

Transcribers put dots in Braille

BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

Pearl Biber has a thing for dots. So do Emily Buchman and some 100 of their friends. Scattered throughout the tri-county area, they spend hours embossing paper with dots.

There's a good reason for their dotly doings. As the Tri-County Braille Volunteers, they have the task of Brailleing everything from novels and children's books to textbooks and sheet music for the blind and visually impaired.

"After doing my very first page of Braille, I was hooked," said Biber. "It's the most rewarding feeling."

Biber founded Tri-County Braille some 25 years ago to serve as an umbrella organization for the seven-eight Braille groups that were doing translations for the blind in the metropolitan area.

Sponsored by The Greater Detroit Society for the Blind, the organization opened up a line of communication among the groups so they knew who was doing what, avoiding duplication of effort.

Most of the Braille groups are in Oakland County and tend to be affiliated with synagogues — Adat Shalom in Farmington Hills, Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Township, Beth Achim and Shaarey Zedek in Southfield, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield and Beth Shalom and Temple Emanuel in Oak Park. The other groups are the Nardin Park Braille Transcribers in the Farmington area and the Grosse Pointe Braille Club.

The group primarily does textbooks for blind students who are placed in regular classrooms although "anything can be done in Braille," according to Buchman.

Talented group

Just looking at the talents of

the group's 40-60 Brailleists is proof. Six can do mathematics in Braille, using a system devised by Dr. Abraham Nemeth, a retired University of Detroit mathematics professor. Two others are music Brailleists, and Biber works in Hebrew.

"Braille can be reproduced in any form, if you can get the code," she said. "I once did a book in Old English."

Original Braille work was done on a slate using a stylus and working from right to left. A wooden erasure was used to make corrections and "a little spit" went a long way in keeping the impression from coming back up, Buchman said.

With the slate, a proficient Brailleist could do one page in about 10 minutes, but accuracy rather than speed is the most important part of the work and one reason why everything is proofread. The group has four-five members who have taken a Braille proofreading course.

All of the work is free of charge "although we're not above asking for a donation," considering a ream of the heavy Braille paper costs \$16, Buchman said. The thermopaper, used to make copies of the Braille work, costs about \$45 a ream.

Meeting a need

"Our whole purpose is service to the blind in the best way," said Biber, who recalled Brailleing textbooks for an Ann Arbor student all through school until he went to college.

Buchman is the assignment chairwoman and when a call comes in for a Braille book, she first checks with American Printing House to see if it has already been done. If the book has been done, the request is referred to the printing house; if not, the group registers the book and then does

the transcribing.

The Braille book bindery is a "pet project" of Temple Beth El, while Nardin Park maintains a depository at the Farmington sub-library, where it keeps books and disks. Those originals not registered with the printing house and sent to the depository go to the state library in Lansing.

"The fiction stays at the bindery," Buchman said. "Then it's bound for distribution as part of the Gift of Books project."

No request is too small or too large. The group has Brailleed letters for the families and fans of blind entertainers like Jose Feliciano, knitting instructions and cookbooks, even menus for restaurants. They Brailleed the works of Shakespeare for a young man who lived in Punjab, India, and are Brailleing greeting cards at selected card shops.

Gift books

Biber got involved in Brailleing when she and her sister discovered blind people had almost no books of their own. They started a project to give every blind child in school a book of their own at Christmas.

They lived in Detroit at the time and did no less than 100 books a year. When her synagogue's Sisterhood decided it wanted to take on a project, Biber offered the idea of Brailleing.

"I couldn't even estimate how many I've done," Biber said. "We would get pins for our work and the top mark now is 10,000 pages."

That sounds like a lot of pages and it is, but nowhere near some "blockbusters" the group has done — 30-40 chapters and some 25,000 pages. In those cases, the group asks for two copies of the book, one to keep intact and the other to tear up and distribute pages among members.

It takes three pages of Braille to transcribe one printed page and a 132-page paperback can quickly turn into a hefty six-inch stack of pages. And when it comes to textbooks, if a publisher revises an edition, the entire book has to be transcribed, Buchman said.

She got involved with Brailleing because it seemed like a nice thing to do and a way of learning a new skill. But, she admits "most people don't realize how involved it is."

She remembers the first book she ever Brailleed. It was the children's story about the little train that could. She later visited a school where a little boy came running up to her.

"He was yelling 'Mrs. Buchman, Mrs. Buchman, thank you for the book,'" she said. "I was crying. I was embarrassed because the other women had done these math books and other big books and all I did was this little children's book."

Becoming a Brailleist is no easy task. The group usually offers classes in the fall, taught by members. The class meets once a week for eight to nine months. At the end of the class, students complete a 35-page manuscript that is sent to the Library of Congress to earn certification, no easy task considering an erasure is considered an error, Buchman said.

Some years, they have a good turnout for the classes; other years aren't so good. A lot of people sign up, but a lot drop out because it is time-consuming work. In fact, both women admit that being a Brailleist may be as lonely a profession as the legendary Maytag repairman.

Persons interested in learning Brailleing can call Tri-County Braille Transcribers president Dee Josaitis at 474-3468 or Sheri Biederman at 661-3468.

Some time ago someone suggested that I have my handwriting analyzed. This I thought the conclusions would be interesting. I am not sure

Mentally efficient, writer acts quickly

GRAPHOLOGY PROFILES



LORENE GREEN

Dear Ms. Green, Some time ago, someone suggested that I have my handwriting analyzed. This person thought the conclusions would be interesting. I am not sure about what she meant. Anyway, until this time, I haven't taken any steps to follow up on the woman's suggestion. Maybe you will do me the honor.

I am 37 and right-handed. J.C. Westland

This handwriting was done with a soft felt tipped pen. If this is the writer's usual pen selection, he probably has a sensuous nature.

Today's writer is a young man interested in intellectual matters. In the world of business, he knows how to cut red tape and get right down to business. He is mentally efficient and often thinks and acts quickly. He likes good equipment to help him expedite his work. When involved in things that are most meaningful, he can become quite enthusiastic. Precision and accuracy are hinted at in this handwriting. However, punctuality may be a problem for him.

Thinking is exploratory and analytical. He has an innate curiosity about many things. His analytical mind then separates what he can accept from what he cannot. Once a decision has been reached, he can be rather firmly based.

Early in life, he wanted to be independent and do his own thing. In his efforts to gain this independence, he was probably a little rebellious. He may still be fighting the voice of authority at times.

In interpersonal relationships, he tends to hold other people at a distance. While he wants to be understood, he does not always make it easy for others to do this. His lack of closeness to others suggests some deprivation he per-

ceives from his early life. Perhaps this is why the woman suggested an analysis of his handwriting.

This writer is extremely sensitive to personal criticism. He may even expect it when none is intended. Compliments he enjoys. Keeping his moods on an even keel may present a little problem for him. He can be critical and unpredictable at times. Feelings of good self-esteem also seem to fluctuate.

Some hidden temper is scattered throughout his handwriting. This can be triggered when things do not run smoothly for him.

Our writer is talented and versatile. Ostensibly, he has been exposed to some of the finer things of life. This in turn would influence his choice of friends and activities.

If you would like to have your handwriting analyzed in this newspaper, write to Lorene C. Green, a certified graphologist, at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia #B150. Please use a full sheet of white, unlined paper, writing in the first person singular. Age, handedness and signature are all helpful and objective feedback is always welcomed.

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