

Transcribing Geometry Into Braille Requires Ingenuity

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For eight months, three women have each been working about 20 hours per week transcribing a geometry book into Braille. They have not yet finished.

But math and other illustrated books are more difficult than most, explained Bette Bielefeldt, chair of the county Transcribers Guild.

Charts, graphs, drawings and other illustrations must be rendered so the blind reader can understand them by touch.

To do so, Braille transcribers use felt, embossing tools and a lot of ingenuity.

The Guild's 20 members transcribe school books for the county's four blind students in kindergarten through 10th grade.

The unpaid workers have been transcribing textbooks, books for summer reading, articles, tests and handouts that teachers assign since the guild was established in 1962.

The volunteers' work enables the blind youngsters to attend regular schools and follow the regular curriculum.

After the students finish with the books, they are put in the county Office of Education's Braille Library.

The library's collection is catalogued and it exchanges volumes with other libraries throughout the country.

The exchange system is designed to minimize duplication of the arduous process of transcribing books into Braille.

The guild's members describe their work as "exciting."

"It takes a specific type of person" to enjoy transcribing, Bielefeldt said.

"The kind of person who enjoys doing crossword puzzles, and likes working out codes.

"They are people who work well by themselves. Loners."

The transcribers must have a good knowledge of the language they are transcribing from and "a lot of patience," she added.

The women work on Braille writers, gray machines that resemble simplified typewriters.

The machines make indentations in paper that constitutes Braille.

Braille letters consist of configurations of a "cell" of six dots, placed in two rows.

Various configurations signify different letters and numbers.

Correcting typographical errors in Braille is more difficult than retyping over a piece of correcto-type or dabbing on some liquid paper.

While typing in Braille, a transcriber can use a wooden eraser to remove a misplaced dot.

Once a page is finished, "If you have left a word or a letter out, there is no way to put it back," Bielefeldt explained.

"So, you learn to do it very carefully."

Guild members are required to turn in 10 pages of Braille each week.

"When you're first starting, it's a horrendous task. Then, it's proofread, and if it's not correct, you must do it over."

To transcribe one page of printed material, about 20 pages of Braille are needed.

Guild members must pass a course in transcribing and receive a certificate from the Library of Congress.

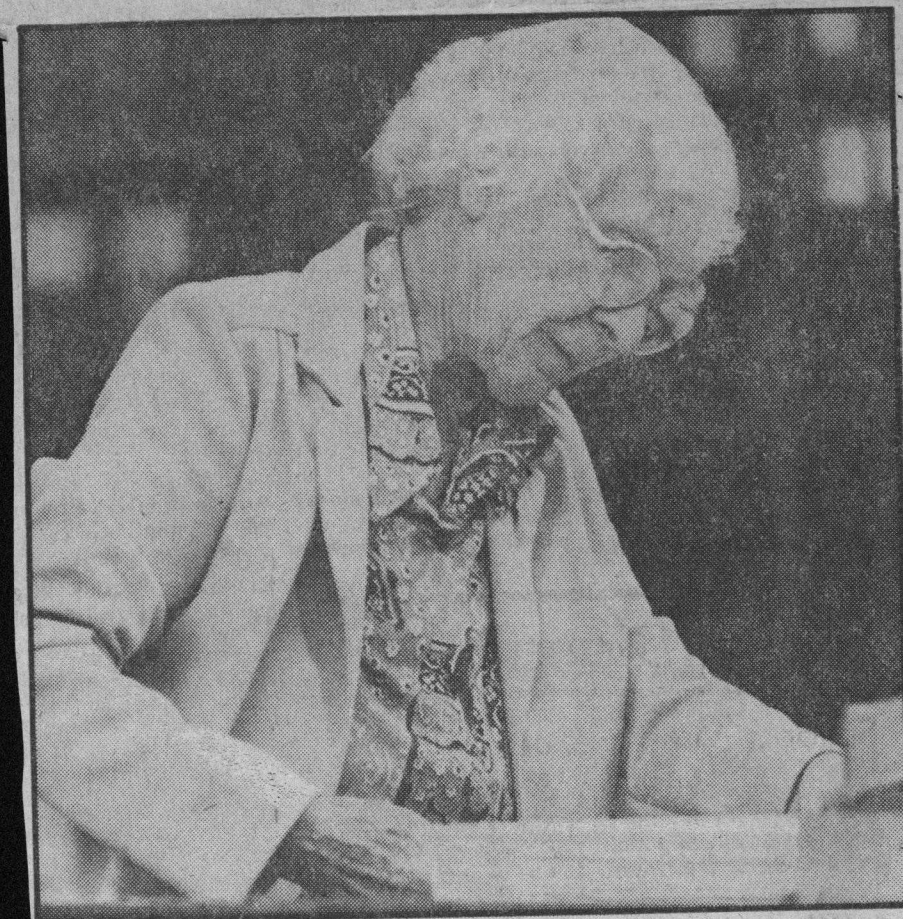
The volunteers do not normally meet the students in the county, normally about four, whom they prepare the Braille volumes for.

When the transcribers are having difficulty rendering a drawing comprehensible, they may consult with a student, but these cases are rare, Bielefeldt said.

She said the transcribers do not want to instill a sense of obligation in the students.



Isabelle Rust transcribes geometry into Braille



Dorothy Conrad has been transcribing for 20 years