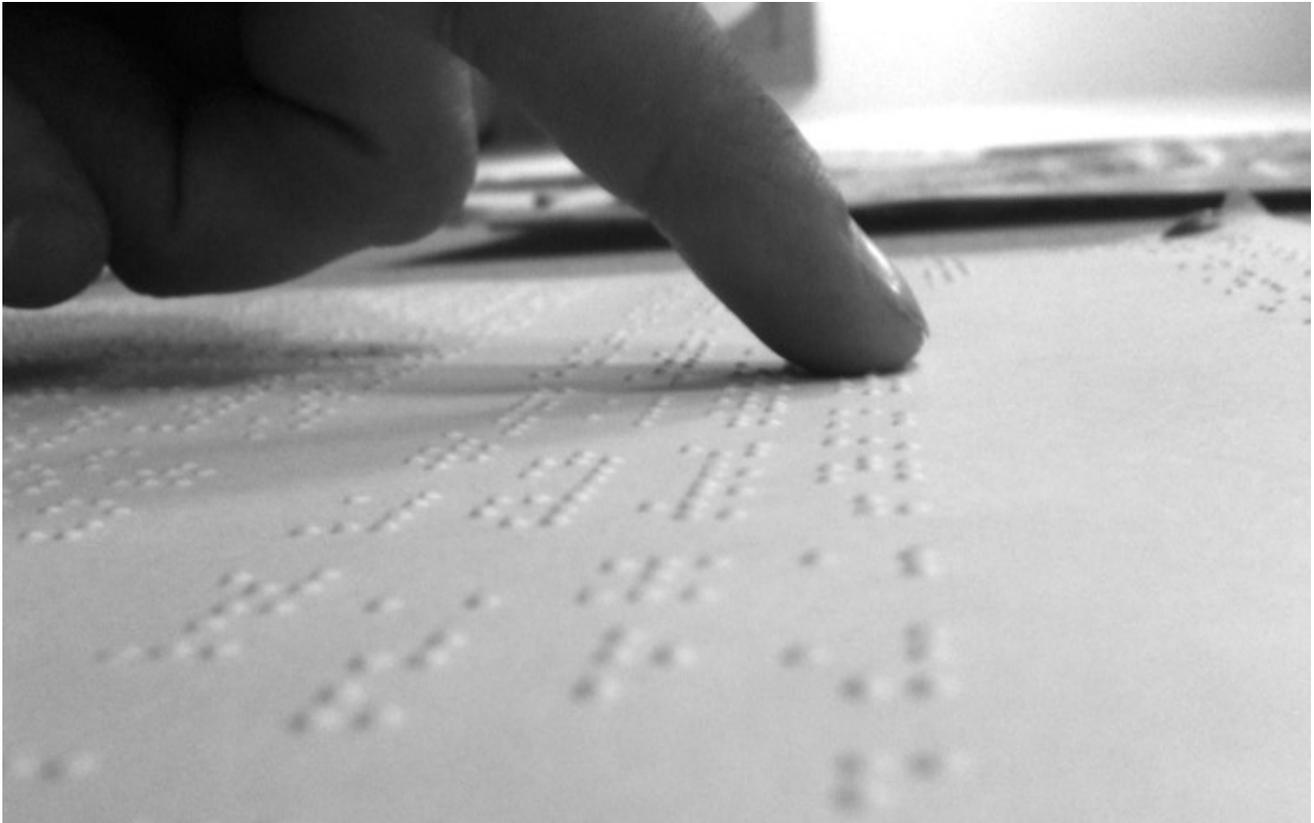

WISCONSIN BRAILLE



Volume 22, Issue 2

Summer 2021



It Takes a Village



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As we all know, "it takes a village." It takes a village to support and nurture braille literacy. Here in Wisconsin many parents, teachers, TVIs, librarians and transcribers are dedicated to seeing our blind youth become proficient in braille reading and writing. You are the village and Wisconsin Braille is proud to be counted among your numbers. The village is also comprised of many individuals and organizations beyond just the state of Wisconsin. In this issue of our newsletter we recognize **Seedlings** and **Braille Institute** as just two such organizations.

The story of our larger village begins with the story of **Seedlings**.

In 1984 a shy woman, Debra Bonde, wanted to find a volunteer job she could participate in without having to talk to anyone. She signed up for a braille transcription class in hopes of being able to transcribe books in the solitude of her basement in Detroit. Debra began transcribing popular children's books, like *Oh, The Thinks You Can Think!*. She printed them on a braille embosser her father had made, and sold them for just the cost of the paper.

