NUBS SAMPLER 2

Alliance for Braille Literacy

This is the second sampler in the series
designed for braille readers to get acquainted with
NUBS, the Nemeth Uniform Braille System.

It is being provided by the
Alliance for Braille Literacy
St. Louis, MO.

This excerpt is taken from
BEN FRANKLIN OF OLD PHILADELPHIA
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Published by Random House
New York, NY

ISBN 1-314-84928-0

Braille pages p-1-3 and 1-54

CONTENTS

His eyes are gray and they are keen and sharp as steel. ... Maybe I am wrong, but it seems to me that he is secretly amused and keeping it to himself. That is the sort of look in his eyes. Though he has conversed with most of the great people of the world, he listened intently to my silly remarks as if they were really interesting. After he left I said as much to Ed Rutledge and he laughed. "Don't fool yourself," he said, "Dr. Franklin was interested. You don't know him. He is interested in everything and everybody ... who you are and what you have done all your life."

--Philip Mackenzie, from a letter to a friend
about Ben Franklin, Philadelphia, 1776.

1 Water Baby

One freezing January Sunday in 1786, a gray-eyed baby boy was born to the wife of a soap-and candle-maker in Boston. The baby's parents would have been greatly surprised to know that their little son would do more different things in his lifetime than any other American of his century.

The very day he was born, the baby made a trip. In the arms of his father, he was carried across snow- covered Milk Street to the Old South Church, and with the icy water from the baptismal font, he was christened Benjamin Franklin.

Benjamin had a whole houseful of brothers and sisters. There were usually thirteen people at the Franklin table. While he was still very young, he learned to take care of himself and to keep out from underfoot. His mother was too busy cooking, washing, and sewing for her large family to keep an eagle eye on Ben, and his father was too busy making soap and candles.

Mr. Franklin sold his candles to the town of Boston for the night watch. Of course there were no streetlights in Boston then, any more than there were street numbers. In front of Ben's house there was a sign with a blue ball painted on it. People knew that you could buy soap and candles at the Sign of the Blue Ball. It was a busy place, and even a little boy had his chores and knew how to do things.

Everybody in Boston was busy in those days. It was a small town, the way we count things now, and it was located in a wild, new country. Each person, big and small, had to do his share, and if you didn't work, you might not eat. The government of the Colony of Massachusetts frowned on lazy people, and you could be whipped on your bare back if you did not choose to work.

Boston wasn't a particularly pretty or easy-going place, at that time, but it was a wonderful place to be a boy. The town was built around the harbor and the wharf, where sailing ships put in from England, bringing news and goods from the great world to the colonists. When a ship was sighted, the people swarmed onto the wharf and shouted in their excitement.

Narrow, winding streets, full of holes and bumps, climbed the low hills above the harbor. On each side of the streets rose square, unpainted houses, gray from the wind and rain and sun. Beyond, the great forests rolled away, nobody knew how far.

But for a boy, there were trees to climb, fish to catch, boats to sail, and canoes to paddle. There were the Commons, where Bostonians drove their cows to pasture; the marshes; the ponds; the river; and the sea. Boys built

forts and stockades and played Indian, put together homemade boats and sailed the ponds as pirates, explored the woods and swam in the blue water.

Benjamin was a regular water baby and spent most of his time with his feet wet. He learned to swim almost as soon as he learned to walk, and he could sail a boat like a master. All summer long he splashed in the water like a little seal and his friends splashed after him. The names of those boys are now forgotten, but we can be sure that among them were Johns and Peters and Davids and Quincys and Obadiahs and Rogers.

Ben was the ringleader of the crowd, because his friends knew that in whatever place he was, something was sure to be going on. He could always think of something to do.

One day they were down at the salt marsh, fishing for minnows. Ben was standing there in his wet feet, waiting for a fish to bite, when he saw a crew of men beginning a building. They were working on a heap of stones. Right away he had an idea.

"Halloo," he called to his friends. "Why don't we build a wharf over here?"

