

**A page from *Guess How Much I Love You*.
The newly designed format, as seen in
The Dot, enables blind and sighted
individuals to share a book.**



Blind and Sighted Share Joy of Reading

Eric Ligon grew weary of not being able to read along with his eight-year-old son, Ethan, who was born blind. Books were one of many things the two couldn't share together, until recently.

Combining his background in graphic design and teaching, Ligon co-founded BrailleInk. in 2004, a not-for-profit company that released its first two braille books in December 2005.

Using the redesigned format, pictures and graphics are placed on the top half of the page, and print characters with the corresponding braille cells are typed on the bottom half of the page. Now, braille readers' hands don't cover the pictures, and print readers are able to tell what the braille says. Both types make it possible for print and braille readers to share a book, which is necessary since 85 percent of children who are blind or visually impaired attend public schools, according to the American Printing House for the Blind.

The books can also be used as a teaching tool for learning braille. In the back of each board book is a braille glossary of numbers, letters and punctuation.

"Since the print and braille are clearly correlated and the original print and illustration are preserved, BrailleInk.'s books also serve as an effective introduction to Braille for sighted folks interested in learning about disabilities," said Ligon.

Guess How Much I Love You, by Sam McBratney and illustrated by Anita Jeram, and *The Dot*, by Peter Reynolds, debuted in December and have since been distributed across the US and even to Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Estonia and Buton. As word of the new concept travels, the number of countries ordering the books continues to grow. BrailleInk. hopes to print three additional books by December 2006, with at least one book available in Spanish. A recent partnership with the Braille Foundation of Uruguay to identify recipients for the books and expedite the copyright process is enabling greater distribution in South America.

"The books have been very, very well received," said Bruce Curtis, Executive Director of BrailleInk. and member of the Denton Hi-Noon Lions Club. "It's very moving to hear stories from parents who can now share a book with their child for the first time."

More than 2,000 copies of *Guess How Much I Love You* have been printed and sold, and 1,000 copies of *The Dot* have been printed with 850 sold to date. Books are \$25 each, and many Lions clubs throughout Texas, where BrailleInk. is based, have purchased books to place in local libraries and schools.

The Denton Hi-Noon, Texas, Lions Club purchased 40 books to give district governors throughout the state to help promote the new books and increase the Lions' involvement. The Denton and Denton Triangle Lions clubs each purchased 20 books for schools and libraries. Grapevine, Keller, Little Elm and Gainesville Lions clubs have also purchased books for distribution locally and statewide.

"I would like to commend BrailleInk. for producing the highest quality books I have encountered. The layout...clearly features print and braille together such that those without visual impairment can understand and appreciate the braille translation," said Leigh Burnham, Children's Librarian at Grapevine Public Library. "I shared the books with the elementary school-aged children in my after-school story time, and they were fascinated to see how braille works in the clear examples provided by these books." She continued, "The books were able to provide a real, hands-on educational experience for these children, who then were able to recognize that we have braille on our sign at the library under the printed words. What an excellent educational experience." The Grapevine Public Library received a donation of books from the local Lions club.

The organization has received a handful of grants to assist in production and printing costs as well as many bulk purchases. Copyrights are coming quickly and the manpower is in place to print additional books, but the organization is waiting on additional funding. Curtis believes working with Lions clubs is a natural given the Lions' mission to assist the blind and visually impaired.

Lions are invited to learn more about BrailleInk. by visiting their booth at the 89th International Convention in Boston. Curtis hopes through the Lions' support, publicity from a recent story in *People Magazine* and exposure during the convention that BrailleInk. will be able to meet their goal of publishing three additional books before the end of the year. ■