

Wisconsin Braille in the Time of COVID-19

Dear Parents, Teachers, Transcribers, and other supporters,

In this time of COVID-19, many things are changing. Some things will be permanently changed and others simply adjusted. At Wisconsin Braille we are definitely in the "something old and something new" phase of change too.

In the category of "new:"

Thanks to William Dieck, we will be displaying, when appropriate, QR codes for your convenience. He shares with us how to use these codes on page 2 of this newsletter.

In the category of "old and new:"

The hard copy of our newsletter is produced, in both braille and print, at the Oshkosh Correctional Facility. As we all know, correctional facilities and nursing homes are some of the hardest communities hit by the COVID virus. For this reason, this current newsletter will only be available in an electronic format. For those of you who generally receive a hard copy of the newsletter, if your email address is in our files, you will be receiving this Summer 2020 copy of the newsletter electronically.

Our board member, Kurt Pamprin, who manages the Oshkosh braille program has only recently been able to get back into the braille production center. My understanding is that he has little to no staff helping him at this time and therefore is unable to provide us with one of his most valuable services: production of our newsletter. We hope Kurt and the braille production team can safely be up and running, at full capacity, in the near future. Both our newsletter production and the Braille Book Project rely on the Oshkosh program.

page 2

In the category of "old:"

Wisconsin Braille meetings are always open to the public. Our next meeting will, again, be a virtual meeting. We have offered virtual participation to our meetings previously and hope you will consider joining us for our upcoming virtual meeting on June 27, from 10:00 to 12:00, or any amount of time that you might have available. To receive an invitation to our Zoom meeting please contact William Dieck at william.dieck@gmail.com

We hope you enjoy this newsletter,

Alison McKee

Quick Response (QR) Codes and Their Uses

By William Dieck

Wisconsin Braille is adding new tools to its website, newsletters and brochures for use by our interested inquirers. Membership applications, opportunities to donate, and the braille book project will, from now on, be accompanied by relevant QR Codes for your convenience.

Today's spotlight is on the new scannable codes which you'll see in our brochures and newsletters. These quick-response barcodes, or QR Codes, are designed to be scanned with your cell phone, and every QR Code will take you directly to a specific webpage. For example, the QR code on the back of our brochures will take you to the Wisconsin Braille online registration form, to make registration easier.

You may already have a QR code reader on your phone, or you may need to download one from your App Store. Search "QR reader" in your App Store to find a long list of free ones. The codes we are using are universal to all these apps, and we encourage you to use these QR codes to explore our website.

page 3

In Memoriam-Sr. Melmarie Stoll by Marilyn Harmon

Sister Melmarie Stoll, a pioneer in the education of blind and visually impaired children, passed away on April 16th at the age of 91. Sister Mel, as she was affectionately called, was a first-grade teacher at Holy Assumption School in West Allis, Wisconsin, when a blind child, Lois, was placed in her classroom. At that time, few visually impaired students received their education alongside sighted peers. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee sent Sister Mel to Catholic University to receive training as a TVI, and in 1958 the Resource Room for the Blind was created at Holy Assumption.

Over the years, her students included those from numerous socio-economic backgrounds, faiths and ethnicity. All participated as fully as possible, given their varying needs, in the general education classroom, and received support and braille instruction within the Resource Room. Sister Mel followed the Expanded Core Curriculum before the term was coined. She had a gift for recruiting others to work with her students: occupational, music and art therapists; high school and college students. Her students received instruction in proper etiquette and even dancing! She inspired others to follow in her footsteps as TVIs (I received credit during my senior year at Juneau High School in Milwaukee volunteering in her classroom).

Because her students were fully mainstreamed, they needed access to braille copies of textbooks. Volunteers were recruited to become transcribers (some through a letter to Mrs. Griggs, an advice column in the Milwaukee ... continued on page 4

page 4

Continued from page 3

Journal). Thus, Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, now known as ABLE (Audio and Braille Literacy Enhancement) began in a home basement!

The Resource Room closed in 2003, after 45 years of leadership from Sr. Mel. She was deeply loved by the students she taught and will be greatly missed by many. Cheryl Orgas, executive director of ABLE and a former student of Sister Mel, said Sister was like a second mother to her. Cheryl also stated, "Because of Sister Mel and her high expectations and strong emphasis in academics and braille, I excelled in school and hold her responsible for giving me the tools of blindness leading to my confidence to take on the leadership of ABLE, an organization that wouldn't exist without her influence in the late 60s and 70s." A Memorial Service is planned for a date yet to be determined.

Please Join Us For Our Next Board Meeting on June 27, 2020

This meeting is a virtual meeting

10:00-12:00

To receive a Zoom invitation contact

william.dieck@gmail.com

Contributors to his newsletter:

Cindy Collins, William Dieck, Marilyn Harmon and Alison McKee

page 5

Squint

by Chad Morris and Shelly Brown

Reviewed by Cindy Collins

Squint is a book written for middle school age children. Here's how it starts: *"My name is Flint, but everyone in middle school calls me Squint because I'm losing my vision. I used to play football, but not anymore. I haven't had a friend in a long time. Thankfully, real friends can see the real you, even when you can't clearly see."*

Flint is the main character. He loves to draw and he wants desperately to finish his comic book so he can be the youngest winner of the Find a Comic Star contest. He's also rushing to finish because he has a severe case of keratoconus, which he has been told could eventually make him blind.

McKell has just moved to Flint's town, and she is trying to understand the dynamics of the groups in her new middle school. It seems the popular kids aren't very kind to the boy named Squint. She thinks he draws awesome pictures of superheroes. She wants to get to know him, but she is afraid that might turn the popular kids against her.

McKell has hidden talents of her own and a terminally ill brother, Danny. Danny has a YouTube channel which challenges kids to push themselves and try new things. He especially wants his sister to find a friend she can trust. Flint/Squint seems like he might be that someone.

Here's how the reviewers describe it: *"Squint is the inspiring story of two new friends dealing with their own challenges, who learn to trust each other, believe in themselves, and begin to truly see what matters most."*

This book is available in print and audio format.

Braille Corner

Our Braille Corner is Empty

Typically our braille corner is written by certified braille transcribers. For quite some time Julie Sumwalt wrote **Braille Corner** articles for us. Julie led us through braille rule changes as we transitioned from using the English Braille American Edition (EBAE) code book to our new code book, Unified English Braille (UEB). She shared with us rule changes, formatting changes and how to integrate the use of Nemeth Code into text written in Unified English Braille. Her work was greatly appreciated by us all.

Connie Risjord, also a certified transcriber, assisted us all with articles written for us as transcribers and teachers providing braille to our readers.

Both Julie and Connie have gone onto other things. If there are any certified transcribers who would like to take on the challenge of writing the **Braille Corner** for us please contact Alison McKee at amckee8473@gmail.com

Membership Application

Use this form to join *WisBrl*, or to renew membership.

Date:

Regular membership, annual dues \$10 _____
Sustaining membership annual dues \$30 _____
Lifetime membership \$200 _____
Additional donation \$30 _____
Total amount enclosed _____
Check () cash () money order ()
Donations to *WisBrl* are tax exempt.

Newsletter format requested (choose one)

Regular type _____
E-mail _____
Braille _____

What is your affiliation with the braille reading community? (Check all that apply.)

Teacher _____ Producer _____ Ed. Assist. _____ Transcriber _____ Proofreader _____
Parent _____ Administrator _____ User _____

Other (specify) _____

Return Application Payment to:

Membership Chair, 557 Milky Way, Madison, WI 53718