Word spread among parents and teachers of blind children, and demand grew for more of her books. Friends helped her to form a nonprofit so she could start getting grants and donations to help with production costs. She named it **Seedlings Braille Books for Children** because she believed that if you give a child a book, the love for reading will grow. That first year, she embossed 221 books.

From its humble beginnings 37 years ago, **Seedlings** has produced and distributed more than 600,000 books across the world. They give half of their books away for free. The other half are sold for an average price of only \$10 each, about half the cost of producing them.

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Skip forward to the year 2000, when **Braille Institute** sponsored the first **Braille Challenge**. This challenge was offered to children living in the Los Angeles area. In 2003 Braille Institute began partnering with other organizations and formed an advisory committee to make the Braille Challenge [accessible](#) to all children across the [United States](#) and [Canada](#). That year, 200 students from 28 states and four Canadian provinces traveled to participate in the regional events, sending 55 finalists to [Los Angeles](#) to compete for the 2003 Braille Challenge title. Wisconsin sent a finalist to the 2003 competition. She won the challenge in her age category. Participation in the Braille Challenge has doubled since 2003 and Wisconsin continues to send participants to the finals in Los Angeles.

Of course, last year the finals were interrupted by COVID-19. The finals did not get cancelled. Instead, "The Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired announced that Ellie from Wausau School District was a Braille Challenge Finalist! She placed in the top 10 of her age category for the Braille Challenge preliminaries and qualified to compete in the Braille Challenge Finals. Ellie said, 'Being a good reader and writer is important for everyone.' Congratulations and good luck!"

Thank you to our entire village, those here in Wisconsin and across the country!

(Sources for this article came from (1) [goodnewsnetwork.org/seedlings-braille-books-for-children-blog/](https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/seedlings-braille-books-for-children-blog/) comes this story, (2) Braille Institute, (3) WCBVI and (4) the Wausau School District website.)

A Braille Resource for Students in Wisconsin

By Dawn Soto, Director of Outreach, WCBVI

The Outreach Department at the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI) offers many services to support Wisconsin students who are blind and have low vision. Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) are designed or converted so that the content is usable across a wide range of students and may include multiple formats (i.e. print, digital, braille, audio, video). Braille is just one example of an Accessible Educational Material. The link to the WCBVI AEM department is <https://www.wcbvi.k12.wi.us/outreach/aemc/>

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Teachers, parents, librarians and transcribers can find many resources that benefit braille readers by accessing the WCBVI AEM supports and services.

1) WCBVI AEM provides research so that Local Education Agencies (LEAs), or school districts, can purchase accessible educational materials in braille (and other alternative formats) for Wisconsin students aged 3 - 21.

2) WCBVI AEM works with the Office of Student Assessment (OSA) and the Office of Educational Accountability (OEA) to ensure high quality testing materials are transcribed and purchased for all Wisconsin students. We also collaborate with OSA, OEA and Wisconsin educators to address issues related to test bias for students who are blind and have low vision.

3) WCBVI AEM has hosted the Midwest Braille Conference. This is a major professional development opportunity for transcribers, teachers, paraprofessionals, and others.

4) WCBVI AEM offers braille training for professionals or any Wisconsin stakeholder interested in learning braille and support for those interested in becoming a certified braille transcriber.

5) WCBVI AEM offers more information about braille at <https://www.wcbvi.k12.wi.us/outreach/aemc/braille/> and offers specialized help regarding braille at their Outreach Services. To request such services go to <https://forms.gle/29muPAkQVpWnKwZz5>

Interesting Fact:

Individuals with Vision Loss Dream: People who are visually impaired are just as likely to experience vivid dreams as anyone else. The main difference is that those dreams are dominated by senses other than sight. For example, someone who is blind might dream primarily with sounds, smells, and tastes.

Meet Wisconsin Braille Board Member

William Dieck

Hi! My name is William Dieck, and I've been the webmaster for WISBRL since September 2019. In that short time, I've updated and improved several of our web pages, and continue to maintain them with up-to-date info. I joined as a board member in Spring 2020. I'm excited to contribute to WISBRL.

If the last name seems familiar, it's likely because my wife Leanette is the current Vice-President of WISBRL, and an active TVI. All it took was a few technical questions, and she got me involved. We also have two children - one in college for education and one still in high school.

I've lived in Wisconsin my whole life, but in a dozen different cities, including Blue Mounds where I currently live. I graduated UW-Whitewater with a degree in Education almost two decades ago, but I did not teach for very long. For the past several years, I've worked at Epic in Verona, which makes and supports medical software. Working in the tech sector gives me many tech-savvy friends to pitch ideas to regarding our website, and I'm often able to figure out technical issues. But I also want to hear from you with any suggestions you may have. If you have questions or comments regarding our website, please reach out to me at webmaster@wisbrl.org.

