GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH NUBS

This document is the first in a series of short stories or articles to acquaint braille readers with the proposed new braille code known as NUBS, (Nemeth Uniform Braille System).

At the end of this sampler, there is an explanation regarding all of the NUBS issues that occur in this sampler.

The text for this sampler is taken from:

Title: RASCAL
Author: Sterling North
Illustrator: John Schoenherr
Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Company

ISBN: 0-395-73253-0

I May

It was in May 1918, that a new friend and companion came into my life: a child, a personality, and a ring-tailed wonder. He weighed less than one pound when I discovered him, a furry ball of utter dependence and awakening curiosity, unweaned and defenseless. Wowser and I were immediately protective. We would have fought any boy or dog in town who sought to harm him.

Wowser was an exceptionally intelligent and responsible watchdog, guarding our house and lawns and gardens and all my pets. But because of his vast size--one hundred and seventy pounds of muscled grace and elegance--he seldom had to resort to violence. He could shake any dog on the block as a terrier shakes a rat. Wowser never started a fight, but after being challenged, badgered, and insulted, he eventually would turn his worried face and great sad eyes upon his tormentor and more in sorrow than in anger, grab the intruder by the scruff of the neck and toss him into the gutter.

Wowser was an affectionate, perpetually hungry Saint Bernard. Like most dogs of his breed he drooled a little. In the house he had to lie with his muzzle on a bath towel, his eyes downcast as though in slight disgrace. Pat Delaney, a saloonkeeper who lived a couple of blocks up the street, said that Saint Bernards drool for the best of all possible reasons. He explained that in the Alps, these noble dogs set forth every winter day with little kegs of brandy strapped beneath their chins, to rescue wayfarers lost in the snowdrifts. Generations of carrying the brandy, of which they have never tasted so much as a blessed drop, have made them so thirsty that they continue to drool. The trait had now become hereditary, Pat said, and whole litters of bright and thirsty little Saint Bernards are born drooling for brandy.

On this pleasant afternoon in May, Wowser and I started up First Street toward Crescent Drive where a semicircle of Late Victorian houses enjoyed a hilltop view. Northward lay miles of meadows, groves of trees, a winding stream, and the best duck and muskrat marsh in Rock County. As we turned down a country lane past Bardeen's orchard and vineyard, the signature of spring was everywhere: violets and anemones in the grass; the apple trees in promising bud along the bough.

Ahead lay some of the most productive walnut and hickory trees I have ever looted, a good swimming hole in the creek, and, in one bit of forest, a

real curiosity--a phosphorescent stump which gleamed at night with fox-fire, as luminescent as all the lightning bugs in the world-- ghostly and terrifying to boys who saw it for the first time. It scared me witless as I came home one evening from fishing. So I made it a point to bring my friends that way on other evenings, not wishing to be selfish about my pleasures.

Oscar Sunderland saw me as I passed his bleak farmhouse far down that lane. He was a friend of mine who knew enough not to talk when we went fishing. And we were trapping partners on the marsh. His mother was a gentle Norwegian woman who spoke English with no trace of an accent, and also her native language. His father Hermann Sunderland was another kettle of hasenpfeffer--German on his mother's side and Swedish on his father's--with a temper and dialect all his own.

Oscar's mother baked delicious Norwegian pastries, particularly around Christmastime. Sometimes in placing before me a plate of her delicacies she would say something tender to me in Norwegian. I always turned away to hide the shameful moisture in my eyes. As Mrs. Sunderland knew, my mother had died when I was seven, and I think that was why she was especially kind to me.

Oscar's tough old father presented no such problem. I doubt that he had ever said anything kind to anyone in his life. Oscar was very much afraid of him and risked a whipping if he were not at home in time to help with the milking.

No one was concerned about the hours *I* kept. I was a very competent eleven-year old. If I came home long after dark, my father would merely look up from his book to greet me vaguely and courteously. He allowed me to live my own life, keep pet skunks and woodchucks in the back yard and the barn, pamper my tame crow, my many cats, and my faithful Saint Bernard. He even let me build my eighteen-foot canoe in the living room. I had not entirely completed the framework, so it would take another year at least. When we had visitors, they sat in the easy chairs surrounding the canoe, or skirted the prow to reach the great shelves of books we were continuously lending. We lived alone and liked it, cooked and cleaned in our own fashion, and paid little attention to indignant housewives who told my father that this was no way to bring up a child.

My father agreed amiably that this might well be true, and then returned to his endless research for a novel concerning the Fox and Winnebago Indians, which for some reason was never published.

"I'm headed for Wentworth's woods," I told Oscar, "and I may not start home before moonrise."

"Wait a minute," Oscar said. "We'll need something to eat."

He returned so swiftly with a paper sack filled with coffee cake and cookies that I knew he had swiped them.

