

LE LOUIS BRAILLE

Commemorating the birth of the 'father' of Braille

A Day Without Braille is a Day Wasted

By Gerhard Erasmus



I am fortunate to be a blind assistive technology specialist who works for Edit Microsystems, a company whose belief in braille is unshakable. We distribute a number of braille related devices and software titles and naturally, I get to use it.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share a few typical ways in which braille enhances my day at work.

I usually arrive at the office around 07:30 each day. Coffee is made and a little gossip is shared. My BrailleOne Safari is hanging over my shoulder, ready to let me have access to my e-mail on my phone, in braille, while my ears remain open to hear the latest tidbits.

We implement The Braille Safari and other devices in schools, workplaces and many other scenarios. I get to read... a lot! My Brilliant BI40x, with its longer display for fluid reading, is on my desk, ready for more intensive office work that may include looking at textbooks for accessibility, guiding learners and teachers through braille maths literature and more.

And then there are the meetings of course. Trusty, portable Safari is again at the ready, in my pocket or strapped across my shoulder, ready to let me make meeting notes. I could of course also just brazenly check Twitter, and nobody would know, but I will not admit anything!

For all this to be possible, we firstly need to sell the devices. I read a lot... quotes, sales requests,

promotions of new hardware and software and of course, when dealing with governments, tenders are all included in my daily reading material. I never tackle the reading of a tender without a braille display of some kind; I simply could not risk costly fall-out.

We are busy. Phones ring, customers visit, and one needs to be on top of one's game. It is simply amazing to have a portable braille device to take down a number, when nobody can find a pen. You will not believe how often this happens in an office full of sighted people (I am usually the only one with a pen, by the way.)

We are grateful that life is increasingly returning to normal again. Air travel is again possible and there is nothing better than to have a book from Bookshare on my Brilliant, while I listen to music on my headphones and while the big metal bird takes me where I am needed.

My braille displays are almost fused to my body by now. I am in control thanks to them. I cannot imagine my life without them anymore. I am very grateful for the opportunity to share this with you.

Blind SA Brings the Gift of Braille to the Community

We are pleased to inform readers that a training session, funded by the Education Training Development Practice Seta will take place in KwaZulu-Natal week commencing 17 January 2022.

These training sessions which

will up-skill in the skills of grade 1 braille are aimed at 15 blind and visually impaired adults in KwaZulu-Natal.

We wish the trainer and trainees all of the best for this event and hope that the braille trainees will learn to love the wondrous world of braille.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers

Following the recent celebration of World Braille Day on 4 January the SALB will here forth publish a shorted version of the Louis Braille Bulletin in honor of the commemoration of the birth of Louis Braille, who is the inventor of the braille code.

In this edition we hear from a braille user who experiences a day without braille as a waste, and learn about a braille training initiative of Blind SA in KwaZulu-Natal.

We invite stakeholders with an interest in braille related matters to submit articles for publication. We trust that readers will find the bulletin informative and relevant.

For further information contact:

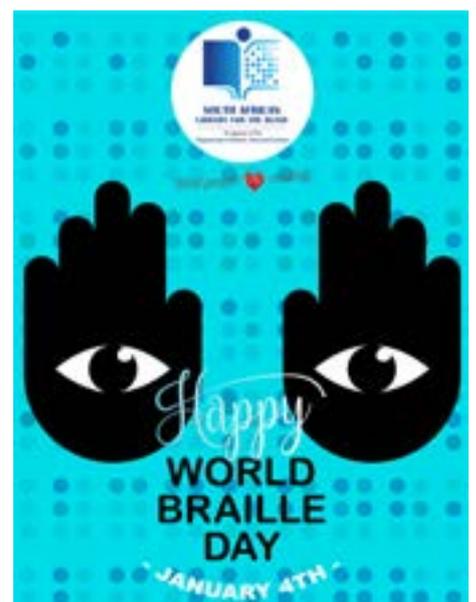
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The benefits of the Louis Braille Legacy!



Aya's story

Zooming in on Braille

at Nkosinathi Foundation, we would like to make it personal and look at the journey of one of our own who had the privilege to benefit from the great legacy of Louis Braille, and this child's name is Aya. In 2019, a young boy from rural Transkei went through a life changing event – one that is unimaginable for most – he was diagnosed with leukaemia and because of the illness ravaging his body, he lost his vision too.

Not only did he need to fight the cancer but learn how to navigate his new world without his sight. It was at the beginning of his chemo journey, after he was recently diagnosed that Nkosinathi Foundation staff got involved in helping him along this new path through rehabilitation, counselling, and braille.

Prior to his vision loss, he was a committed student who passed grade 6 comfortably. His desire to learn and continue with his education was incredible and as soon as he was well enough, he was introduced to braille. All his

initial braille lessons took place in his hospital ward, most often from his bed. On good days, when he was feeling strong, he did Orientation and Mobility training and was given a cane to use to navigate the ward. This teenager exceeded all expectations and by the time he got all clear from the hospital; he was reading uncontracted braille and able to confidently use his cane.

Currently, Aya passed Grade 7 at a special school for the blind and exceeding everyone's expectations.

Teaching braille to our clients, as with Aya's story, does not only assist people with visual impairment to spell and understand grammar, but it also play a crucial rule in their communication with the world, building confidence and being able to write even though they do not have eyesight.



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Adagio!

It is the final weeks of 2021, a year that has seen challenges of an unprecedented nature for so many. As Paula reflects, her thoughts drift to the birthday of Louis Braille and realizes the braille system is in use for 211 years worldwide in many languages. Her thoughts stray back to an evening in 2009.



