally's encouragement, Little throws the ball in the direction she suggests, ultimately leading to their victory as Sally scores. This episode highlights the prejudice and bullying Little faced due to her disability, but it also showcases the acceptance and support she received from some of the peers.

The subsequent tragedy in Little's life is the death of her father, who had been her steadfast support both personally and academically. She adapted and utilised his skills and resources to nurture her literary career, enabling her to continue writing, publish her books and poems, and gain recognition. The love, attention, and support of her devoted father made all of these accomplishments possible.

Little reaches the culmination of her college journey, with her final exams behind her and graduation day at hand. To everyone's surprise, she achieves a passing grade and earns

her degree, even though many doubted her capabilities, including her teachers. They acknowledge their error and express their appreciation for her accomplishments. Mr. Woodside states, "Jean, we just wanted to tell you that we now know how mistaken we were... We're glad that you've proved us wrong" (*LBLAWE* 218). While Little appreciates their acknowledgement, she still feels the absence of her father and reflects, "I'd done better than that. I had come fourth in English Language and Literature and first in the list of second-class honours. And I'd done it in four years! Even my father must be satisfied" (*LBLAWE* 220). Thus, Little's college journey is a blend of achievements, setbacks, challenges, validation of her talents, linguistic innovations, forming connections, and participating in sports, among other experiences.

Upon obtaining her degree, Little intends to dedicate herself entirely to writing. However, her mother encourages her to seek employment so that she can write during her free time. This request wounds Little, but she realises the need to support her family after her father's passing. She comes across an opportunity at the Rotary Crippled Children's Centre, where a small class for handicapped children is being established and a teacher is required. Little is hired on a temporary basis with the possibility of an extension based on her performance. She prepares to teach children with disabilities and, given her own disability, plans to employ innovative teaching methods. Her experiences have equipped her with fresh ideas about what to teach and how to engage her students. In addition to the curriculum, she imparts real-life experiences and lessons, remarking, "We did all these things, and Phonics, too" (*LBLAWE* 223).

Little chronicled her early years in her book, *Little By Little: A Writer's Education*, organised by grade rather than age. It demonstrates that she places a higher priority on education in her life than anything else. She describes herself as a lifelong reader and learner.

Because she believes that education fosters respect and inclusivity, her autobiography is replete with instructional sequences.

In her memoir, *Stars Come Out Within*, Jean Little continues her life story, which she began in *Little By Little: A Writer's Education*. In her autobiography, she vividly portrays her childhood experiences of growing up with visual impairment, the sorrow she felt at her father's early passing, and her aspiration to become a writer. In this sequel, she recounts her profound shock as she loses one eye to "glaucoma" and later her vision in her remaining good eye as well. She grapples with depression as she endeavours to write without the gift of sight. However, within this narrative, Little discovers two invaluable blessings, a talking computer that aids her academically and Zephyr, her guide dog, who assists her in daily life. The novel also introduces various characters with disabilities, albeit to a limited extent.

The narrative unfolds when Little is twenty-six years old and employed as a school teacher at the Crippled Children's Centre. Her extensive education and improved teaching skills, honed through numerous challenges and struggles in her own educational journey, make her particularly adept at instructing children with disabilities. She maintains a friendly and motivational approach to her students at the center, often accompanied by her nursing assistant, Rose Vanderweit, who assists in her caregiving responsibilities.

As an educator at the Guelph Crippled Children's Centre, Little is tasked with presenting a comprehensive program explanation to parents of children with disabilities. Her classroom is where five unique individuals, namely Clifford, Billy, Max, Barry, and Alec, receive their education. Each of them faces distinct challenges, Barry copes with muscular dystrophy, while Clifford, Max, and Billy grapple with cerebral palsy, necessitating the use of crutches for mobility. Alec, a five-year-old, faces the additional challenge of wild ataxic wobbling in addition to his cerebral palsy. It is within Little's classroom that these five exceptional individuals receive their education.

Little approaches her role as a teacher with great enthusiasm, yet harbours some doubts about her own abilities. However, a pivotal moment occurs when she overhears one of her students addressing her as "Miss Little!" (*SCOW 2*), dispelling her self-doubt and leading to a change of heart.

