

# WISCONSIN BRAILLE

Volume 18, Issue 2

Spring 2017

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## **Welcome New Board Member Angela Memmel**

My name is Angela Memmel. I am the parent of a visually impaired child and a certified dental assistant. Not only do I work with teeth all day, I do root canals all day long too! I have the best employers ever! I love my job.

When I am not at work I am with my wonderful children and husband. Matt is truly my better half! We spend a lot of time traveling to watch our daughter, Zoey, play soccer or our son, Dawson, swim and wrestle. I became a member of WisBrl because of Dawson and his amazing vision teacher Cindy. They have taught me to live by the moment and to treasure all that I have. Dawson has Lebers Congenital Amersosis.

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## **BETTER THAN BRAILLE**

*Article from "On Wisconsin" magazine, Spring 2017*

Blind from birth Yeaji Kim DMA'14 learned to play the piano at age five. Instead of feeling isolated from her peers, Kim formed strong connections with both blind and sighted musicians. Her experiences inspired her to pursue a career in music education and travel from South Korea to UW-Madison, where she earned her doctorate from the School of Music.

One day, while she struggled to play a piece, Kim and one of her professors discovered that the conventional score indicated that some notes should be "beamed", or connected, in a way that wasn't communicated on the braille music sheet. This small but vital discrepancy led Kim to develop Tactile Stave Notation: a method that renders sheet music in three dimensions by slightly elevating the staff and notes above the surface of the page. It's a universal system that could become the bridge between sighted and blind musicians.

Her revolutionary process created a new opportunity for collaboration between disciplines: a team of graduate and undergraduate students from UW Madison's Department of Mechanical Engineering brainstormed ways to mass-produce a 3-D printing process for the system.

Kim has since returned home to South Korea, where she has been active in performing. She is also in the process of patenting her system and exploring ways to mass-produce it in her home country.

Thanks to Kim's solution, blind and sighted musicians are finally on the same page.

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*[The following article, which is appearing in two parts, was first published in Future Reflections, Volume 35 Number 1, Winter 2016. This magazine is a magazine for parents and teachers of blind children published by American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults in partnership with the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children.]*

## **If Braille Were Print**

by Erin Jepsen

*From the Editor: In the Winter 2017 edition of our Wisconsin Braille newsletter we published the first part of an article, **If Braille Were Print**, that was first published in Future Reflections, Volume 35 Number 1, Winter 2016. The author, Erin Jepsen is a low-vision homeschooling mother of four elementary-age children, one blind, one low vision, and two sighted. Her motivation for writing her article was to address misperceptions about braille reading. She wrote her article re-framing the learning of braille as though it was the learning of print.*

*The issues she addressed in the first part of this re-printed article were:  
(1) It makes sense that you're having*



*a hard time with this. It is hard to learn print. (2) I'm not aware of any techniques for reading print at a usable speed. (3) I'm sorry, but your book is loaded with typos. (4) Technology, schmechnology! And (5) Reading is overrated in which she said, "Nobody these days needs to read print or write with a pencil anyway. You can just listen to audiobooks. It's a lot less work than reading, and you can dictate anything you want to write. Technology is amazing these days for people like you.*

*And now to continue with part two:*

#### *6. Nobody else reads the way you read.*

In your school, no one besides you reads print. The teachers don't read it. Your friends don't read it. There is no print displayed around the halls, on the classroom walls, or in the lunchroom. Everybody reads, but nobody reads English print. Nobody here can read what you write, and nobody can write to you. Well, one of your friends learned to write to you. He thinks print is a cool secret code.

There's a sign in print by the bathroom. You say it actually says "Aathroox?" We keep reminding you to be grateful for your printed books. The other students have thousands of books in whatever they read, and no one tells them to be grateful. But you should be grateful for the twelve books that you have. Don't forget, people went to a lot of trouble to get them for you. You didn't do very well on the reading test last week. Your special print teacher says it was written like this: %Bgoat %Bpig %Bhorse %Bduck. I don't read print, so I don't know how it looks to you. I just grade your test the best I can.