"You'll get a licking when you get home."

"Ishkabibble, I should worry!" Oscar said, a happy grin spreading across his wide face.

We crossed the creek on the steppingstones below the dam. Pickerel were making their seasonal run up the stream, and we nearly caught one with our hands as he snaked his way between the stones. Kildeer started up from the marshy shallows, crying "kildeer, kildeer" as though a storm were brewing.

Wowser had many virtues, but he was not a hunting dog. So we were much surprised when in Wentworth's woods he came to a virtual point. Oscar and I waited silently while the Saint Bernard, on his great paws, padded softly to the hollow base of a rotten stump. He sniffed the hole critically, then turned and whined, telling us plainly that something lived in that den.

"Dig 'em out, Wowser," I shouted.

"He won't dig," Oscar predicted. "He's too lazy."

"You just watch," I said loyally. But I wasn't betting any glass marbles.

In another minute Wowser was making the dirt fly, and Oscar and I were helping in a frenzy of excitement. We scooped the soft earth with our hands, and used our pocket knives when we came to old decaying roots.

"I'll bet it's a fox," I panted hopefully.

"Probably an old woodchuck," Oscar said.

But we couldn't have been more surprised when a furious mother raccoon exploded from her lair screaming her rage and dismay. Wowser nearly fell over backward to avoid the flying claws and slashing little teeth. A moment later the big raccoon had racked her way up a slender oak tree. Thirty feet above us she continued to scream and scold.

In plain sight now, within the den, we found four baby raccoons, a month old perhaps. The entire litter of kits might easily have fitted within my cap. Each tail had five black rings. Each small face had a sharp black mask. Eight

bright eyes peered up at us, filled with wonder and worry. And from four inquiring little mouths came whimpered questions.

"Good old Wowser," I said.

"That's a pretty good dog you've got there," Oscar admitted, "but you'd better hold him back."

"He wouldn't hurt them; he takes care of all my pets."

In fact the big dog settled down with a sigh of satisfaction, as near to the nest as possible. Ready to adopt one or all of these interesting little creatures. But there was one service he could not render. He could not feed them.

"We can't take them home without their mother," I told Oscar. "They're too young."

"How do we catch the mother?" Oscar asked.

"We draw straws."

"And then what?"

"The one who gets the short straw shinnies up the tree and catches her."

"Oh, no," Oscar said. "Oh no you don't. I ain't that crazy."

"Come on, Oscar."

"No, siree."

But at just this moment the four little raccoons set up such a plaintive quavering that we all felt miserable. We *had* to catch that mother raccoon. Wowser was as sad as I was. He pointed his big muzzle toward the evening sky and howled mournfully.

"Well," Oscar said, kicking his shoe into the fresh earth, "I'd better be getting home to help with the milking."

"Quitter," I taunted.

"Who's a quitter?"

"You're a quitter."

"Well, OK, I'll draw straws; but I think you're loony."

I held the straws and Oscar drew the long one. Naturally I had to live up to my bargain. I looked far above me. In the fading glow of the sunset there she still was, twenty pounds of ring-tailed dynamite. I patted Wowser as though for the last time and began my tough scramble up that slender trunk.

As I shinnied up the tree, in no great hurry to tangle with the raccoon, I had one piece of good fortune. The full moon began to rise above an eastern hill giving me a little more light for my dangerous maneuver. Far out on the first limb, the outraged animal took a firm stance, facing me, her eyes glowing balefully in the moonlight.

"I'm going to cut off the branch with my jack- knife," I told Oscar.

"And then what?"

"You're supposed to catch her when she falls in the hazel brush."

Oscar suggested that I had bats in my belfry. But he took off his corduroy jacket and prepared to throw it over the raccoon in a do-or-die effort for which he had little enthusiasm.

Whittling through two-and-one-half inches of white oak with a fairly dull jackknife is a laborious process, as I soon discovered. I was in a cramped position, holding on with my left hand and hacking away at the wood with my right. And I feared the raccoon might try to rush me when the limb began to break.

The moon rose slowly through the trees as blisters rose slowly on my right hand. But I couldn't weaken now. From far below came the whimpering of the raccoon kits, and an occasional mournful howl from Wowser. Tree toads and frogs in the swamp began their chorus, and a little screech owl, sounding almost like another raccoon, added an eerie tremolo.

"How you coming?" Oscar asked.

"Coming fine. Get ready to catch her."

"Count on me," Oscar said, his voice less convincing than his brave words.

The tasseled limb of the white oak sighed at last, broke with a snap, then drifted down to the hazel brush below.