"What for?" John wanted to know. He was the youngest and always asked silly questions.

"So we can stand on it to fish, Dunce Cap," said Ben. "We could tie our boats to it, too."

"Now, Ben," said Obadiah, "What dost thou think we can find to make a wharf with?" He was a Quaker boy, cautious and practical.

Ben jerked his fishpole toward the pile of stones. The workmen had dusted off their hands and gone home to supper.

"Rocks," he said.

"You mean move them over here?" It sounded like work.

"How else?" Ben said, throwing down his pole and running toward the rock pile. The others followed. For some reason they always wanted to do what he wanted to do.

Before you could say "Massachusetts," they were all tugging away at the big stones. Sweating and panting, they lugged them to the edge of the pond. There Ben drew a plan with a stick and bossed the job. Before nightfall the stones were fitted together to make a neat platform. Then, tired but happy, the boys went home.

They could hardly wait for morning so they could start fishing in comfort.

But this never happened.

When morning came, the men who had been putting up the building went back to their work, but their stones were missing. Each one had been moved

over to the edge of the pond. Like angry hornets, the men went buzzing into Boston and made a great fuss to the fathers of the boys. The trouble began.

All over Boston, young lads were called on the carpet.

"What made you do a thing like that, Benjamin?" Josiah Franklin, a very honorable man, asked his son.

"We needed a wharf to fish from," Ben said. "Look what a good wharf we built, Pa!"

"But it isn't yours," Mr. Franklin pointed out sternly.

"Oh," said Ben.

By the time Ben and his friends had carried all the stones back to where they had come from, the boys had learned that rocks can be twice as heavy on the return trip. They had also learned to let other people's things alone. Everybody was hot and cross, and John fell down and skinned his shin.

"I told thee so!" Obadiah said to Ben.

For once Ben couldn't think of anything to say.

But nobody could stay angry at him for long. They might miss some fun! It wasn't long before he had thought up a way to make fins like those of a fish. With these strapped onto their ankles when they went swimming, the boys could streak through the water twice as fast, and leave an interesting trail of foam behind.

They never knew what Ben was going to do next. He was full of surprises. There was the time, for instance, when Ben brought the kite down to the pond. As he felt the wind pulling against it, he thought, It's almost strong enough to pull me! Then he thought, If I were in the water, I'll bet it would pull me!

The next time he went to the pond with his friends to swim, he took the kite.

"You can't fly a kite in the water!" Obadiah said.

"How do you know?" Ben asked.

He got the kite in the air and then took off his clothes and jumped in. Holding the kite string in his hand, he floated--and the kite, pushed by the wind, pulled him across the pond. William and Quincy, who were holding on to his clothes, were really amazed. They wanted to try it, too.

Ben was a hero for several days.

Benjamin loved the water all his life, and there was nothing about swimming that he did not learn to do. Years later when he was living in London, his fame as a swimmer spread and won him friends. He once put on an exhibition in the Thames River to the loud applause of people on the banks, and he taught several young Englishmen to swim as he did. When he

founded a school in Philadelphia, he insisted that swimming be one of the studies--an unheard-of thing in those days.

Benjamin Franklin's ambition was to be a sailor, but that's one of the few things he never got to do.

2 Schoolboy

Life wasn't all swimming and summer and smooth sailing. The Boston winter was cruel and cold, with snow falling out of the sky like feathers from a pillow, and the wet, freezing winds blowing in from the sea. Frost coated the windowpanes, and long icicles hung by the outer walls of the houses. Never did the New World seem so wild and lonely as when winter came.

Ben did not mind it so much, because in the winter he had time to read. He could not remember when he had learned to read, but he loved it so much that he would read anything. Even sermons! Nobody had many books when Benjamin was young, and people as poor as Ben's father had very few indeed. There were not many pictures in Mr. Franklin's books, which were all serious and dry and full of long, hard words. But Ben read them anyway, not once but over and over.

