



# AT Banter Podcast Episode 239 - Matthew Horspool

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

braille, people, blind, teach, sighted, cowbell, called, speech, learn, leg length difference, disability, pushback, find, bit, maths, community, ryan, astronauts, pandemic, meetings

## SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Matthew Horspool, Ryan Fleury

- 
- R** Rob Mineault 01:26  
Hey, and welcome to a another episode of AT Banter
  - S** Steve Barclay 01:31  
Banter, banter
  - R** Rob Mineault 01:34  
Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. And joining me today is Mr. Ryan Fleury. Well, it's not the intro. I was going for it but hey, I'm Ryan Fleury. And Mr. Steve Barclay.
  - S** Steve Barclay 01:48  
Okay, I'll be Johnny Cash.
  - R** Rob Mineault 01:54  
He's been waiting just been waiting 239 episodes to do that joke and I screwed it up for him.



Ryan Fleury 02:01

You blew it.



Rob Mineault 02:02

Sorry, buddy. Ryan, are you Where are you right now? Are you are you in the guitar dungeon?



Ryan Fleury 02:09

I am today is my first day back in the guitar dungeon. We had a few dead ants this morning. Linda looked and no live ones anywhere down here. So I'm hoping after two weeks of ant battles we are done. So we'll see what happened in the next day or so.



Rob Mineault 02:28

You've won the war.



Ryan Fleury 02:30

I hope so.



Rob Mineault 02:31

Well, okay. Well this is good news because yeah, you can I can kind of tell your sound sounds a lot better so I can I was I suspected you were back in the guitar dungeon.



Ryan Fleury 02:39

Yeah, it's known as open sounding you know, being in the guitar dungeons a little bit more closed in the living room dining room areas. All right, well, we're going to scratch that bit off our list ... the checking on the ants in the guitar dungeon. So it looks like that's no longer a running bit that we can do. So.



Rob Mineault 03:00

You know what the worst part about it is, but we've just lost hundreds of 1000s of listeners. That's true. That's right. Like we said there was no cowbell and the ants are all dead

- R** Ryan Fleury 03:11  
Okay, we're gonna need a new segment that are replaced the ants.
- R** Rob Mineault 03:16  
Yeah, exactly. So I don't know. Maybe you can you can you get a wasp infestation, perhaps?
- R** Ryan Fleury 03:24  
They're bad for dogs are
- R** Rob Mineault 03:26  
They're bad for everybody. I hate those things. So, Hey, Ryan,
- R** Ryan Fleury 03:37  
What Rob?
- R** Rob Mineault 03:38  
what do we what are we up to today?
- R** Ryan Fleury 03:40  
Today we are speaking with Matthew Horspool from the Braillists foundation all about Braille.
- R** Rob Mineault 03:47  
Braille. I love talking about Braille. Braille, Braille. Braille. Braille. Braille. Braille. Yeah.
- S** Steve Barclay 03:57  
Yeah, well, you've got a real feel for it.
- R** Rob Mineault 04:01

Well done. Boom, boom. This is why we have lost the 239 episodes, folks. That is very cool. I'm looking forward to talking to him a little bit later. Hey, I wanted to talk to you guys about something though. Did you guys happen to see this story about the European Space Agency and the fact that they are now allowing astronauts with disabilities to apply?

**S** Steve Barclay 04:28  
Yeah, I did see that.

**R** Rob Mineault 04:33  
So to catch listeners up so basically, what the deal is, is the ESA, which is Europe's answer to NASA, who we know and love. Over here in North America. They have announced that they're looking for four to six astronauts to enter into what they're calling the Paris Dreadnought feasibility project, which is aimed at including candidates with some physical disabilities. into their training program, and then not just be called astronauts. What? Yeah, I don't know. But I don't know how I feel about this. I think that's kind of stupid. But the more I better read the article, I actually wasn't really sure about how I felt about this. And I want to see if I want to get your guys's opinion on this, because some of this seems a little weird to me. So really, what I have a problem, not a problem, but what I find is a little bit weird is the things that they've listed as, quote, disabilities, which seems to me is kind of weird. So there are they list three things that there they allow for in order to enter into this this program. So one is if somebody has a lower limb deficiency, so for example, there they have an amputation or a congenital limb deficiency, or difference, as we like to call it here. It's kind of a negative connotation, but they have a leg length difference. Or they are short. Under 130 centimeters, which would be what about four foot? Is that about right? Yeah, but for four and a third feet? Yeah. So and that's it, those those are the quote, disabilities that they're allowed. So I don't know, like, when did short become a disability? I mean, I mean, I imagine they're talking about, like, say, people with the, like, dwarfism or something like that. But is that do we consider that a disability is that? But I don't know. I mean, they don't usually show up at the meetings. Yeah. And what? Leg length difference? What What's that about? Like? That's, again, that seems like a really strange thing to lump into people with? I don't know, like, I don't know, it's, I think some of the language, and maybe it's, maybe it's a European thing. Their the way that they talk about disability is a bit different than here, maybe? Because I don't know, I wouldn't I, I mean, you limb difference, I guess you could you can clump into some disability community, but I don't know about leg length difference, or, or like people who are under four foot? Like, that seems like a really bizarre, but maybe they just didn't have any other way to talk about that, like the physical differences. TI don't know, it just seems

weird. And same with this the whole Parastronaut project seems a little bit. Just weird.

