

# Braille, Their Labor Of Love

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Sentinel Staff Writer

"We just plain LOVE to Braille!"

So says Mrs. Betty Johnson, chairman and teacher for the weekly Santa Cruz Adult Education class which transcribes textbooks and supplementary material into Braille for area blind students.

It is demanding, complicated, dedicated work, and the time the volunteers spend in class each Tuesday afternoon is merely the tip on an iceberg of hours they spend in the actual transcribing.

They do the bulk of their Brailleing at home—each one usually spending 30 to 40 hours a week at the task.

In class, they bind and repair the huge Braille books which they have produced, and polish their techniques.

How does one go about joining the transcribers' group?

"Just come to one of the classes," Mrs. Johnson says.

She adds, "It isn't easy to learn how to Braille—it's very complicated. Some go through the course in six months and some, in a year."

The classes are held each Tuesday from 1 to 4 p.m. on the campus of Live Oak Elementary school in a small building facing Chanticleer Avenue.

Mrs. Johnson, who took up Braille after she became a widow 11 years ago, showed me one of the Braillewriters.

It looks somewhat like a typewriter, but has only six keys.

Each key represents a dot in a different location—and the entire Braille alphabet is created from two vertical rows of three dots each. The Braillewriter impresses the dots on a special, heavy paper.

Three pages of Braille are required to reproduce one text book page.

But what about shapes and figures to illustrate, say, a page of math problems?

These are all done by hand.

Mrs. Johnson showed me a Braille math page in which encircled dots were used for counting problems. The person working on it prepared tiny felt dots and glued them on so the student could feel them.

On another elementary school page, there was a grinning jack-o-lantern drawn in raised dots. The transcriber had used a dressmaker's tracing wheel to make the outline.

And the book contained other, similar drawings.

"I thought the little fellow would like it," she said.

To assist the teachers, all school books up to the third grade level are interlined.

That is, the words are hand written by the volunteers above the Braille symbols.

One of the men in the group,



Engrossed in their Braille transcribing work are, from left, Miss O. C. Koch and Mrs. Bette Bielefeldt, working on a fourth grade math textbook; Mrs. Arcelia Patton and Mrs. Klara Horstschneider, transcribing an English text; and Mrs. Ralph Conard, who is binding a completed book. Others of the Santa Cruz Adult Education transcribing class are the Frank Blacks, Ralph Conard, Hattie Coulson, Olive Kersh, Jean Mullin, Jack Plattner, Barbara Stauff, Lyn Smiley, Emily Clark, Myrtle Steinmetz, Jeanne Fraim and Chairman Betty Johnson.

Jack Plattner, works for the telephone company and wanted to learn transcribing.

"He found Brailleing just wasn't for him," Mrs. Johnson says. "But he wanted to help. So for three years he has been keeping all our mechanical equipment in good repair."

Who teaches the blind children to read Braille?

Mrs. Jeanne Tofflemire is one of the teachers of the visually handicapped for the Santa Cruz County Schools. A member of the staff of Richard Struck, director of special education for the county schools, she is in charge of the Adult Education transcribing class.

"I'm convinced the public school program for the blind couldn't be a success without this group," she says.

Presently, there are five totally blind and 20 partially sighted children in county schools.

During the past three years, four blind students were graduated from high schools, and the transcribers continued to Braille books for one student who completed two years at Cabrillo College.

Another graduate went on to Loyola University, and they occasionally transcribe a book for him, too.

The state provides standard textbooks for younger blind children, but provides none at the secondary or high school level, she says.

The elementary school books which the volunteers transcribe are supplementary or special textbooks which meet the needs of the individual children, according to Mrs. Tofflemire.

Test and final exams are made up in Braille so students can take them concurrently with their fellow students.

One transcriber, who specializes in languages, has put many German and Spanish books into Braille.

Since the work began here nine years ago, the class has transcribed some 2,000 volumes for kindergarten through junior college students.

There is a central clearing house for Braille textbooks in Louisville, Kentucky, and books may be taken out from there on loan.

"When we need a book, we try to borrow it first—if we cannot get it, we have to decide if we want our own original," Mrs. Tofflemire says.

State funds provide the Braille writers and other

materials which the transcribers' class use.

"Most of our volunteers hold Library of Congress Braille transcribing certificates," Mrs. Tofflemire says. "Which means they have each done an error-free, 50-page Braille manuscript."

There are 60 or 70 transcribing groups in the state, and the Santa Cruz volunteers always are represented at their yearly conferences.

Once in a while, the group gets a request from another area for a special transcribing job.

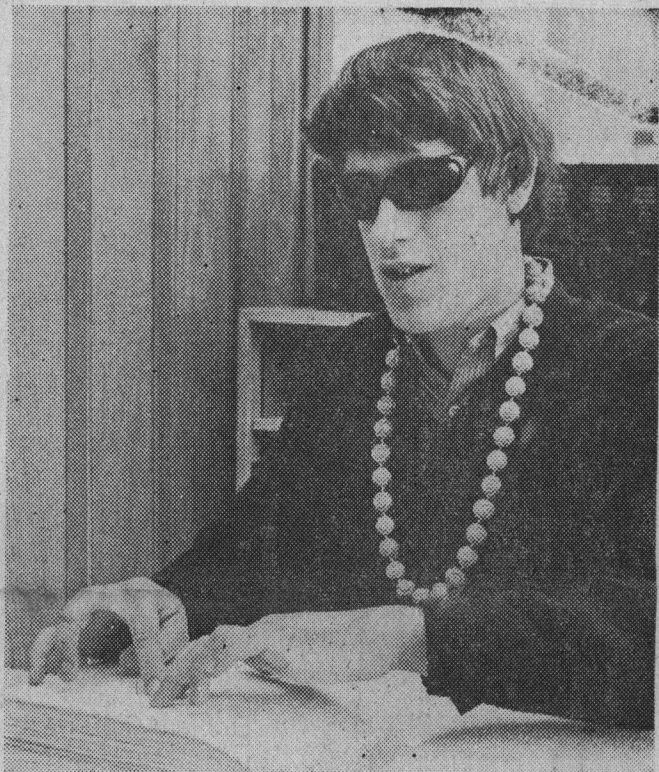
Recently, they received a hurry-up call for a blind law student in a San Francisco college. He needed a book on constitutional law transcribed—within a week.

"It took three volunteers working 12 hours a day for a week to get it finished—and it wasn't even an interesting book!" Mrs. Johnson says.

They have agreed to Braille several more books for the same student—but hopefully with more time to work.

Aside from the warm realization they are doing a valuable and helpful service for young people, what keeps the transcribers at their Braillewriters, hour after hour?

"They find the mechanics of it are fascinating," Mrs. Johnson says.



Steve Galli, Soquel High senior, reads one of the textbooks transcribed by local volunteers into Braille for county blind students.

## China Topic For AAUW

Study topic this year for the International Relations Sections of the American Association of University Women will be "Our Changing Involvement in the Pacific."

Members will continue the study when they meet Monday at 10 a.m. at Piedmont Court with Mrs. Clare Baldwin to discuss "China Since World War II."

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