He would settle down by the hearth and read by the light of the fire, or by the crooked candles that came from the tallow shop. These were candles that had not been perfect enough to sell, and they were apt to flicker.

Of all the books he read, Ben liked *Pilgrim's Progress* best. It had a *story*.

When he was seven years old, he wrote a poem. This was so unusual that his father began to think about sending him to school. School was expensive and people like Mr. Franklin couldn't afford to educate all their children. But the next year Ben went to the Boston Grammar School.

At that time he was a middle-sized boy, chunky and strong, with a long head and a mop of curly hair. His eyes were large and brilliant and gray. In less than a year he worked his way to the head of the class, and he never had to be ashamed of his report card. Still, he did not think much of the Latin they
tried to teach him at the Boston Grammar School.

"Why do I have to take Latin?" he complained. "Nobody speaks it anymore."

"You'll be sorry if you do not apply yourself, son," his father replied.

Ben may have been sorry but he never exactly admitted it. After he grew to be a man and learned to speak Spanish, Italian, and French, he looked at Latin again and saw that it was easy for him. It was his opinion that you should learn these languages first because they are simpler, and when you know them, Latin is easy. Before his life was over, he lived in France and had to speak French all the time. Some people said that his use of French grammar wasn't very good. They believed that if he had known Latin his French might have been better.

He didn't really have time to learn Latin when he was young, because he left the Boston Grammar School in less than a year, and went to Mr. Brownell's School for Writing and Arithmetic.

He learned to write a fair hand there, but he failed in arithmetic.

Nobody knows why Benjamin Franklin did so poorly in this subject. Mr. Brownell was supposed to be a very good teacher. It stands to reason that Ben's mind must have been on something else--
probably *Pilgrim's Progress.*

He learned arithmetic later, however, digging it out for himself, by himself, and became a wizard with figures. He even made up games with numbers, just for the fun of it. By this time he was no longer going to school but was working in his father's business, stirring the cauldrons of soap and pouring tallow into the candle molds. The greasy smell of the tallow was always in his nose and he hated tallow much worse than he hated arithmetic.

Ben hated it so much that after two years of trying to teach him the candle-maker's trade, his father began to look around for some other kind of work for his youngest son. He would take Ben by the hand and they would walk all over Boston, watching bricklayers and carpenters and braziers (brass workers) at their jobs. Mr. Franklin thought that in this way Ben might decide what sort of work he wanted to do.

Nothing happened, but from these tours of inspection Ben learned how to lay brick and do carpentry and machine work. In time he got to be quite handy around the house. But Ben grew more and more restless and Mr. Franklin grew more and more worried. Here was Ben, going on twelve, and he still hadn't decided what to do to earn a living!

"What do you *want* to do?" Mr. Franklin asked.

"Go to sea," his son said, promptly. "I want to be a sailor."

Most Boston boys wanted to go to sea, and Mr. Franklin knew how strong was the pull of the blue Atlantic, but he thought it a hard and unrewarding life. He could not bring himself to say yes to Benjamin. He was a patient man and a loving father, but he knew he had to act quickly.

Benjamin loved books. Why not let him learn how to make them? Mr. Franklin's son James had gone to England to study printing and had set up his own shop in Boston. That was the answer to the problem! Ben's father bound the boy over to his older brother as an apprentice and hoped for the best.

Ben was twelve years old. His schooling was over and his education had begun.

3 Apprentice

Ben had signed a paper, promising that until he was twenty-one years old he would work for his brother James as a helper. As his part of the bargain, James would provide Ben with food, a place to sleep, and lessons in printing.

Until he was twenty-one! That was nine long years away and only in the last year was Ben to receive wages. For eight years he would have no money at all. But the arrangement was not without its good points. Working in a print shop gave Ben a chance to meet the men who sold books in bookstores. Sometimes he could even borrow a book from a friendly bookseller at night and return it the next morning, being careful to keep it clean. After he had read several books of poetry in this way, he decided to write some poems.

