

## Why Those Dots Are Important to Me.

**Posted on 1/3/2014 at 12:00 PM**

by Emily Coleman

January 4th is a much celebrated day in the world of visual impairments. It was Louis Braille's birthday, who was born in 1809, and of course invented braille as a means to literacy for those that were blind. For almost two centuries, his work has made a difference in the lives of many that would otherwise remain illiterate.

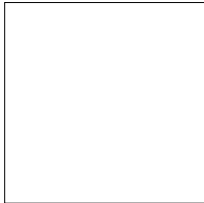
When Eddie was diagnosed with blindness, I immediately became curious about braille. How did it work? Where do you get braille books? Is it hard? Who will teach it to my son? What do you use to write braille? The questions just kept coming, and very patient educators kept answering them.

As Eddie got older, and it was determined that he had multiple disabilities on top of his blindness, I wasn't sure what that would mean for reading & writing. I still provided him an environment full of braille, and opportunities to simply touch those dots, but I didn't know if he'd ever truly read them himself. The prospect of him not being able to read is extremely sad to me.

I read a lot. I collect books, just with the hope that someday I'll have time to read them. I haven't switched to an e-reader (like a Kindle) because I not only like to have a real book in my hand, but I like the way they look on the shelf. Reading, and books, is simply a big part of my life...and I want it to be important to all of my kids.

As Eddie entered school, I continued to advocate for braille instruction, and was questioned by some educators outside the field of blindness. Is this something Eddie can really do? How important is it that he learns braille? Will you tell us when you think he just can't do it? How long do we keep trying? As you might guess, these compiling questions really made me mad.

As a parent, I was steaming inside. I don't think I've ever heard those questions asked about a sighted special-education student who was eight...and younger. When do you stop trying to teach them how to read? The answer is maybe never. Even though the way reading is taught as they get older changes...and the goal for literacy may change...we are still striving for literacy.



I know that some people with visual impairments prefer audio books, and some cannot access braille due to additional disabilities, and I'm grateful that auditory books are available to them. I'll admit that I enjoy a good audio book going in my car at all times. However, there is still importance, and confidence, in being able to read a book...or a sign...or a menu. Having the ability to read, even if it might not be "War and Peace", is important for independence...and increases the chances of employment.

So, for me, braille means literacy for my son and literacy means the ability to read...the ability to be independent...the ability to be employed. All of these things are extremely important to me, and thanks to Louis Braille, I can continue to push for them at home and at school. As you can see by his shirt in this picture, I definitely consider him a "Future Braille Reader." Thanks to Louis Braille, I don't just have shelves of books for me, but I have shelves of books for Eddie.

Those shelves bring me to why those dots are most important to me. They give me the chance to pull a book off a shelf, and my son into my lap, and simply read to him. As we enjoy a book with print and braille...Eddie's hands always move out to explore, and feel the "bumps." He's always looking for them, and knows that they simply mean something. That is where reading begins...and that is where I get my best "Eddie" time.