On her first day in the classroom, Little's nervousness and clumsiness are evident. Observant students notice her mismatched shoes and playfully poke fun at her, to which she responds, "But their laughter was kind. They, too, often had difficulty dressing" (*SCOW 3*). Little's mother comes to the rescue, providing the correct shoes that enable her to dress appropriately, instilling newfound confidence in Little as she prepares to begin her day.

In Little's classroom, her unique eyes catch the attention of her students, particularly Clifford, who's intrigued. However, Billy steps in to halt Clifford's probing. Little, determined to dispel confusion, reveals her visual impairment, "My eyes were scarred somehow before I was born... before I turned two, my parents realized I was starting to see after all" (*SCOW 3*). It falls on Little to clarify matters. When Clifford inquires about the crossed appearance of her eye, she politely explains, "My eyes cross because I only use one at a time... I can't look through both at once" (*SCOW 4*). And when Alec asks about her maximum sight distance, Little explains:

‘I can see as far as the sun’, I said solemnly. Then I told him what he really wanted to know. ‘I can see the same things you can- the walls, the windows, you, Rose, the easel. But I can’t tell what colour your eyes are. I can see trees out the window, but I can’t see separate leaves. I can read, but only if I hold the book up close. When I was a little girl, my mum was always sending me to wash the printer’s ink off my nose- especially if I’d been reading comic books.’ (*SCOW 5*)

Clifford and the other students display a keen interest in delving deeper into the specifics of Little's impairment, prompting her desire to furnish them with precise information. It remains of paramount importance for them to grasp the accurate clinical terminology pertaining to various forms of disabilities. Consequently, Little elucidated the medical term for her condition, stating, "That's called nystagmus," and she imparted that the appropriate term for "crossed eyes" is "strabismus" (*SCOW 4*). This exemplifies Little's commitment to teaching and her capacity to respond to her students' inquiries with empathy, avoiding personal offense. Her disclosure of her disability also serves as a source of inspiration, as it enables her students to realize that they are not alone in facing "disabilities" (*SCOW 4*).

While Little derives genuine enjoyment from her students and her role as a teacher, the responsibility of managing children with impairments occasionally weighed her down and toughened her resolve. The addition of a few new students with disabilities to her class heightened her workload. Students who recover from their impairments or were prepared to transition to inclusive schools depart from this specialised setting. Little continues to teach and support her disabled students, but the challenges take their toll. She underscores the depth of her concern, kindness, and unwavering dedication to her work, emphasising her ongoing commitment and perseverance:

I lost my temper at them. I laughed with them. I taught them songs and stories. I tripped over their crutches. I helped them earn enough money to buy two guinea pigs and took them to the pet store to choose them. We flew kites and went to the circus, the zoo, a hockey game and a fall fair. We took bus and train rides. I invented a dangerous but exciting game called Crutch Ball. I worked hard at teaching them to read. (*SCOW 6*)

Little as an exceptional and highly capable individual, refuses to let her impairment hinder her in any way. She adeptly balances her writing career with her role as a teacher for children with disabilities, showcasing her unwavering determination and dedication to her work. To her, both aspects of her life hold equal importance. Upon commencing her teaching duties, Little swiftly adopts various teaching methods and consistently goes above and beyond to assist children with impairments. She believes in inclusivity, allowing them to fully partake in life without any discrimination. However, Little's personal experience as a person with a disability equips her with a deep understanding of their desires and needs.

Little goes the extra mile and exercises extra care when instructing individuals with impairments. She extends her teaching beyond the standard curriculum, in alignment with Fitri and Iswari's article titled "The Role of Counselling Guidance Teachers for Children with Special Needs in Special Schools in Dharmasraya Regency." This article underscores the importance of special students receiving essential guidance, motivation, special assistance, and instruction from their teachers. The authors emphasise, "To achieve personal development, educational activities should be comprehensive, not only in the form of instructional activities (teaching), but include activities that ensure that each student personally receives services so that they can develop optimally" (955).

Little forges a unique and profound connection with the students at the center who have disabilities. In their article titled "Strengthening Individual Teacher-Child Relationships: An Intervention Study Among Student Teachers in Special Education," Koenen et al. address the challenges and conflicts that can arise in teacher-student relationships in special education. They underscore the emotional complexity and difficulties faced by teachers in these relationships, stating, "Relationships with children with special educational needs can be emotionally challenging for teachers" (2).