Cheers!

Wisconsin Braille Board Meetings Are Always Open to the Public

Please join us for our next virtual meeting

Saturday, July 17, 2021

10:00-12:00

Please contact william.dieck@gmail.com to receive an email invitation to the Zoom Meeting

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE WHO SEE

Dispatches from the World of the Blind

by Rosemary Mahoney

The author of this book had her first encounter with a blind person 30 years before she wrote it. She decided, fourteen years later, before she went to Tibet, that her ignorance about blind people could somehow "hurt both them and me." This book is proof that she is no longer ignorant about blind people! She blends science, history, and firsthand reporting to investigate blindness and blind people. Her travels to Tibet took her to Braille Without Borders, the first school for the blind there. Sabriye Tenberken, the blind founder of the school, provided her with an example of what blind people are capable of. She was so fascinated and impressed by what she learned from the blind children of Tibet that she went on to investigate the history of blindness, a fascinating part of this book.

As part of her research, she spent three months teaching at Tenberken's international training center in Kerala, India. Her experience there revealed not only the misapprehensions and shocking oppression endured by the world's blind, but also demonstrated their resilience, integrity, ingenuity, and strength.

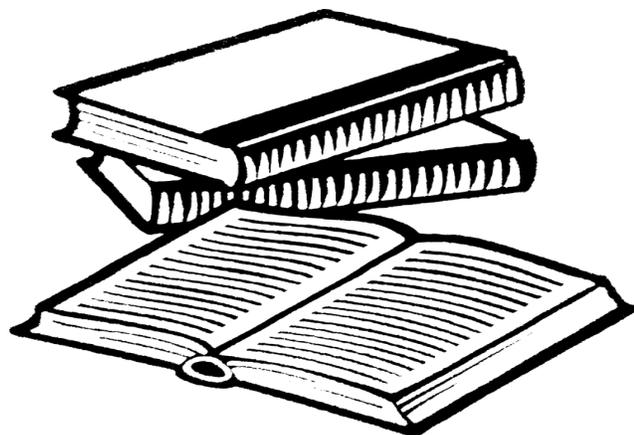
By living among the blind, she gives the reader stories of individuals,

revealing their "quality of ease that seems to broadcast a fundamental connection to the world".

In a way, this feels a bit like a "coming of age" story for the author in relation to her growth in understanding of blindness. When she was a senior in college, she had an accident while playing squash that caused a serious tear in her cornea. When she was lying in bed the night of the accident, she felt that "surely being blind was like being buried alive." She was certain then that she would rather die than lose her eyesight. By the end of her term of research, and the end of the book, she has discovered that the life of blind people can be as rich and rewarding as any human being.

This book is available in braille through the National Library Service, and it is also available as an audio book.

Book review by Cindy Collins



Meet Our New Braille Corner Expert: Julie Sumwalt



Oddly enough, my journey to braille began with sign language interpreting. I was having trouble finding work as an interpreter so I took a position as the Braille Coordinator for VBTI (Volunteer Braillists & Tapists), now BLTS (Braille Library and Transcription Services) in 2002. There I obtained my literary braille certification the following year.

I joined Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI) in Janesville as the third braille transcriber in 2008. Since then I have gained certifications and updates in Textbook Formatting, Nemeth, Formatting 2011, and UEB Proficiency. I'm now in the middle of braille music transcription lessons.

I was rehired by WCBVI in 2015 as the Braille Specialist to prepare the

State of Wisconsin for the transition to Unified English Braille (UEB). Since then, I've led many workshops and webinars for parents, teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs), transcribers, paraprofessionals, and anyone else who is interested in all aspects of braille. I've also been privileged to organize the Midwest Braille Conference. I am now looking to present information sessions on how to draw tactile graphics (raised line drawings) with a computer in the Fall of 2021.

I've been fortunate enough to serve on the Board of Directors at various times for Wisconsin Braille and the National Braille Association (NBA). I was chair of NBA's UEB Literary Committee for a few years.

The future is wide open!



SIX PRINCIPAL SYSTEMS OF EMBOSSED TYPE

Contributors to this issue are:

Cindy Collins, William Dieck, Alison McKee, Dawn Soto, Julie Sumwalt

Membership Application

Date _____

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

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

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

2021: () New member () Renewal

Make checks or money orders payable to

WISCONSIN BRAILLE INC.

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



WISCONSIN BRAILLE



WISCONSIN BRAILLE INC.

5745 Bittersweet Place

Madison, WI 53705

Address Correction

Requested