#### *7. You will get your books late. Always.*

The school ordered the wrong reading book from the supplier, so your book is the first-grade version, not the second-grade version. It's double-spaced and uses easy vocabulary, but that's okay for you. Your life is challenging enough already, just learning to read print. You have to learn all those curves and squiggles. The capital letters are different shapes, and there are different fonts, too. You have to learn five different shapes just for the letter A. That's hard! You don't need challenging vocabulary, too.

You're falling behind your class? Don't worry. You have a lot on your plate. Your math book is still at the translator's shop. They say it will be here in seven months. Everyone else is going to use a math book during the next seven months, but I'll just read your math out loud to you. Don't worry about learning to read numbers! When you get your math book, you can

read the numbers all you want! Be grateful you're getting a math book in print.

### 8. *Of course you're behind.*

Kids like you, print readers of average intelligence, are always behind. Always. In fact, you'll likely graduate from high school with about a fourth-grade reading level. It can't be helped. It's okay, though, because kids like you don't usually want to have a career. People who read print usually get jobs sorting stuff at places like Goodwill. They pay you about \$2 an hour, but you won't notice that because of the math thing.

### 9. *Print is just so cool!!*

Print looks cool! I see it here and there, like on elevators, and it's just so neat. It's all swoopy and round, and I like to look at it. People like you must be really special to read it. I can't believe you can just walk up to a sign with words printed on it and *boom!* read what it says. Kids who read print are so beautiful and special. They open their printed books and just go for it. Unbelievable!

### 10. *I love the way you write print, too.*

I've watched you write print. You make these marks on paper, and you actually know what they say. That special tool you use, what's it called? A pencil? It's so neat! It writes print, just like that!

I've seen you type on a special keyboard. It makes print, too, but it disturbs the class with the clicking noise, so I wish you wouldn't use it. You can use it someday when you're grown up, but not in class, okay? Just tell one of the adults what you want to write, and we'll do it for you. We'll even spell it right for you. You can practice spelling words on your special spelling tests in your special writing room on Fridays.

## **The Print Reader's Experience**

Dear Reader, what do you think? Do you think a kid is going to learn to read in that atmosphere, with those expectations and that sort of encouragement? With that amount of support and practice? Any TVI or homeschool mom who has tried to even things out for a Braille reader knows exactly what I'm talking about.

What do print-reading kids typically experience in school? Let's take a look.

### 1. *Your teacher knows English.*

If you are an English speaker, your teacher knows the language in which you're reading and writing. She or he may even know Spanish or Chinese or Dutch. She can use all the tools you are expected to use. If she can't, she is not deemed qualified to teach.

## *2. Your teacher has books.*

Books in print arrive in the classroom on time before the school year begins. In nearly every school in the country, there are books for every kid in the class. The books don't come late. The teacher reads them and shows you how to read them. You have your own copy of each book you need. The teacher sends books home with you for practice. If your parents know English, they can read with you. If there is a quote you want to read at the school assembly, you don't have to write it out for yourself first because nobody else knows how. Your mom can read the story you wrote. There might be one typo in your whole book. Maybe. And everyone complains about that one.

## *3. Everyone around you reads.*

Your parents read. Your teacher reads. Your lunch lady reads. Your big sister reads. They read the same way you read. You are expected to learn to read. You're told that it's normal to learn to read.

## *4. You get help when you need it.*

If you're having trouble reading, adults act as if this is a problem. You are expected to take extra classes, to practice, and to get help until you can read well.

If you can't read, you are called illiterate. You are not given audiobooks. You are taught to read (one hopes). If you don't know how to write, you are expected to practice and learn to write correctly. To get a good job that pays a decent wage, you have to be able to read well, write well, and use computers. None of that is considered weird.

## *5. You learn current technology.*

Your school has computers, and you learn to use them. You are taught to type, and you are taught to read on a screen that displays thousands of words at a time. You learn to scan for information, because your class moves quickly.