**R** Ryan Fleury 07:35  
Has NASA ever done anything like this?

**R** Rob Mineault 07:37  
No. In fact, you know, in the article, they they actually quote NASA and they actually went and talked to the folks, some of the folks at NASA, and they really kind of went well, we didn't we haven't, we've kind of looked at this, but we've never really considered any sort of a program like this. And that's really all they said about it. I mean, listen, I'm thrilled that, you know, there's a space agency out there that's being inclusive, and they're trying, and all of that, but I don't know, some of the languaging around this just seems weird. Well, you know, you got to give them kudos for, for giving it a go for starters, you know, nobody else's has done it. But But honestly, you know, when you think about it, really does a limb difference make much difference in space? I mean, it's not like people are tending to do a lot of walking in zero gravity. So, you know, you you wonder how significant that is? how it would even impact on on and astronauts performance. Oh, you mean 100%? So we saw that leg length difference? I mean, I'm guaranteed that that there probably wouldn't be any sort of effect on that. And I mean, like, like, from what I know about the training programs and the application process itself, you're going to scrub out nine times out of 10 anyways, unless you're in peak physical condition. And like, I mean, it's not an easy application process to go through. So listen, if you can get through all that, and you're, you know, four foot two, or you've got your one leg is longer than the other kudos to like you should be you should be in the program. Absolutely.

**R** Ryan Fleury 09:15  
Joining us now is Matthew Horspool. So Matthew, thank you so much for taking some time out to join us today. I am Ryan Fleury. And joining us in the room are Steve Barclay.

**S** Steve Barclay 10:19  
Hello there.

**R** Ryan Fleury 10:21  
And Rob Mineault



Rob Mineault 10:22

Oh, good morning.



Matthew Horspool 10:23

Good morning. It's an absolute pleasure to be here or good afternoon from the UK.



Rob Mineault 10:29

So hey, let's get started and to maybe just give us a little bit of an overview of what you guys are doing over there at the Brailleists.



Matthew Horspool 10:35

Yes. So what we're doing is kind of, it's evolved a lot. And it's evolved a lot because of the pandemic. We started out in 2014. As this tiny little group over in Bristol, Bristol, so southwest of England, they taught like farmers down in Bristol, I'm not even going to try and do the accent. But this little startup called Bristol Braille technology was creating this multi line Braille ereader called the canoes, which is now on the market, but they needed some user testers. So a bunch of us came down to Bristol, and we looked at it and we gave them some feedback. And out of that emerged some conversations about Braille. And we kind of went, well, we're enjoying these conversations. So why don't we meet up again, not to talk about the canoe, but just to talk about Braille. And so this happened, and there were a few meetings in Bristol. And then we had a few meetings in another place called reading, which is kind of near London. And, you know, all this happened. And we were this informal group that talks about Braille. And we were just a bunch of Braille nerds really. And it kind of carried on like that. And there were patches, where we had a lot of meetings, and then we didn't have so many meetings, and then Coronavirus happened. And we had no meetings. And we thought, Okay, well, the community kind of needs to, you know, need some support at the moment, we just need to stay together as a community. So we did some community calls. And that got us really, really good at doing zoom meetings, we learnt how to moderate zoom meetings effectively, and people, other organizations in the UK are coming to us now and saying, you know, how do you run your zoom meeting? so well? And can you give us some training on it? And so we, we took that knowledge kind of around about the sort of maytime of last year and started our first Braille for beginners session, kind of like as a pilot, you know, can we teach Braille remotely over zoom. And we worked out that we could. And we also worked out that there were a few other things that we could do at a more advanced level, that would be even easier to do like teaching people how to use Braille on Windows and teaching people how

to use Braille on iOS, and how to use the slate and stylus. And so we ran a load of these sessions, at the start of this year with some grant funding. And that grant funding has sort of come to an end now, but we've got a little bit more money and we're playing, we're applying for some more money. And yeah, that's basically what we're doing at the moment is just a whole bunch of training sessions on how to use various aspects of Braille in your day to day life.

R

Rob Mineault 13:16

That must be a really interesting experience trying to teach Braille over Zoom.

M

Matthew Horspool 13:22

Yeah, so it depends what sort of teaching Braille You mean, I mean, to teach the basics of Braille over Zoom is really interesting. And I haven't really been involved in that aspect of it, I take my hat off to a woman called Jenny Langley, who teaches Braille down at the West of England school for pioneering this idea, and latterly, a woman called Melanie Pritchard, who lives not too far away from me, but she used to teach Braille to adults and took it on, did another course this year, and what we're finding is we're quite good at teaching people to read over zoom, they, as long as they have the reading material, we can listen to them read, we can, you know, we can point out their mistakes. And we can do this and we can teach them the alphabet, and we can, you know, all of that sort of thing works well, once you've, you know, adjusted to the dynamics of teaching on zoom. Once we start looking at teaching them to write that's a bit harder, because we can't check their work. And we probably could have done a postal system, you know, we could say, you know, post your work to this address, and we'll mark it and post it back. But we didn't do that. And that would involve a lot more work, I think, than teaching people how to read. So it's no replacement for face to face. But in the middle of a pandemic, it suited our needs very well. And in terms of things like you know, teaching people how to use braille displays and teaching people strategies for how to use Braille. We did a session on labeling and things like that. I mean, that's kind of just like presenting any other webinar, really, you know, it's, it's, you know, you can teach someone how to use jaws or you can teach someone how to use a Braille display, and, you know, it's just a webinar

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Rob Mineault 14:58

And so the Braillists Foundation sounds like it's still kind of in its infancy. But Matthew, I've seen your name around online for years. Can you tell us a little bit about who you are and your background?

