

B.R.A.I.L.L.E.



For decades now so-called "experts" have taken the lives of visually impaired children and played Russian roulette in determining what should be taught to them. A portion of this was due to laziness on the parts of those "experts". Still another explanation is poor judgment and the lack of foresight on the part of those "experts" to consider preparing children and their families for the worst case scenario of possible blindness. To that end these "experts" avoided teaching Braille unless they were backed into corners to do so. This story portrays the harm caused when so-called experts make recommendations which fail to prepare a family and their child for living with a disability and adjusting to that disability as fully as possible. It further depicts the resulting catastrophic upheaval for that child and harsh lessons learned. All because of **Bad Recommendations Assisting Individuals toward Limited Learning Efforts (BRAILLE) courtesy of the "experts"**.

Before I started school, my parents were quite aware I had a problem seeing. They enrolled me in school and by the time I was in first grade I was transferred to James Otis School which had a "sight saving room". Why it was called a "sight saving room" is beyond me. Because it certainly did not help to save my sight. I had a wonderful teacher named Miss Lorek, who believed that when a person had a visual problem, they had to be twice as good as the other students. To that end, she pushed all of her students. Because I loved school, I excelled toward that goal. I believed she was right. She pushed her students to make them at least a grade ahead of the other students. I was reading large print whenever available. When it was not available, I read regular print books like the other students. Unfortunately, though Braille was available through an itinerate teacher who came in to teach another student, I was not one of the chosen ones. It was felt that I saw well enough and did not need to learn Braille.

Unfortunately over the summer between sixth and seventh grade I lost my vision. When I returned to school for seventh grade, Miss Lorek was gone. She'd retired. So there I was now blind and my favorite teacher was gone to boot. There was a new resource teacher named Miss Newkirk. She was a young teacher fresh out of college. As part of her curricula for special Ed, she had to be able to read and write the alphabet in Braille. She began teaching it to me. Unfortunately the alphabet was all she knew.

Eventually I had to transfer to another school mainly for the purpose of continuing to learn Braille. This was devastating to me. For me this meant leaving the school I loved and had been in most of my life just to interrupt my education to learn Braille! I was losing all my friends that had grown up with me and a place that was familiar to me. I came to resent Braille and to associate it with my life being turned up-side-down.

Eventually I learned it, but in the process I lost a year of very crucial education. The majority of my seventh grade was spent reading first and second grade Braille books all written in grade 1. What did this mean? There are three levels of Braille Grade 1 where everything is written out in long hand so to

speak, Grade 2 where there are contractions for a large number of things written and Grade 3 which is shorthand Braille where things are shortened even more than in Grade 2. Most books are written in Grade 2. The stories I was reading? All about the antics of Dick, Jane and Spot. Talk about a setback!

While a sophomore in high school in an honors history class after being unable to get sighted readers to read a book for me, I sought the book out at the library on cassette. Uh-oh! I was in trouble. The cassette had already been taken out by a now fellow federationist and she wasn't sharing! Out of desperation, I ordered the book in Braille. At that time I read about 5 words a minute. I read that book from cover to cover. The name of the book? Animal Farm by George Orwell. After reading that book, I came to better appreciate Braille. Thank God for National Library Service.

I then realized that had I been taught Braille as an integral part of my education while I could still see, my education would not have been interrupted and I would have developed an appreciation for Braille much sooner in my life.

Once it has been determined that there is a visual acuity issue, Braille should be taught as an integral part of students' education. When this is practiced, educators will be Building Reading Attributes, Increasing Learning, Literacy and Equality (BRAILLE) and helping students excel to their fullest potential without unnecessary educational setbacks.