Little's sentiment echoes powerfully, "Each needed my full attention, my whole heart, all my skill" (*SCOW* 12). This sentiment is palpable in the strong rapport between Little and her students with disabilities, showcasing a remarkable bond. Little not only delivers exemplary education but also fosters authentic, caring relationships with her students. Despite her deep affection for her students and the fulfilling nature of her work, the realisation that prioritising her writing career might mean leaving the center weighs heavily on her. She openly admits, "Just the thought of leaving them made my heart ache" (*SCOW* 13).

In addition to teaching, Little passionately pursues her writing career, driven by her determination to fulfil her primary goal and honour her father's wish. Before becoming a teacher, she commenced work on *Mine for Keeps*, a book that now occupies her free time as she tirelessly refines it to authentically depict the lives of people with disabilities. Little strives to be an exceptional writer who offers truthful portrayals, unlike other authors who introduce unrealistic, miraculous transformations in characters with disabilities. She criticises these misleading depictions, lamenting, "The children were puzzled by these outcomes. She found them insulting. Why couldn't any of these authors imagine a happy ending that was honest? Did they, deep down, believe that one could not remain disabled and have a full, joyful life? If that was the case, they were mistaken" (*SCOW* 9).

Upon completing *Mine for Keeps*, Little submits it to a publisher with trepidation, anticipating the typical rejection faced by many new authors. To her astonishment, not only is her book accepted, but it also receives an award. She excitedly recounts, "In May the letter arrived. The publisher not only wanted to publish it; they were also offering monetary compensation!" (*SCOW* 10). This achievement demonstrates Little's capability to produce quality novels on par with well-known authors, bringing her dream of becoming a writer closer to reality due to her quality education.

In her pursuit of recognition, Little participates in the 'Canadian Authors Association Awards' with her mother by her side, reveling in the experience of attending an event that embodies every aspiring writer's dream. She remarks, "Here she was actually in attendance at the type of event that constitutes the dream of every novice writer" (*SCOW* 18). This event underscores the success of her writing career. Despite her impairment, Little is not overlooked; she is acknowledged and honoured for her remarkable efforts. Holding her prize, she proudly exclaims, "The cheque was in her hand. She was smiling" (*SCOW* 19), earning the respect and hope for success from renowned authors present, despite being relatively unknown.

Little's reaction to the *Toronto Star* headline, "AS AN AUTHOR SHE'S A SCREAMING SUCCESS" is a blend of astonishment and joy as she blushes at her award (*SCOW* 20). However, one poignant absence deeply saddens is her father, who she believes would have been immensely proud of her accomplishment. Despite his unwavering support and assistance in pursuing her writing ambition, he is not present to witness her achievement, a source of enduring sadness during her special moments.

Eventually, Little faces the devastating impact of her deteriorating vision, as she describes her pain, "Each time, my eye became a fiery red and was very painful" (*SCOW* 23). Nevertheless, she remains resolute in her belief that her novel will see the light of day despite these challenges. She is deeply concerned about potential global events, such as the looming threat of World War III, which might occur before her book reaches readers. In a heartfelt prayer, she beseeches, "Dear God, I prayed, if there's going to be an atomic war, please keep it from happening till my book comes out" (*SCOW* 23). This prayer underscores her profound love and passion for writing and publishing. Little's unwavering determination to overcome her limitations and achieve success is a remarkable and significant aspect of her journey.

Amid her deteriorating vision, Little seeks medical help from Dr. Cowan, who diagnoses her condition, "Finally he told me I had a 'bleb', something like a blister, on the surface of the cornea" (*SCOW* 23), identifying it as "Glaucoma" (*SCOW* 23). Despite the challenges posed by her declining vision, Little remains determined to continue writing and contributing to her literary career before her sight fades completely, dispelling her initial belief that escaping this condition would be relatively simple.

Facing the need for eye surgery due to her deteriorating condition, Little is accompanied by her long-time friend Elizabeth Pearson to the hospital. Coincidentally, on the day of Little's surgery, her book *Mine for Keeps* is released with the headline "PRIZE-WINNING BOOK!" (*SCOW* 34), bringing joy despite the impending procedure. Elizabeth shares Little's excitement with fellow patients in the hospital. Little expresses her elation and pride, stating, "I felt excited and puffed-up with pride, exactly the way I thought an author should feel on Publication Day" (*SCOW* 35). Even as she prepares for surgery, Little is thankful to Elizabeth for wholeheartedly embracing her achievement as her own, describing her as "A friend in deed, that was Elizabeth Pearson" (*SCOW* 36). Following Elizabeth's departure, Little finds herself transformed into a "celebrity," with everyone eager to meet the real, live author (*SCOW* 35).