M

Matthew Horspool 15:10

Yeah, sure. When you Google my name, you get all sorts of things that even some of them are more embarrassing than others. But yeah, I'm in my late 20s. I'll be 30. Next year, I, when I was a child, had access to a broadband internet connection kind of when broadband, you know, you were lucky if you've got one megabit per second, and I had one megabit per second. And people didn't really understand the internet back then. Right? They didn't understand what harm the internet could do. They didn't understand what good the internet could do. It was just this thing. So I got away with loads. And I think if my parents knew half of what I go up to on the internet as a child, you know, they'd be horrified. But yeah, I listened to lots of main menu, back when Jonathan mosun did main menu and then when Dave Williams did main menu, and indeed Dave's now our chairman at the ArrayList, so it's amazing how small the community is. Listen to lots of main menu, learnt a lot from those joined a load of mailing lists, mostly on you know, jaws at the time, jaws and the Braille note, and a few lists for like Braille and buses and that sort of thing, and Skype. And I used to ask questions, and then I used to answer them and write. Yeah, so I was about and beta tested jaws and did internet radio. And then I went to college, I went to a college for the blind down in Hereford, and I discovered beer. And being on what, you know, when you have the choice on a Saturday afternoon between drinking beer and being on email lists, you take the beer, right? So I kind of had an absence from the assistive tech space for a long time. And I'm only now really starting to sort of find my way back in and sort of rediscover some of those mailing lists. And it's amazing that you know, the people who you find our mailing lists, so you were talking to 10 years ago, who still remember you. And it's it's hard community to be a part of sometimes, but it's an amazing community at the same time, and I'm really glad I found my way back to it.

R

Rob Mineault 17:12

So are you guys really mainly involved in things like training and in support? Or are you in the advocacy space in terms of Braille literacy as well?

M

Matthew Horspool 17:22

We're not in the advocacy space. As such, you know, we're not going to be the people who take people to court because they haven't got Braille signage, that would probably be RNA be over in the UK, or possibly, we have a National Federation of the Blind of the UK. And we have things like Thomas Pocklington trust, they would be the real advocacy people, we would teach people strategies on how to advocate so we would say, you know, you need to ask people, if they've got Braille signs, you need to ask people if they've got Braille menus. And we believe very passionately, that there needs to be more Braille, our mission is more Braille. So although at the moment, were mostly doing training and

support, we would, you know, we would do other things connected to Braille if we thought it was useful. So we would test products for people, and we would help out with academic research and, you know, get involved in not so much standard setting, but testing standards. So our Braille authority, for example, if they are rolling out a new standard, they might come to us at the ArrayList and say, can you assemble a user group to look at some samples that are created according to this standard? And tell us what you think. So we do have input in that sense, but not strict advocacy now?

R

Rob Mineault 18:39

And what's the you know, I know that over here, you know, for years, we've been kind of fighting this this battle for Braille literacy, even even among the blindness community, because, you know, there there was this, this idea for a while that things like audio books and screen readers could could sort of replace the need to learn Braille. It has that been your experience over there as well.

M

Matthew Horspool 19:12

Yeah, we've definitely seen this, especially in Education, and actually, especially in areas where sighted people are telling blind people what to do. So one of the things that amazes me is that when we set up Braille for beginners, we got 100, and something 120 140, something like that registrants, for Braille for beginners, and this is off the back of local blindness. Society's telling us aww, we don't run Braille courses anymore, because there just isn't the interest. Well, I'm sorry, there must be interest, because we've managed to find 120 people who don't know Braille, who are online, and who feel comfortable learning Braille remotely. You know, if there's that many people online and comfortable learning remotely, there must be plenty here. blind and not comfortable learning remotely, who are interested. So I think there's a disconnect there. And yeah, we we definitely see it. And I think we tend to take a fairly measured response. I certainly do. I'm not out to say that Braille is gonna solve everybody's problems, I'm not out to say that Braille is inherently better than speech. And I'm not out to say that speech is inherently better than Braille. I don't see why it needs to be a one or the other, you know, an either or choice. I feel like some people get on better with speech, and why shouldn't they let them you know, let them get on better with speech. Others get on better with Braille. And we shouldn't be saying to the people who get on better with Braille, oh, well, you can't have it. Because you've, you've got to do it with speech. There are times you know, I sing in a cathedral choir. And I would not be able to use speech to do that job. I can't imagine standing in a choir with a headphone in listening to speech, speak the words, right, I need to read the words. That's the only way I can do it. And I need to read the music. Now. Likewise, if I'm well, by contrast, if I'm reading my emails, you know what, it's quite nice just

to sit back and listen to them and, you know, drink tea at the same time, you know, so I think it Yeah, we, we would always advocate for Braille, we would always say, you know, Braille. Speech has not replaced Braille. But we wouldn't say, you know, don't use speech because brailles so much better.

R

Rob Mineault 21:33

Right? Yeah, and, you know, and the place where, you know, you really feel the impact of that is, you know, the education space and, and the workspace. Honestly, there are times when, you know, written materials just need to be produced in a in a format that, that someone can read .. and speech isn't always an option. You know, certainly it's great when it is, but there, there are tons of different examples where speech just is not going to cut it. And the problem is, you know, if you've never learned Braille, coming up through the education system, you then you're as an adult, you're essentially illiterate.