It is a Saturday in 2009, the bicentenary birth year of a man who allowed many worldwide intellectual freedom with his communication medium of braille. Seated at an outside table, Paula sips strong sweet coffee from a Styrofoam cup.

The warm liquid is an antithesis to the playful breeze whose childlike hand ruffles her hair, wreaking havoc with her fringe whose bangs dance in the wind. As friend and companion, the honey brown strains of a saxophone playing "baker street" gently beckons, then enters, and treads lightly over her receptive auditory rug, and finally caresses her into this reflective mood in which she does not feel alone, because reflection and observation have always been her friends and sounding boards in her quest to survive and thrive.

As the buttery yellow smooth strains fall and rise in pitch she continues to reflect on her life as it was and as it is at present. It is hard to imagine that a matrix comprising six tiny dots had the powers of an abstract creator, was able to assist with the configuration of her life map and all paths she would take, up until the moment she was brought here. Here, into this moment of

awareness of the richly coloured tapestry of opportunity, upon which she is privileged to "look" and enjoy every day of her life.

The high and low notes of the music alternate quickly now and are light and legato – like a butterfly taking off in flight and given the momentary power of speech it chants carpe diem! Then its flight plays its andante multicoloured song across the sky blue palette as it aims for its next flowery destination, though lingers in her presence long enough for her reverie, like a friend reluctant to end a rendezvous.

Another sip from her cup and then she Reverts back to her reflections, and realizes that the word look may baffle each sighted reader of this passage, as to them man sees with eyes alone.

extraordinary people she met daily and WOULD PERHAPS always HAVE been devoid of awareness of those around her. It is certainly true that many memorable experiences would have evaded her, such as her visit to the home and grave of Louis Braille. Here in this place of reverent reflection and gratitude, where silence is his voice speaking louder than words uttered by voices of the living, and she, reverent pilgrim, listening for each sound.

While her feet tread softly, cautiously, each step like the precise sound of styluses writing on the blank slate of the tomb floor: "I was here".

As she makes her way out of the tomb, the styluses write: "...and privileged to have stepped into your presence ..."

Her final step from the tomb is a decisive dots 256, a full stop, a conclusion, a sentence in present continuous tense.

She takes another sip of her drink and realization washes over her that Certainly her life would have been insipid without the other senses, who like kindly parents offer to her waking presence the Smells and taste like that of sweet bread; and then, there was the merciful sense of touch, allowing

music notes and syllables of words to become cerebral grey-clad friends, and then, glorious sense of sound! Offering the mercurial, gold-clad lightning streaks – rumbling across the sky! The sound of an organ, of which the note ascends high into the dome of a huge cathedral. It is these that would always remain abstractions, mere kindly distant church guests to her, allowing only superficial discourse.

What the six dot matrix gave to her was the weight AND SHAPES OF WORDS. Like the separation

adagio

MUSIC - denotes a dynamic

adverb

(especially as a direction) in slow time.
"the music is played adagio with very slight dynamic change"

adjective

performed in slow time.
"the beautiful adagio ending of the piece was just too loud"

noun

No. No. She wanted to correct the reader: because by now it should be common knowledge that one does not see with eyes alone and that there are many dimensions of awareness.

Awareness that speaks, reminding her that if not for the eighth wonder of the world, that wonder many across the global village know as Braille, she would never have taken an extraordinary journey of this nature; never EVER touched and handled each word; never crossed paths with the

SOUTH AFRICAN LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND EMPLOYEES MASTER BRAILLE

We are proud to announce that three of SALB's brailleists have mastered braille systems of languages other than their own.

Hlulani Mashimbye (below) passed the Swati braille examination, Portia Mqoke (right) passed the Afrikaans braille examination and Hayley Loutz (bottom right) passed the English Braille examination.

Each brailleist is now competent in two braille systems.



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Adagio

of land from the sea, creation of an infinite expanse, like the moment of creation: order out of thoughtless chaos, measured ounce for ounce phone for phone morpheme for morpheme; word for word; sentence for sentence thought for thought; action for action and at last that exquisite state we know as metamorphosis, passing from the old into the new, undiscovered lands of the unknown – the unexplored.

And perhaps the only document of surety given in life, change.

The strains from the saxophone increase in volume and intensity, like the primal cry of a malnourished child in dire need of food and drink; with a compelling need to be heard—and as the notes are suspended in the air dangling courageously,

brazenly stripped of all pretence, holding out the gauntlet to be thrown down for all to fight for the rights of fellow human beings, who in many instances are still disenfranchised, still wrapped in the mists of ignorance. They are mere rolling stones who never gather the comforting moss of empowerment, the ability to choose because of literacy.

The music of gratitude rises in her and in a movement marked Adagio, an overwhelming urge unfurls in her, like a gigantic flower, to cry out loudly with sonorous voice across the plains of this continent, louder than the foghorn, and louder than the gulls raucously chanting their needs and requirements above her head. - and then, being in public

she decides that to reverently mouth the phrase: “Long Live Louis Braille...” would be equally effective.

The song nears its conclusion. Alas, she can no longer sense the presence of the butterfly whose legato flight has already led it on to a sunny yellow world of b flat major potential.

As she takes a deep breath of the cool salty sea breeze, revels in the warmth of her drink, rejoicing in the sweet antithesis of sacred dusky coolness and warm sweet coffee, a welcome juxtaposition for her senses, she again allows the honey sweetness of sound to wash over her with the final notes, and softly whispers: “Here’s to you inventor of my freedom. “Long live Louis Braille!”