After undergoing five eye surgeries and losing sight in one eye, Little relies on a prosthetic eyeball for comfort, which alters her appearance. These changes lead her to ponder, "I had been cross-eyed all my life. That misshapen, eccentric, too small eye was part of my psyche, part of me. Without it, I might look more 'normal', but who would I be? Not Jean Little" (*SCOW* 42). This transformation triggers a unique and complex emotional response in Little, prompting her to express:

It was unsettling, unreal. Yet it was interesting, too. I saw not blackness but a dull brownish background with vivid bits of colour that moved and changed as

I watched. There were green pin pricks that swelled into blue circles, streamers of pink, all scurrying around, fading, and flowering, flowing and shrinking, skimming off sideways and disappearing while something else swam into sight. (*SCOW* 44)

Little faces recurring eye-related challenges, shedding light on the perilous and emotionally taxing aspects of living with partial impairment. These challenges extend beyond the physical realm, encompassing numerous emotional and psychological hurdles. Throughout these trying times, Little skilfully navigates life with steadfast support from her mother. While her circle of visitors and friends remains small, their reactions are marked by shock and ridicule regarding her eye's appearance and colour. Despite the emotional toll, Little responds with kindness. Nevertheless, she candidly expresses both irritation and sadness at the persistence of hurtful comments about her impaired eye, lamenting, "Although I was so exhausted that I could not stop crying, I felt hope touch me. Maybe, after a while, I would again be Jean Little and not this isolated stranger" (*SCOW* 48). Thus, even at the age of thirty, Little grapples with prejudice, negatively impacting the emotional well-being of individuals with disabilities due to the hurtful practice of mocking others' wounds.

Little's life takes a significant step forward as she contemplates acquiring a new home. She muses about her preferences, summarising them as "Small. Dreaming. Private" (*SCOW* 72). However, her ultimate aspiration is to purchase an island and construct her dream villa. Remarkably, her late father shared a similar aspiration during his lifetime, "He was always wanting to buy land, building dream houses" (*SCOW* 73). This revelation aligns her own dreams with those of her father, emphasising that, despite her physical limitations, Little harbours lofty aspirations and an unwavering ambition to lead a fulfilling life. Her ability to translate these aspirations into reality underscores the power of her thoughts, determination, and diligent work.

Following the completion of *From Anna*, Little commences work on its sequel, *Listen for the Singing*. However, she reflects, "I knew that his troubles were not over at the end of the book, but I did not realise how facile those chapters might sound to someone newly faced with such a loss" (SCOW 102). In this book, Rudi, Anna's brother, tragically loses his sight while serving in the navy. Remarkably, this book garners the "Canada Council Children's Literature Prize" (SCOW 106) and includes a reward of "five thousand dollars" (SCOW 106). Upon its publication, the book ignites fresh ideas and resonates with a broad audience.

Little suffers as her past encounter with 'glaucoma' resurfaces, triggering distress. She articulates her anxiety, stating, "I was Panic-stricken" (SCOW 104). Her fear revolves around the potential loss of her sight, as her previous bout with this ailment left her with vision in just one eye. Now, armed with only a single functioning eye, she agonises over its potential loss. While acknowledging the existence of accomplished blind writers like Ved Mehta, Beverley Butler, and Robert Russell, Little fails to find solace in their examples, asserting, "Knowing that there were able blind writers- Ved Mehta, Beverley Butler, Robert Russell- did not help" (SCOW 105-106). Although Little strives to maintain composure and optimism when considering them, she ultimately deems their approaches and ideas irrelevant to her unique situation.

During this trying period, Little's family remains a steadfast source of support. Her eye condition plunges her into depression and disrupts her ability to concentrate on her writing, necessitating additional time to complete her work. To aid Little in her struggles, her sister Pat introduces Sarah and Mark into the equation. Despite grappling with emotions such as anger, sadness, and tears, Little finds herself in an unfamiliar state of disconnection. Physical discomfort intensifies her emotional distress, prompting her to candidly articulate her concerns and challenges.