M

Matthew Horspool 22:14

Yeah, I would agree with that. And, and I think it's not just about reading and writing, you know, I mean, so it is about reading and writing. And I find that my spelling is better for having read Braille. And I don't know about you, but when I'm typing, and I can't spell a word, I'll go, Oh, well, what does that feel like in Braille? And then I'll back translate it, you know, if I can't remember how to spell a word, I'll think well, what contractions does that word have, and that'll, that'll give me a clue. But it's not even about reading and writing. It's about spatial awareness, I read tables, even basic tables, like tables of contents, I read tables in Braille. From a very early age, I was reading books in Braille that had running headers and page numbers, and headings, you know, centered headings, and left justified headings, and all of this sort of stuff. And I learned very early on, through all of that spatial stuff, the importance of having headings, and the importance of having page numbers. And I had a book once that didn't have page numbers, and it was the most horrendous thing to navigate. And so I feel like I've got an appreciation and actual conscious appreciation of why it's so important to put page numbers in my Word document, because I've got a conscious appreciation of how difficult it is. And I feel like people who haven't read whether it's print or or brightly, and maybe if you read print earlier on, and then you lost your sight, it's a slightly different story. But if you've not read at all, if all you've had access to is audio, how do you build up a conscious appreciation, you know, that you need to put page numbers in? Because the sighted people depend on page numbers, but you don't really understand why.

R

Rob Mineault 23:53

So in your experience, and your experience in the community, how hard of a sell is Braille to people? And where where is the pushback happening? Is it among, you know, the, the younger blind community or is it, you know, in the able bodied community? Where is that pushback happening?

M

Matthew Horspool 24:14

I think, actually, we're starting to see some change, in that sense. I think it feels to me, and maybe it's a self fulfilling prophecy. Maybe I'm hanging around with a community that likes Braille, and that's why I'm feeling it. But I feel like Braille is becoming fashionable again, in a way that it wasn't fashionable even, you know, 10 years ago. So I'm not getting as much pushback as I used to get when I talk about Braille, I'm finding a lot of younger blind people, you know, blind people of my age and slightly younger and slightly older who are saying Actually, I really like Braille and I really, you know, use Braille. I do get some pushback, I get pushback from people who who are my age who have, you know, fought really, really hard to get jobs, who are not amazing. Braille readers, and some of us aren't Some of us are not amazing Braille readers, some of us are not amazing speech readers, it goes back to what I said before. But you know, I, there are people who are my age who are not amazing Braille readers who fought really hard to get jobs who've found a job. And and actually very high paying, you know, on on good five, or even six figure salaries. Who would push back and say, Well, I managed to get a job without Braille. So Braille is not that important. That's a narrative that I've heard quite often. And I would add to that sentence, not important to them. And I think that would actually be a fair assessment, you know, clearly they don't need it. But that doesn't mean that everybody else doesn't. And then yeah, I get pushback from actually from the older generation of people who were sighted, and then lost their sight, and in particular, the people who support them. So, you know, if I say to somebody, you need to learn Braille, and they're, you know, in their 20s. I mean, they might sort of go well, I don't know why. But if they're not, you know, that they might learn it. And, especially if they're not doing very well, you know, if they're struggling with their studies, and they're struggling to find employment, they, they might learn it, or if somebody lost their sight in like their, their 20s 30s, I'd have an easier time persuading them to learn Braille than somebody who lost their sight in maybe their 70s, or their 80s. And I think that's partly because the people in the 70s and the 80s feel less incentivized to learn. But I also think it's because the narrative from sighted habilitation professionals and people like that, you know, own em, people, the attitude tends to be well, you don't need to learn it, you're too old to learn it, you won't have the sensitivity, and they've already been put off by them. And so by the time I come along, you know, of course, they're not going to want to learn it.

R

Rob Mineault 26:52

What's the state of Braille education in in the UK right now, because over here, one of the big barriers to people learning Braille is the fact that there's just so few teachers,

M

Matthew Horspool 27:02

Yep, that's true. If you're a child, and you're really, really blind, then you'll be fine. You will get Braille tuition, you may not get Braille tuition of particularly high quality, I mean, that kind of depends on where you live, and whether you're lucky enough to have a Braille teacher nearby. But you'll get some sort of Braille teaching, because there literally is no alternative, you know, unless they want to teach you to use speech only. And I haven't seen any cases of people using speech only. The big problem we have in children's education is people who are on the borderline. So people who, for example, when they're a child, they are able to read children's books in print. And so they're never taught Braille, because people say, Well, you know, you've got your vision, you must hold on to the vision that you've got, you must use, you know, we've got a strain to use every, every bit of the vision that you've got, we don't want to turn your eyes off. In fact, I had one parent that I used to work in a school, and one parent who said this, when I said that the child needed to learn Braille, the mum said, Yeah, but that feels like I'm turning his eyes off. And it wasn't until I said, You know what, you're absolutely right, you are turning his eyes off. But by turning his eyes off, you're allowing him to turn his eyes on when he needs to cross the road. And the mum kind of looked and went, you know, I never thought about it like that. I'm gonna make sure he learns Braille, but people don't. And, you know, we used to say, we'll teach Braille to anybody who can't read size 24 print, and then gradually it's gone up. And now it's, you know, we won't teach Braille until they can't read size 36. And I think in some cases, we won't teach Braille till they can't read size 48. And, you know, I think that's not fair. You know, we should be teaching them Braille. If they can't read 24, or possibly a bit less than that, you know. And if you're an adult, I mean, yes, I mean, good luck trying to learn Braille, if you're an adult, you've really got to fight hard for any sorts of Braille tuition if you're an adult.

