

## Corinne Flynn: Flying High in Gander

Paul David Power

Corinne Flynn has spent most of her life on the move. Over the years she has changed residences a number of times, along with taking on a slew of short-term jobs. This personal history of changing locations is probably why she currently feels quite at home in Gander, a town known for its rich history in aviation travel.

Corinne grew up in Musgrave Harbour, a small community in central Newfoundland with a population of just over 1,000. In 1989 Corinne left the familiarity of her small town behind to attend Memorial University in the province's capital.

"I graduated from Memorial in 1993 with a Bachelor of Arts, with a major in Folklore and a minor in English," says Corinne.

Like most new graduates, Corinne quickly learned obtaining a degree was just the start of her professional challenges. Still living in St. John's, Corinne spent the next few years trying unsuccessfully to find a permanent job related to her field of study.

"A lot of the times in trying to get a job I got the same response of not having enough experience. Some jobs came up but nothing that lasted very long," Corinne recalls. "I had one job digitizing maps with a company, but that didn't even last a year because the company went under. I tried part-time jobs in the mall and tried getting work in a number of places."



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Adding to the job search challenges of a new graduate, Corinne also encountered negative responses to her disability from potential employers. Corinne has cerebral palsy.

"I don't know if people who are hiring or conducting interviews mean it, but sometimes there is this moment of questioning if they, meaning people who are disabled, can do it," Corinne describes. "There's that moment of indecision by employers of whether or not someone with a disability can do the work."

While Corinne continued her search for a full-time job, she was made aware of a new employment equity program in the provincial government called Opening Doors. She submitted her resume in hopes of finding employment within the public service.

Unfortunately, no position was immediately available matching Corinne's background.

After four years of job searching and settling for temporary positions in St. John's, Corinne decided that perhaps there would be more opportunity in a smaller location with less professional competition.

"I moved to Gander in 1997 with my roommate. I had been having trouble getting work in St. John's, and thought maybe if I moved to Gander I would be able to get something to beef up my resume."

Corinne also advised Opening Doors officials of her move to ensure she could be reached if a position became available through the program.

The decision to relocate to Gander paid off.

Shortly after her move, Corinne applied her educational experience in English Literature to a job opportunity working in the town's local bookstore, *The Book Worm*. Experience and contacts made while working at the bookstore, along with her newfound fascination with the history of the town she now called home, led to a further opportunity. Sponsored by the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA), Corinne was asked to write a book to be used in adult literacy classes. The result was *I Remember When...Early Stories of Gander*.



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After the book was printed, Corinne decided the time was right to once again change her life course. The time she had spent working in the local bookstore and the CPA writing project gave her the financial resources to return to school. Corinne enrolled in a computer program at the College of the North Atlantic in Gander and graduated with a diploma in 2002.

Shortly after, Corinne received a call from Opening Doors. Thanks to her new academic credentials Corinne was advised she would be an excellent candidate for an administrative position with the Department of Natural Resources, Gander office.

"I knew as soon as I walked into the interview that I had a good chance at getting this," Corinne remembers. "Somehow I felt I gave a positive interview with a positive outlook. If it wasn't for

Opening Doors I would have never known anything about the job. Craig Hall, Regional Supervisor of Administration for Natural Resources, remembers being impressed by Corinne's interview. "She gave me the impression that this was her job," remembers Craig. "Her academic background, especially in the area of computers and her knowledge of the areas tested, all assisted in her obtaining the position. I also feel that Corinne's Arts degree from Memorial gave her the confidence needed to present herself well at the interview."

"When I got the call that I got the job, I was just flabbergasted," Corinne says with genuine excitement.

"I told them I could start right away, and then I hung up the phone and headed out to go buy some new business clothes because I didn't have any," Corinne laughs. "The rest of the day I just walked around in a daze repeating 'I got the job, I got the job!'"

When asked if her new co-workers' initial reaction to her disability resembled the doubt about capability she encountered during her multiple job interviews in St. John's, Corinne replies with a definite, "no".

"When I started, everyone was so welcoming, it wasn't even an issue. And people are willing to help when I need it. There's a woman here who will assist with the filing since part of my disability is that I can't stand for long periods of time, but other than that I'm just the same."

While Corinne's experience in competing for her current job was positive, she does recognize a disability carries a stigma for some prospective employers.

"You have to look beyond the physical and realize that persons with disabilities are just as qualified. When you are interviewing someone for a position, each person that comes in and sits down next to you is just like any other person and should be judged on their professional qualifications, not their physicality."