He wrote a poem called "The Lighthouse Tragedy" about something that had really happened. It was the story of the drowning of a sea captain and his two daughters. James Franklin decided to print this poem in a little paper book. When it was finished, he sent Benjamin around town to sell the books. They sold very well, for people in those days did not have the sort of newspapers we have now and they liked to read the sad story of the lost captain.

With this success before him, Ben then wrote a sailor's song (for his mind was always on going to sea) about the downfall of Teach, the pirate. It began:

Will you hear of a bloody battle,
Lately fought upon the seas?
It will make your ears rattle
And your admiration cease.
Have you heard of Teach, the Rover,
And his knavery on the Main;
How of gold he was a Lover,
How he loved all ill-got Gain?

Ben's father did not think much of this poem, which isn't very good, and he didn't like the idea of his son going from door to door, peddling his books. So he made fun of Ben. Had it not been for this, Benjamin might have become a poet instead of so many other things.

He did become a writer. But he didn't become a writer just by deciding he was going to be one. He went to a lot of trouble to learn how it was done. He would read a chapter in a book and then close the book and put it away. A

few days later he would think about what he had read and rewrite it in his own words. He would then compare what he had written with the book he had read. His writing didn't sound as good as the book to him, and he realized it was because he didn't know enough words. So Ben decided to write in rhymes. In that way he would have to learn words that fitted the rhymes and yet had the same meanings as words that didn't rhyme. He would take several paragraphs of a book he was reading and turn them into verses. Later on, when he had pretty well forgotten the prose he had rhymed, he would take his verses and turn them back into the original prose. This was the way he learned new words.

While Ben was apprenticed to his brother James, he was kept pretty busy during the day. James was young and he was a hard master for his little brother. In fact, James had Ben running and fetching and carrying all day and was even harder on him than he might have been on an ordinary apprentice.

Ben had no time to read except at night after work or in the morning before work or on Sundays. He would read by candlelight, after everybody else had gone to bed, and by the first gray streaks of dawn in the mornings.

On Sunday, he was supposed to go to church, as was everybody else. Before Ben became an apprentice he had been obliged to go to church, for there wasn't any way out of it. His father made him go. After Ben went to work for James, he felt that he just didn't have time. Sunday was his best time for reading and learning new words and writing verses. So he stayed home and worked, but his conscience bothered him. This may have made him work harder, because he felt that it was his duty to be at church.

Ben Franklin learned to write by hard effort and with himself as his teacher, and it was one of the things he did best.

"Writing was of great use to me in my life, and was a principal means of my advancement," he said many years later.

Sometimes it is impossible for brothers to work together or to keep from fighting, especially when one brother is boss over the other. Ben and his brother James just couldn't get along. This made Ben's apprenticeship, which was such a change from the carefree days of his childhood, especially hard. Nor were James' other apprentices of much help, for they didn't seem very interesting. So Ben was lonely and missed his mother and sisters and his friends.

James wasn't married. Since he didn't have a home of his own, he boarded himself and his apprentices with a family he knew. Ben hated to go to the boarding house, where everybody nagged him because he had decided to stop eating meat. (He was always reading books and trying out things he

read about, so when he read a book about the value of a vegetable diet, he decided to try it.) As meat was the principal feature of all meals in those days, everybody made fun of him, and James was embarrassed because his apprentice was attracting attention.

"I don't understand why you can't eat what everybody else eats," James said testily.

"I'm a vegetarian," Ben answered.

"You find yourself lucky that your master is able to provide you with meat," James declared.

"But I don't want it," Ben said.

"This is but another of your confounded poses," James cried, red as a beet.

"I will make a bargain with my master," Ben said sarcastically. "If you will give me weekly half the money you spend for my keep at the boarding house, I will feed myself and save you having to sit at the table with your inferior servant."

"Done," said James, who thought the bargain sounded too good to be true.

Ben thereupon became a cook. He looked up some recipes for cooking vegetables in the book he had read. Then, at the print shop, he started to boil up rice and potatoes and to make hasty pudding--a delicacy that was something like cornmeal mush and was usually eaten with molasses.