R

Rob Mineault 28:59

Yeah, I hear your point about the the pushback you sometimes get from parents, one of the other hats that I wear, I work on a clinic, a low vision clinic for kids. And we regularly see kids who have eye conditions where their their vision is ultimately going to fail them. And it's surprising how many parents of those kids do not want their kid to learn Braille, because they see it somehow as as a defeat. Which is sad. Wrong. Yeah.

M

Matthew Horspool 29:35

I guess you get the same arguments about the white cane as well. Oh, I don't want you know, "he's not blind. He's only partially sighted. He doesn't need a cane." And you think Yeah, but I mean, if he's so partially sighted that he's going to fall down the steps because he didn't see them. He's blind enough to need a cane. But I guess it's the same sort of thing, isn't it? Braille is seen as like this, the ultimate kind of demonstration of the fact that you've failed at life because you're blind. And then I think it's a shame. I think, I think we still have this problem of we see blindness as a failure as a society. Well, I mean, it's it's a real shame that he's blind. And I think, you know, that's, that's not really I can understand why we're here. But it's not fair.

R

Rob Mineault 30:19

Yeah. 100%. I mean, and that's a, you know, that's a super high level conversation. But you're absolutely right. I think that, you know, the really the, the problem at the at the heart of that is just the way that societies sees disability. So, how much of a problem, do you see cost being in terms of Braille, you know, even producing Braille materials is, is expensive, you know, for, for educational systems to produce Braille for, for all their students, very expensive. And even on the in the consumer level, you know, things like electronic Braille devices are still really expensive for a lot of people. Does that factor in to some of the problems that we're having in really getting Braille out there?

M

Matthew Horspool 31:08

I mean, it does. But I think we're not always comparing apples to apples. And sometimes we can see technology as a bit of a false economy. So yeah, Braille technology is expensive. There's no getting away from that. And I think Braille technology hasn't really done us any favors in a lot of ways. Because you have products like the Braille note touch, and the Braille sense six, and I'm not out to slam these products at all. If you know, I think they're great products. And they work well, in the areas where they work well. However, they don't work in the areas where they don't work well. And what I find frustrating is that we say, Oh, yeah, you can get this really expensive Braille technology. But it'll do everything that the laptop will do. And then they get it and they find that it doesn't. And that gives a very negative impression of Braille, because not only is it expensive, but it's not fit for purpose. I think products like the orbit reader are changing the landscape, because number one, they're cheaper. And number two, they've got a very predefined purpose, this machine can only read and write basic Braille. And people understand that and people buy it. And there's there's no false expectation of what it can and can't do. And I think that's helping. So I think we'll, we'll get there in terms of the expense of the technology. And as more and more people need the technology, we might get economies

of scales and bring the cost down, or at least not continue to bring the cost up. I mean, for all that Braille is expensive. A Braille display 10 years ago cost about the same as a Braille display costs now. So I don't see as the price has really gone up in line with inflation. So it is gradually getting cheaper, or at least staying the same. And in terms of the cost of the production of Braille, I mean, it's always going to be expensive to a certain extent, cuz you've got to pay transcribers to do jobs. And, I mean, there's automation, but automation isn't gonna get you all of the way. But the thing is, I think, to a certain extent, we're always going to need transcribers because the sighted world, the mainstream world is not good at producing accessible documents. So even if I didn't need a document in Braille, even if I just needed the document as a Microsoft Word documents so that I could read it on, you know, on my Braille display, or I could read it with speech, if that document originated as a PDF file, but it's badly formatted, or originated as a printed page that's got to be scanned in and we don't have the electronic file anymore, or anything like that, we're still going to need a transcriber to transcribe it into a Word document. So although it will be more expensive to put it into Braille, because you've got to pay for the Braille paper and what have you, I don't think it's as as expensive as perhaps we make it out to be or the opponents of Braille would make it out to be.

R

Rob Mineault 33:56

So going back to some of these devices that are cheaper, because, you know, I remember talking about this years ago, when when they were sort of first poised to enter the market and being really excited about it, because from what I understand they they use a slightly different technology than standard electronic Braille devices that that allow them to be produced cheaper, which then allows them to be sold cheaper, of course, how are we in that space? I mean, because I know that there are a few devices that are out there that that use similar technology that that's different. How is how are things like the Orbit Reader doing? Say in the UK?