Little's central preoccupation centers around the profound loss of her ability to engage with books, a poignant consequence of her profound visual impairment that deeply troubles her. She firmly holds the conviction that genuine writers are voracious readers, and her lifelong practice of borrowing books from the library attests to her unwavering dedication to this literary communion. However, her deteriorating eyesight compels her to seek solace in the acquisition of a "Talking Book" to satiate her reading appetite, as conventional reading has become an insurmountable challenge. Her elation is palpable when she stumbles upon the revelation that "Richard Adams and the CNIB Talking Book Library had given me back my lost stars" (*SCOW* 120). This gift of a talking book emerges as a luminous ray of hope in her life, rekindling her spirit when she had once resigned herself to the abyss, as she poignantly expresses, "The darkness within me was not banished, but never since that afternoon has it seemed absolute or endless. I was ready, at last, to go forward" (*SCOW* 120).

The subsequent phase of Little's journey entails a quest for familiarity with assistive technologies, including Braille, a conventional electric typewriter with enlarged text, and a Dictaphone. These tools serve to simplify her writing and reading endeavours, albeit necessitating a process of relearning as her vision inexorably recedes. Little proactively endeavours to forestall any further deterioration in her condition. Nonetheless, she encounters formidable challenges in the realm of writing while employing these aids, with error rectification proving to be a laborious ordeal. She candidly reflects on these tribulations, stating, "Everyone stayed out of my way until the storm blew over," conveying a sense of helplessness and exasperation (*SCOW* 125).

Jenny, Little's neighbour, offers her support and understanding, taking into account Little's impairment. Little eagerly anticipates making new friends and socialising. She reflects on her previous belief that loneliness was an inevitable consequence of blindness, acknowledging that her friendship with Jenny has challenged this notion, remarking, "Going

to 'Roots and Wings' with Jenny made me see how foolish I had been when I thought loneliness was an inevitable part of blindness" (SCOW 137).

As Little reaches the age of fifty, she recognises the need for a companion both inside and outside her home to prevent clumsiness. Consequently, she contemplates getting her own dog, a yellow lab named Zephyr. Delighted with her new companion, Little exclaims, "You're so big! I never thought you'd be so big. And you're beautiful!" (SCOW 150).

Zephyr's arrival marks a turning point in Little's life, providing her with a loyal companion for years to come. Like many other visually impaired individuals, Little now has a guide dog to help her navigate her surroundings safely and confidently, promoting her independence and offering companionship. The article titled "Behavioral and Physiological predictors of guide dog success" *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* by Tomkins et al. underscores the significance of guide dog ownership, echoing Whitmarsh's words, "Guide dog ownership offers several benefits, including increased independence, confidence, mobility, social interactions, as well as providing companionship, which distinguish it from other mobility aids."

Further, Little harbours aspirations of acquiring a "SAM" talking computer to enhance her writing process (SCOW 223). With SAM, she attains heightened writing efficiency and speed. Despite the substantial cost associated with this technology, Little diligently saves up, harnessing her own financial resources and contributions from friends and family. She undergoes extensive training from experts to maximise her proficiency in operating the talking computer. A study titled "Facilitators and Barriers of Assistive Technology and Learning Environment for Children with Special Needs" *Hindawi: Occupational Therapy International* by Lersilp et al. underscores the pivotal role of assistive technology in aiding individuals with disabilities, asserting:

Assistive Technology (AT) is any product, instrument, strategy, service, or practice used by people with disabilities and also the elderly. It is produced specially or availed generally to prevent, compensate, relieve, or neutralize impairment, disability, or handicap and improve the individual's autonomy and quality of life.

In conclusion, this comprehensive examination of Jean Little's life experiences, particularly through her autobiographical works *Little By Little: A Writer's Education* and *Stars Come Out Within*, illuminates the profound impact of social and attitudinal barriers on her journey as a disabled individual. Little's narratives vividly portray the myriad challenges she encountered, ranging from her educational pursuits to her efforts towards social inclusion. Through these autobiographical writings, the chapter underscores the pervasive influence of societal attitudes and structures on the lives of disabled individuals, highlighting the complex interplay between personal narratives and broader social contexts. Ultimately, this exploration of Little's life underscores the imperative of fostering inclusive environments and challenging societal prejudices to create a more equitable society for all individuals, regardless of ability.