## *6. You don't get a pass.*

You are expected to keep up with the class. You don't get a free pass not to keep up. You don't get to be lazy just because you're a print reader. After all, reading print is normal. Everyone knows it's completely doable, so why should you get to slough off?

You have all the materials you need and all the tools you need. You can't make excuses, because you have the book you need for the assignment and the pencil or the keyboard you need for your work. The teacher loaded and set up the software your class uses, and he knows how to use it.

*7. You know you'll use print all your life.*

You fully expect that you will grow up, get a job, pay bills, and become a contributing member of society. You know you will read and write print as you do all of these things.

*8. You read math.*

If your teachers did not teach you to read and write the language of printed math in school, your parents would throw a holy, hell-raising, fire-breathing, sue-the-school-for-a-zillion-dollars tantrum. And the community would support them. The school would be put up for review by the state. If the teachers did not write math code, they would be fired. Period, the end. And no one would be surprised.

*9. Nobody gushes over your reading ability.*

Nobody tells you they saw some print on a box of Band-Aids and how cool that is. Nobody tells you that you literally deserve a medal for learning how to read.

Because everybody reads! You don't give yourself pats on the back for using a computer at the age of seventeen. Everyone uses a computer at age seventeen! Technology is normal for you.

*10. You get all the information in class if you bother to pay attention.*

A print reader of typical ability and average intelligence can get all the information presented in the classroom. All the stuff on the overhead. All the stuff in every book. All the stuff on the wall. All the lunch menus. All the recess schedules. All the toy names. And for all that, nobody thinks to be grateful.

## A Few Last Comments about Braille

### 1. *Reading Braille is normal for blind kids.*

For blind and low-vision kids, Braille is the normal way to read. The tools they use are normal. Reading is normal. Having Braille on the elevator is normal.

### 2. *Reading Braille is not hard.*

Reading Braille by touch is not hard.

READING BRAILLE BY TOUCH IS NOT HARD.

Reading Braille is NOT HARD.

NOT HARD.

Many Braille readers are slow because of all the things listed above that happened when they were learning it.

BRAILLE IS NOT HARD.

### 3. *You can read Braille fast.*

Good Braille readers can match print readers for speed.

(Not many do ... see above.) A good Braille reader can read ten thousand pages in a couple of weeks. (Not many do ... see above.)

### 4. *Braille is not becoming obsolete.*

There are Braille displays for computers. There are Braille embossers. There are Braille transcribers looking for work. There are more Braille books than ever before. There are computers that transcribe books more accurately than ever before. There are blind people who need to be able to read. There are people who need to read pill bottles. And bills. And recipes. And blog posts. And books. And textbooks. And math books. And elevator signs. And hallway signs. And foreign languages. And CD covers. And they need to see how names are spelled. There are deaf-blind people who use Braille to communicate *everything!*

Since the early 1800s when Louis Braille brought the idea of a quick, dot-based tactile method of reading and writing to his school in France, there have been naysayers. In the beginning people said that Braille wouldn't work. A separate code that sighted people couldn't read would never be widely used. Blind people used Braille anyway, because for the first time, they could write for themselves. Braille gave them voices. They could read what they wrote. When Braille came to America, it had naysayers. People said it was too expensive to produce. They said there would never be enough books.

Blind people used Braille anyway. They made their own books. They hired people to learn Braille and transcribe it. They raised funds.

As Braille enters the modern century, it has its naysayers. They say it's becoming obsolete because of technology. They say it's clunky and outdated. Blind people keep using it anyway. We use Braille with technology. We use it to learn to spell, and we use it to jot notes. We delight in the thrill of opening a real, paper book and feeling the magical constellations under our fingers as words and stories come to life.

##### 5. *Then what is the problem?*

See if you can figure it out. I can hear what you're thinking:

"But Braille is different from print." Obviously Braille and print aren't the same, but they're not as different as they seem to non-Braille readers. I read both. I read Braille by touch. I read print (sometimes, under the right conditions).