M

Matthew Horspool 34:43

Yeah, it's the fact question and look, you get what you pay for with these things. I'm not saying that the Orbit Reader 20 is comparable to a Focus 14 or a Brailiant bi 20 or a Varioultra 20 or any of the other displays on the market. It is different technology. It refresh. She's more loudly, it refreshes more slowly. You imagine a blinking cursor on an orbit reader 20 going off all day, it sounds like you've got a ticking clock in the room. It's it's really frustrating. But they're cheap, and the Braille quality is good. And for people who are just starting out with Braille, maybe they don't care so much. And that, because they're cheap, were able to, I mean, companies like our and I be over in the UK, they bought bucket loads of these things, you know, 1000s and 1000s of them and are just

giving them away. They have a very aggressive grants program. If you're a blind child, the orbit reader costs about 600 pound over here. If you're a blind child, you can get one for 40 pounds, thanks to a grant program, headed up jointly by rnap and a charity called Victor. You know, when the rnr library closed this time last year, because of COVID, they sent out lots of free orbit readers with SD cards of books. And indeed, that SD card has become very popular and people are ordering the SD card because it's got, you know, 2000 BRF formatted books on it. So over here, the RNIB doing remarkably well, because it's cheap enough that RNIB can buy lots of them in and really support it well and push it out to people. And I think rnr in that sense, kind of sorry, electronic Braille is kind of, you know, okay, we could spend a few 100,000 on electronic Braille devices, but they rent their physical library space. So if by spending hundreds of 1000s on electronic Braille devices, they could reduce the amount of hardcopy Braille and hence reduce the amount of space that they need to rent, then I think they probably saw it as a long term investment.

**S** Steve Barclay 36:56  
Hey, let's talk about the BrailleCast.

**R** Ryan Fleury 37:00  
What is BrailleCast, Matthew?

**M** Matthew Horspool 37:03  
All right, yeah, so, so BrailleCast and the Braillists, were not one in the same at first, and they are now. So BrailleCast was set up in 2017, as a bit of a freelance project, that the chairman of the Braillists at the time, Dave Williams, so in fact, is still the chairman of the Braillists, but at the time, he was a freelancer. And he set it up to strengthen his brand, I think, and, and I was brought on to kind of do some editing work and some production work. And we set it up as as BrailleCast to promote Braille. And the idea was, we produce about 20 minutes of content per month, and we push it out to teachers of the blind, and other stakeholders like that, to try and show that Braille is still relevant. And we try and publish, you know, interesting interviews and things like this. And it worked to a point we didn't get, you know, enormous listener figures, but it was good. It did what it did. But then we both kind of got busy and nothing really happened with it for a while. And then we sort of brought it under the Braillists, umbrella. And we started to publish, you know, some more lengthy interviews, we published one with, say, Brian McDonald, about how National Braille Press was coping. During the pandemic, we published one with the UEB online people about the UEB online course, and how that worked. And all that sort of thing. Judy

Dixon gave us an interview on Braille slates and things. And in the early days of the pandemic, we actually recorded those interviews in front of a live Braille audience, as part of our community calls, you know it, you know, people needed a sense of community. So we had a community call for a bit. And then we brought Judy in, interviewed her, the audience got to ask questions, and it was kind of a nice way to spend a Friday evening when we were all kind of in lockdown and didn't know what to do with ourselves. And that kind of changed the dynamic of BrailleCast. And we ended up with a very loyal audience of Braille users. And so the content on BrailleCast now is very much geared towards Braille users and interviews that they would find interesting. So we have an interview, that as we record, this hasn't been published, but will be published soon. With Andrew at Humanware about the new 1.1 update for the Brilliant displays. That that's just come out. And we've got some really interesting interviews, we published one over Christmas with a chap called Steven, who I went to college with, and he's a sighted person who was denied the opportunity to learn Braille and we talked about you know, what was it like to go through school as somebody who didn't know Braille and you know, Do wish you'd learned Braille and all this sort of thing. And the interviews got a bit longer and we also use it As an opportunity as a platform to publish archives of our training, so quite a lot of Braille cast at the moment actually is archives of the masterclasses that we've run on using Braille on Windows using Braille on iOS, SCB versus UEBBraille in the workplace, how to choose a Braille display, Braille music you know, lots of webinar recordings that we brand as BrailleCast extra so that people know that they can skip over it if they attended the live webinar, but it's all in the same feed.

R

Ryan Fleury 40:34

Okay, I have to ask so I learned grade one Braille I learned a little bit of grade two never jumped into UEB but I think I just heard you say SEB. What is SEB?

M

Matthew Horspool 40:45

Okay so SEB never actually existed. We'll call it SAP now. So before UEB so UEB is Unified English Braille and we have ue grade one and new UEB grade two right. Before UEB we had all the different codes that all the different countries used and they predominantly fell into British Braille. And the the full title of British Braille was British Braille, a restatement of standard English Braille, which is where we get SEB. But the code was British Braille. And the other code that people might be familiar with, particularly in Canada was English Braille, American edition EABE. and British Braille was produced by Bork, the Braille Authority of the UK, and EBA was the Braille authority of North America. And these codes kind of came, you know, came together to form UEB. And SEB has become the word that we use to describe the various cluster of codes that existed before UEB.



Ryan Fleury 41:49

So have we finally settled on our Braille code?



