

Group Poem facilitated in Long term Care, Taken from Hagens, C., Cosentino, A., & Ryan, E. B. (2006).  
*YOU GROW OUT OF WINTER: POETRY IN LONG TERM CARE.*  
Hamilton ON: McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies.

## **Our First Jobs**

It was in the Arcade,  
my first job,  
before it became Eaton's.  
I was sixteen, a saleslady!  
Sold everything – shoes to clothing to underwear.  
Gave my paycheck to my mother.  
She doled out what I needed.  
As soon as I came from the old country,  
I worked in Men's Clothes in Montreal, on Ontario Street.  
I couldn't talk English, only Yiddish and Russian.  
I used to sweep the floor.  
Second season I got a raise – two dollars!  
When the family came over  
I asked for another raise.  
He said, "You can go home!"  
So I became a busboy in a hotel – the Mount Royal.  
Hearing the language all around me,  
I absorbed the expressions, pronunciation.  
I read the children's books,  
then more important material.  
After the war someone brought a copy  
of Dr. Zhivago, in Russian.  
It made the rounds of our circle of friends.  
I kept on reading with the dictionary beside me.  
Halfway through the book,  
I became fluent in Russian again.  
If you don't use it, you lose it!  
My first job was in my parent's store.  
Later it was my store.  
I liked the people coming in, telling jokes.  
Had it twenty-nine, thirty years.  
A long time to have it!