Braille Hits the Right Note

In 2009, when NBP heard about Rocco Fiorentino it wasn’t because he was a musical prodigy even though he had been performing at places like Birdland, the famed jazz club in NYC, since elementary school. We learned of Rocco because he successfully lobbied the New Jersey state legislature to fund over $1M for braille education—when he was only 12 years old! Rocco became our 2009 Hands On! awardee in the company of dignitaries such as First Lady Laura Bush and author J.K. Rowling.

Since then, Rocco has made a guest appearance on Sesame Street, has jammed with Stevie Wonder, and sang and played piano at the Dr. Oz Health Corps Annual Gala. Yet, Rocco and his parents, Tina and Rocco Sr., still remain close friends and supporters of National Braille Press. Rocco was featured in the last two NBP galas and led the audience in a rousing rendition of the children’s song, “Dragons Love Tacos” this past October. This song, written by Matt Kaplowitz for the Great Expectations program, can be downloaded from the NBP website, www.nbp.org.

Born four months premature and weighing a mere 1 1/2 pounds, Rocco endured 72 blood transfusions and 10 surgeries in the first year of his life. His need for high levels of oxygen to keep him alive resulted in his blindness. But Rocco’s challenging start in life has not deterred him in any way.

Rocco is currently following his dream for a career in music and now lives in Boston, attending Berklee College of Music, just a few blocks away from NBP’s braille publishing facility. We look forward to many more years of collaboration with Rocco!

“I’ve always seen my blindness as a part of me, and who I am as an individual, which is why I have never let it stop me from achieving my goals, and living my life as though the sky is the limit.”

—Rocco Fiorentino

In the Middle of It All

Middleton Family are the Star Volunteers of Gala

It wouldn’t be the A Million Laughs for Literacy gala without the Middleton Family! You may have met them at one of the galas over the years—greeting guests at the registration table or encouraging bidders in the ballroom during the live auction. Martin, Joyce, and their children, Michael and Katherine, always have smiles on their faces and have brought order to NBP’s big night since 2011. Michael has even volunteered to act as our slate and stylus liaison to braille materials for our guests. The whole family are dedicated members of LIONS and LEOS Clubs in Massachusetts District 33S. Their passion for braille literacy and volunteerism is contagious. The Middletons believe, “Being of service to those who have limited or loss of vision is a major tenant of the mission of the LIONS Club and it is where our hearts are best nourished.” And as Joyce concluded, “It’s the gala! Who wouldn’t want to be a part of a night like this!”
Sharing the Joy of Reading

What is the Braille for Life Alliance? When people ask Director of Major Gifts and Planned Giving, Joe Quintanilla, this question he recalls his first conversation with Tom and Suzette Smith. Tom told Joe, “NBP’s print/braille children’s books made it possible for me to read to our daughter and now to our granddaughter, Eva. We are forever grateful for these cherished moments in our lives. We joined the Braille for Life Alliance so that other families—blind parents and sighted children, sighted parents and blind children—can enjoy the experience of reading together.”

The Braille for Life Alliance continues to grow steadily. In three years, it has grown by 93% to 56 individuals who have made provisions in their will or other estate plans for NBP to be a beneficiary.

We thank our Braille for Life Alliance Members for their special support—sharing the gift of reading beyond their lifetime to touch the lives of others.

To join the Braille for Life Alliance, contact Joe Quintanilla at 617-425-2415 or via email at jquintanilla@nbp.org

What Braille Isn’t

By NBP guest blogger, Edward Bell

No one ever told me that braille was supposed to be slow, hard, difficult, cumbersome, or outdated. So, it wasn’t.

No one said that braille would take a long time to learn, and so it didn’t.

No one said that braille was antiquated, and so it wasn’t.

No one ever told me that braille would make me a second class citizen, and so it didn’t.

No one ever told me that braille would be among the most influential factors leading to my success, but it was.

Today, braille is a daily part of my life. Just last evening I used my braille syllabus and notes to lecture graduate students. This past weekend, I pulled out my trusty slate and stylus in order to write out notes for the speech I had to give at a statewide conference.

It, like many things, is what you make of it. If you think it defines you as blind, you are correct. If you think it is somehow a defeat or failure, then it will be.

But if you think that braille is the path to literacy, freedom, independence, hope, success, satisfaction and fulfillment, then it will be. Or, at least it has been for me.

To read the full post on NBP’s blog, Inside NBP, go to http://nationalbraillepress.wordpress.com/
Hungry Fingers Book and Puzzle - Fun Hands-on Learning!

Lovingly named for how children’s little fingers are “hungry” for new discoveries - the Hungry Fingers tactile storybook and accompanying wooden puzzle teach blind children how to construct a tactile image progressively. As the story unfolds, a teddy bear emerges, one body piece at a time—tactually—giving the child a chance to follow the sequence until the whole “mystery character” is formed. Only then is the child asked to give the teddy bear a name, thus making the child feel he or she has a hand in bringing the bear to life!

After the concept of “drawing a bear” is understood, each child builds a teddy bear using the puzzle pieces. The tactile drawings in the book match the sturdy wooden, magnetic puzzle pieces, encouraging kids to make the connection between the drawing and the real puzzle piece.

The Hungry Fingers Puzzle Set includes a print/braille tactile book, a 8-piece wooden, magnet puzzle and a magnetic board to build upon.

National Braille Press is indebted to the Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation for underwriting the costs to bring this unique product from Poland to America. The Foundation shares NBP’s passion for literacy at the earliest age and have partnered with us to develop other literacy projects such as ReadBooks! and Great Expectations: Bringing Picture Books to Life for Blind Kids.
Thank you to our supporters who ensure that NBP continues to promote literacy for blind children and provide access to information through braille.

www.nbp.org