Matthew Horspool 42:02

There are so many people who don't like UEB. I think the thing is, the great thing about UEB, and I'm a great advocate of UEB. But the great thing about UEB is that it's an ambiguous and it can represent everything that you need it to represent. If you need to represent something in UEB, you can do it. And it's really interesting the sorts of things that you can do in UEB that you sort of didn't think about. So if you look at Braille screen input on an iPhone, you know, I had a girlfriend, I don't have a girlfriend anymore, although, you know, how temporary that will be? Will will, you know, leave to be seen, but you know, when we would text each other, you know, I wanted to put smiley faces now, okay, I could do that in the old Braille code. But remember that the open bracket and the close bracket were both the lower G. So how do I make absolutely sure if I'm doing a colon followed by a bracket? How do I make absolutely sure that that the translator will put a right bracket instead of a left bracket, I don't want to send a sad face by accident, most of the time, it will get it right. But you know what I mean, in UEB, you do not have that ambiguity. It's it's very simple bracket, that open bracket is a dot five and a gh sign of the closed bracket is a dot five and an AR sign. So UEB can represent everything and it can represent it unambiguously. And that's an enormous selling point. There is no denying that the Nemeth Code for mathematics is significantly smaller than its UVB counterparts. Even the old British maths code, I mean, it wasn't as small as Nemeth. But it was smaller than UEB. If I was studying degree level maths at university, I think I would probably choose to use one of the older maths code for the fact that it was compact. And I think that's fine. I think, you know, I think it's good that we have the ability to represent maths in UEB. And I think it's equally good that, you know, if we need to, to represent it in a small way, we can still do that, you know, we still switch to an alternative code for music. So why shouldn't we switch to an alternative code for maths, but what you don't want to do is be in a situation where the only maths code that's available is Nemeth, and you're using iOS braille displays, and you've got a couple of math signs that you then need to switch into Nemeth Code because UEB can't accommodate them. So it's good that UEB has the options there.



And that's why people refuse to learn Braille, because it's too complicated.

R Rob Mineault 44:46  
It's not that complicated.

M Matthew Horspool 44:48  
But the thing is, it's not though and yeah, I mean, it's well, and even then it's a false economy, right. You say, Well, I'm not going to learn Braille, because it's too complicated. But we don't say that, you know, oh, well, I'm not going to learn speech because it's too complicated, right? But But, but we can have a conversation about well, I prefer Eloquence and I prefer, Nuance, Vocalizer. And Nobody. Nobody sits there and listens to us have that conversation and says, Oh, I'm not going to use speech because it's too complicated. Right? And, and actually using speech is pretty complicated. The only reason why people don't think speech is complicated is because they're not trained. You know, I get really cross with people who say, I use NVDA. Because NVDA can do everything that jaws can do. Do everything that jaws can do. I'm not saying here that NVDA is a bad product. NVDA can it can do things that jaws can't do, jaws can do things that NVDA can't do. I'm not out to say which one's best? You know, I use both of them. I like both of them. But you can't simply you know, people oversimplifies speech. And I don't think it's I don't think it's fair, if you invested as much time in, you know, trying to work out reasons why you shouldn't use speech as you invest in finding reasons why you shouldn't learn Braille, Believe you me, you'll find them right.

R Rob Mineault 46:13  
I like it. I like this passion about Braille. I like where this conversation has gone.

M Matthew Horspool 46:19  
This is great that you gave me a perfect opportunity to talk about speech versus Braille, which was the one thing I did want to come back on. But I've, I've done it

R Ryan Fleury 46:28  
He's angry now

R Rob Mineault 46:29  
Yeah, no, just in time for the end of the day, this is great. You can drinking more beer.

M

Matthew Horspool 46:36

Well, it just annoys me that, you know, people turn around and say, Oh, well, it's gonna take two years to learn how to do Braille, but we can teach someone how to use a computer in three months. And you go, Well, actually, you know what, you can't teach someone to use a computer in three months, you can teach somebody how to write a document and save it in three months. But as soon as a Windows Update comes and changes the process for saving a file, then you've got to send them back to training to be retrained, if you're going to teach somebody to independently use a computer and deal with all of the stuff that goes wrong with computers, it's going to take the same two years that it took to teach them Braille.

R

Rob Mineault 47:14

Oh if anybody knows that pain, it's going to be Ryan and Steve

R

Ryan Fleury 47:18

Buy a MAC

M

Matthew Horspool 47:21

Yeah but even that doesn't work. Either, either a staunch voice over user on iOS, and I thought yeah, okay, I'll use a Mac because you know, voice and yada, yada, yada. And I wanted to throw that MAC out the window. It was awful. I mean, maybe it wouldn't have been like, you know, if I'd have actually bothered to actually learn how to use it rather than just you know, done it for half an hour and gone. No, you know what, it's not the iPhone. I don't like it. But you know, even the MAC has its problems

R

Ryan Fleury 47:48

For sure. conversation for another day.

M

Matthew Horspool 47:52

Indeed.

R

Rob Mineault 47:53

Well listen, anybody who is interested in any of the workshops or master classes that you

guys hold, where can people find you guys?

M

Matthew Horspool 48:03

Well, you can find us on the web at [Braillelists.org](http://Braillelists.org). You can follow us on Twitter at [Braillelists](https://twitter.com/Braillelists). We are also on Facebook, the search for the Braillelists Foundation. You'll find us there. And if you want the podcast for now, where we have a separate website for the podcast so the podcast is at [BrailleCast.com](http://BrailleCast.com). And if you have iTunes or overcast or pocket casts downcast Castro, Stitcher, Spotify, amazon music any of these Google podcasts if you just search for BrailleCast you'll find it and if the a lady doesn't find it because we do have this is a play BrailleCast and it says I can't find Brian cast. You know, any number of things happen when you try this we did actually add some keywords so the full title of the feed to make it easier for smart speakers to find us is connect BrailleCast connecting the dots for Braillelists everywhere so if you ask it for something like "BrailleCast connecting the dots" hopefully there's enough keywords in there that it should be able to find it.