Oscar tried. I will give him credit for that. He tangled for five seconds with that raccoon, and then retreated with a damaged jacket. Three of the little raccoons, hearing their mother's call, trundled with amazing swiftness into the hazel brush to follow her, and were gone. Oscar, however, was quick enough to cup one kit in his cap, our only reward for our labor--but reward enough, as time would prove. As nearly as we could tell, the handsome, sharply marked little animal was covered only with soft gray underfur, having few of the darker guard hairs which later gleam on the adult raccoon.

He was the only baby raccoon I have ever held in my hands. And as he nestled upward like a quail chick,

and nuzzled like a puppy seeking its mother's milk, I was both overwhelmed with the ecstasy of ownership and frightened by the enormous responsibility we had assumed. Wowser romped beside us through the moonlight, often coming to sniff and lick the new pet we had found--this bit of masked mischief which had stolen his heart as well as my own.

"He's yours," Oscar said sadly. "My old man would never let me keep him. He shot a 'coon in the chicken house just a few weeks ago."

"You can come and see him," I suggested.

"Sure, I can come and see him."

We walked in silence for a time, thinking of the injustices of the world that made so few allowances for the nature of raccoons and boys of our age. Then we began talking about all the raccoons we had ever seen, and how we would feed this kit and teach him all the things he would have to learn.

"I seen a raccoon mother once with five kits," Oscar said.

"What were they doing?"

"She was leading them along the edge of the stream. They did everything she did."

"Like what?"

"Feeling around with their front paws hunting for crawdads, I guess."

On the horizon there were flashes of distant lightning and a low rumbling of thunder, sounding like artillery many miles away. It reminded me that the war was still raging in France, and that maybe my brother Herschel was being moved up to the front. I hated to think about that terrible war which had been killing and wounding millions of men ever since the year my mother died. Here we were, safe and remote from the war, and worrying about such small and unimportant things as whether Oscar would get a whipping when he got home, and how to feed and raise a little raccoon.

As we came up the lane toward Sunderland's farmhouse, Oscar began saying, "Ishkabibble, I should worry." But he acted worried to me. When we reached his front yard he dared me and double-dared me go up and knock on the door. Meanwhile he hid behind a flowering spirea bush and waited to see what might happen.

Oscar was wise to let me do the knocking. Herman Sunderland came storming out, swearing in German and Swedish. He was certainly angry with Oscar, and didn't seem to like me very much either.

"Vere is dot no-goot son of mine?"

"It wasn't Oscar's fault," I said. "I asked him to come for a walk with me, and ..."

"Vere iss he now?"

"Well," I said.

"Vell, vell, vell! Vot you mean, vell?"

"We dug out a den of raccoons," I said, "and here is the one we brought home."

"Coons," shouted Sunderland, "*verdammte* varmints."

I was afraid that Mr. Sunderland might flush Oscar from behind the spirea bush, but at just this moment Oscar's gracious mother came out on the front porch, the moonlight shining on her silvering hair. "Go to bed, Herman," she said quietly. "I will take care of this. Come out, Oscar, from behind that bush."

To my surprise, Oscar's father meekly obeyed, taking a lamp up that long, dark parlor stairway--his shadow much taller than himself. And Oscar's mother took us to the kitchen where she fed us a warm supper and began to heat a little milk to the temperature that would be right for a human baby.

"It is hungry, the little one," she said, petting the small raccoon. "Go fetch a clean wheat straw, Oscar."

She filled her own mouth with warm milk, put the wheat straw between her lips, and slanted the straw down to the mouth of the little raccoon. I watched, fascinated, as my new pet took the straw eagerly and began to nurse.

"Look how the little one eats," Oscar's mother said. "This is the way you will have to feed him, Sterling."

END OF SAMPLER NUMBER 1

Here are some of the new NUBS symbols that you will encounter in this article.

1 Capitalized Phrase:
GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH NUBS
Note the begin and end symbols for the phrase.

2 Roman Numeral I
Notice the need for a notational indicator so that the word is not interpreted as the word "I".

3 Quotation Marks
The familiar quotation marks as in 8I see.0 now require a preceding dot 6. So the phrase in NUBS would be "I see."

4 The notational period (12456) and the notational comma (16) must be used if active mode is notational.

5 Parentheses:
The symbols for parentheses are:
of (12356) open parenthesis
with (23456) close parenthesis
When an opening or closing parenthesis could be interpreted as "of" or "with", a punctuation indicator (dots 456) is required before the parenthesis. You will notice that no punctuation indicator is required between the 456 above and the closing parentheses. That is because no contractions are allowed in notational text, and the closing parentheses could not be interpreted as the word "with". Of course, any punctuation that follows a closing parenthesis must reflect the mode that precedes that parenthesis.

6 The short dash is -- (46,36) in NUBS

7 Ellipsis in NUBS is ... (6,6,3)

8 An Italic word is done as follows:
"I am *sure."*
Notice the italics symbol for a single word requires two cells in NUBS.