

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAILLE – THE BUMPY ROAD TO LITERACY

by Lois Montgomery

Congenital glaucoma has robbed me of my vision and left me legally blind since birth. This being so, I was never introduced to Braille as a child or a young adult. It was only ten years ago I became an avid Braille reader.

As a child I was expected to read print. Not once was Braille mentioned as an alternative medium. Needless to say, reading was not at the top of my favorites list – I did as little of this as possible to avoid headaches and eye strain. My parents and I assumed this was as good as it gets. However little vision one had he/she used it. I was always placed in the front of the classroom in order to see the chalkboard and held my books close to read. As the years passed, reading became slower, more painful, and tedious. Not only this, but it became embarrassing as a young adolescent.

As a young adult I was raising a small child. Most parents read to their children. Sad as it is to admit, I failed as a parent in this category. I was totally blinded for six months due to a massive hemorrhage after surgery. Even this failed to bring Braille into my life.

It took ten years of not reading anything before I was introduced to Braille. It was through the local CIL (Center for Independent Living) and the help of Mary Hartle-Smith that I was first offered the opportunity to read again through the use of Braille. What a treat! Reading again – and without headaches! A new world at my fingertips! I returned to college as a blind student to become a medical transcriptionist where Braille was essential in my studies.

To this day reading Braille is a part of my daily routine. I use it for everything: grocery lists to telephone numbers, recipes to reading in general. And, when my husband and I travel, whether it be across town or across country, he expects me to have the directions written in Braille so I can help us reach our final destination with little or no trouble.

Totally blind or legally blind, *blind is blind*, and Braille is essential for one to be literate. Braille is so important to me that I have become certified and now teach Braille to young and old alike. I want no one to experience that which I experienced as a child. Literacy is essential to all in order to be a successful pillar in the community. My passion is so strong for literacy among the blind I now advocate for all, young and old alike, to learn Braille and enjoy the gift of reading.