R

Rob Mineault 49:18

Oh damn, you know we need to do that too. So yeah, we're gonna do the same thing. Or we need a smarter smart speaker.

M

Matthew Horspool 49:38

We really do. Well, it's frustrating because you can't even put a phonetic thing in Can you like I thought, you know, when I listed on Amazon Music it might come up with you know, how, what alternative things could we look out for at which point I would have put Braille space Cast it might have come up. And then you say our play podcast by the Braille Foundation. You get I can't Find podcasts by the playlist foundation. No, I don't want to play. You know, but that doesn't seem to be any way of logging that sort of thing. Insane. Can you sort this out, please?

R

Ryan Fleury 50:11

Well, that's one main reason I don't use my echo devices for Home Security. They're just not reliable yet.

M

Matthew Horspool 50:18

No, no, that really not. But hey, how, you know, we'll get there one of these days. And in the meantime, I think we've got just about enough keywords to make it work.

**R** Rob Mineault 50:28  
Well, Matthew, thank you so much for taking some time out today to join us. I know your day is one coming to an end. Ours is just beginning.

**M** Matthew Horspool 50:36  
Yeah. Well, thanks very much for having me. It's always a pleasure to talk about Braille and to talk about Braille and to find like minded people. So yeah, keep in touch.

**R** Rob Mineault 50:47  
Huh? Well, there you go, boys. Another Braille episode under our belts, probably like the 56th one. Indeed, it wasn't even all that bumpy.

**R** Ryan Fleury 50:57  
There was lots of interesting stuff going on on their website. I was looking at it earlier today. And they've got events coming up. Steve, they even even have an event with Kay Holbrook presentation on their website, I think in June, on Braille. So there's webinars, events, stuff happening over there all the time. So definitely check out their website because they're pretty active. Well, and that's the nice thing about the online world that we live in, thanks to COVID is that a lot of these events are now open to people all over the world. So as long as you can manage the time difference? Yeah, there's there's a lot of pretty cool events that you can access. Thanks, COVID. Thank you, COVID.

**R** Rob Mineault 51:44  
Thank you for bringing the world to our computers and forcing them to stay there.

**R** Ryan Fleury 51:50  
And some ways it's brought us together. You know, how many times have we said during our pub nights and stuff that you know, we're talking with people that we probably would never have met before? over this past year? year and a half so it's been attended to bonuses. Yep.

**R** Rob Mineault 52:06  
I mean, there was that there was a month and a half there that Pornhub was free. What?

Yeah, that's right. You mean What did you tell me? Sorry, dude, that was Yeah, was last March. Oh, man. Sorry. But ya know, it Listen, you got to take the silver linings where you can get them but no, that was you know what, it's really also really interesting to hear about the state of Braille in different countries and because I do really feel like your mileage varies depending on where you are in the world. I was looking for good news articles. Yeah, sure. You guys are trying to pull that whole Hello thing I thought that's what's going on. See you making me paranoid now. Like I think you guys have meetings without me. We're just like, Okay. Just pretend this mic died and you can't hear

**R** Ryan Fleury 53:07  
Good idea. Yeah.

**R** Rob Mineault 53:12  
Well, hey, Ryan.

**R** Ryan Fleury 53:16  
Rob.

**R** Rob Mineault 53:18  
Where can people find us? They can find us at atbanter.com. They can also drop us an email if they so desire. At cowbell@at banter.com Substitute cowbell. Yeah. Suck it Ryan. Wait was really lame sounding cowbell? I didn't hear anything. Yeah, it was very, very, very faint.

**S** Steve Barclay 53:44  
Was it?

**R** Rob Mineault 53:45  
Zooms probably cancelling it out?

**R** Ryan Fleury 53:47  
zoom is the canceled out where were you using one of the cowbells.

- R** Rob Mineault 53:52  
Okay, okay, try to get okay. Put her up to the microphone. There you go. That's right. As we speak, there's like a bunch of cows running towards us. Wow. That's quite the cowbell. I'm sure our audience now is really looking forward to the return of the actual cowbell. We better end this I think. I think all those ant trap fumes are getting going right to Ryan's head. Say hey, speaking of you. How's the exercising going?
- R** Ryan Fleury 54:35  
Now? I haven't done it for two weeks because we've had ants down here.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:38  
Okay, well, just checking because I thought yeah, that's how it starts next week will be the big test.
- R** Ryan Fleury 54:44  
If I've got no ads down here for the rest of the week, then yes, I will be starting again Monday.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:48  
All right. Okay. What about what about you, Steve? What's the how's the running schedule going? Pretty good. Pretty good. I was out on Sunday. to six and a half kilometer run in and the Sunday before that. I did 10 Wow. Wow, that's coming along pretty good. Yeah, yeah. And I think tomorrow I might, if I can get my ass out of bed early enough I might go down to the lake and see if I can run around Burnaby lake. Wow.
- R** Ryan Fleury 55:22  
That is nice. Well done well done. Is there somebody somebody's home to come pick you up?
- R** Rob Mineault 55:29  
No, but if I take myself with me I'm sure I can call someone.



Steve Barclay 55:33

I can phone a friend.



Rob Mineault 55:36

Alright, that I think is going to do about do it for us this week. Thanks, everybody for listening in. Big thanks to Matthew from the Brailleists for talking with us. And we will see everybody next week.