"But I'm a blind person, and I don't read Braille well. I hardly read it at all." Why not? Is it lack of desire, lack of support, lack of encouragement? (I'm not talking about people with multiple disabilities, cognitive impairments, or nerve damage in their fingers.) If it's lack of desire, I accept that. You may prefer to use audio, magnification, or other reading methods. But if you dig deep into your reasons, and it's due only to shame or lack of good instruction, I feel that those reasons should not exist. We shouldn't be ashamed to read! We should not be left unsupported when the rest of our peers have a way to read that fits their needs and frees them for a life full of options.

"But I teach Braille, and what you describe is impossible." Is it? See if you can do something about it. Please. Because if blind and low-vision kids got the support their average sighted counterparts get in learning to read, they would not face a 70 percent unemployment rate. There might still be workplace discrimination, but I'd be willing to bet there would be more employed blind folks than there are today!

I wanted to write "That would be amazing," but I realized that isn't quite accurate. *Amazing* implies something above and beyond the norm. It implies something unexpected. It implies something to be marveled at. Reading isn't something to be marveled at; it's something that should be expected, that should be normal. It's basic, like adequate clothing or nutrition. It's the foundation of every other form of education.

So, instead of "amazing," I write: "It would finally be what kids deserve. It

would be just. It wouldn't level the playing field, but it would be a start."

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### A Quick Plug for Braille

After reading this article, if you agree with the author, consider bringing braille into your homes, schools and libraries by supporting Wisconsin Braille in its efforts to promote braille literacy across the state of Wisconsin. Become a member of Wisconsin Braille. Visit our website: [wisbrl.org](http://wisbrl.org), to find out how you might join our efforts to help share the joy of reading with every Wisconsin child who reads braille.

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### **The Braille Corner Accent on UEB**

Dear Ms. Perkins,  
I was just reading about a little café with an artful façade in a town I plan to visit. What are those strange dots in "café" and "façade"?

Baffled,  
Mark Knowles

Dear Mark,  
Those are accent marks! Where there used to be merely a dot 4 to represent all accent marks, UEB has a unique symbol for each type of accent mark, just like in print. UEB calls these accent marks "modifiers." The same marks are used in all contexts, such as foreign languages, borrowed words, poetry analysis (scansion), or pronunciations. They always come before the affected letter or letters.

Here is a list of UEB modifiers.

#### **Modifiers**

- ⠠ / slash overlay on following letter
- ⠡ – horizontal stroke overlay on following letter
- ⠢ ˘ breve above following letter
- ⠣ ˉ macron above following letter



The braille ligature indicator is placed between the two letters. There is only one braille symbol for all types of ligatures. The specific type of ligature should be stated in the special symbols or transcriber's notes page at the beginning of the volume or in a transcriber's note just before the ligature appears.

⠠⠠ ligature indicator

œ ⠠⠠⠠⠠

th ⠠⠠⠠⠠

The benefit of these new symbols is that all readers have the same information. Enjoy that little café!

Sincerely,

*Ms. Perkins*

Do you have questions for Ms. Perkins? Address them to:

Wisconsin Braille Inc.

5745 Bittersweet Place

Madison, WI 53744-5076

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Please Join Us  
For Our Next Board Meeting  
at the  
**Alicia Ashman Public Library**  
**733 N. High Point Rd.**  
**Madison, WI 53717**  
**June 17, 2017**  
From 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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If you are interested in joining Wisconsin Braille, or have not paid your membership this year, please be sure to complete the membership form at the back of this newsletter and mail it to the address listed.

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Deadlines are: Spring/Summer – April 15, Fall – August 15, Winter – December 15

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The purpose of WISCONSIN BRAILLE INC. is to advance communication and coordinate the efforts of all persons concerned with the availability, quality, and distribution of brailled materials in the state of Wisconsin thereby encouraging braille literacy.

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This version of the Wisconsin Braille newsletter was prepared by the members of the OSCI Braille Program. It has not been proofread. Readers are encouraged to report noted errors to: Wisconsin Braille Newsletter, Editor, 5745 Bittersweet Place, Madison, WI 53705.