Although Ben had not planned to become his own cook, that is what he did. Nobody knows what kind of cook he was, but history doesn't record that his cooking made much of an impression. In fact, he said himself that he ate very light meals, sometimes no more than a handful of raisins, a biscuit or slice of bread, and a glass of water. At other times he dined on a tart bought at the pastry cook's. Hasty pudding probably turned out to be too much trouble!

The most important thing about the bargain Ben made with his brother James was that he had time to read while the rest of the workers in the shop were away at their meals. The bargain also helped him to save a few cents. He would probably have starved before spending those few pennies James gave him. When he had a minute, he tried to think of ways to get out of his apprenticeship, and he knew that he would need money if he ever found a way.

When Ben was about fourteen years old, James Franklin decided to start a newspaper. It was the third newspaper to be founded in the city of Boston and was called the *New England Courant.* Some people thought it was pretty silly of James. After all, Boston already had two newspapers, the *Boston*

News-Letter and the *Boston Gazette,* and what use was there for another one? James persevered in his rashness, however, and pretty soon the *New England Courant* made its appearance on the streets.

Ben was quite excited with the idea of the newspaper. He tried to hang around the editorial offices where James' friends gathered to discuss the articles that appeared in the paper and to talk about the ones they planned to write for it.

"Perhaps you could bring yourself to set a few sticks of type," James said to Ben one day, "instead of getting in the way of your elders. Your job is not to be concerned with the contents of the *Courant,* but with getting it in print."

Ben was shunted back to the composing room, where he not only set type for the paper but helped to print it. When he had finished that, he was ordered to put on his jacket and go shout out the headlines and sell it in the streets. While he was busy being a newsboy, his mind was also busy. How could he get something printed in the paper that people would read? When he heard James' friends praise the writing of some article or essay in the *Courant,* he ached to hear such praise of his own efforts.

He knew in his heart that James would never print anything he wrote. For one thing, he was still just a boy, and for another, James thought he was too smart for his own good already. But Ben thought of a way to get around that. He sat up late writing his thoughts out, and then he disguised his handwriting and copied his words over. He didn't put a name on his manuscript, and, running through the dark street, late at night, he pushed it under the door of the printing house where he spent his days at hard labor.

The next morning when James unlocked the door, he found the manuscript.

"What's this?" James said, looking over the neat script and searching for the author's name. "It seems to be anonymous!"

"I don't suppose it can be any good, if the writer didn't put his name to it," said Ben, offhandedly.

"On the contrary," said James, who could never bring himself to agree with Ben on any subject. "It's quite interesting. I think I'll show it to the others."

When James' friends dropped in, as they always did, James displayed the manuscript as an evidence of the attention the *Courant* was beginning to attract.

While Ben lurked in the doorway, the manuscript was read aloud. Everybody thought it was fine, and they all tried to guess the name of the author. Ben wanted to shout: "I wrote it!"

Ben wrote many of these secret, anonymous pieces, and when his brother's friends continued to praise them, his vanity finally overcame him and he admitted that he was the author. This did not set very well with James, as you can imagine. His friends began to include young Ben in their circle, and that irked James. Besides, he did not like the idea of having been fooled by his little brother. He thought all this attention made Benjamin vainer than he already was, and the brothers began to quarrel in earnest.

Their disputes usually wound up before their father for settlement. Although the elder Franklin often sided with his younger son, he still impressed on Benjamin the importance of James' position as master and Ben's need for humility as an apprentice.

James took his position seriously. He was a hot-headed man with a high temper, and when Benjamin displeased him, he set on him and beat him. Ben resented this fiercely, largely because the punishments seemed to him too big to fit the crimes. He despised these beatings and resented James' right to give them to him.

Ben had an independent spirit and did not believe that one man ought to be allowed to have complete power over another. He felt the same way all his life, and he said that his hatred and distrust of dictators sprang from his miseries as an apprentice to his own brother.

James' hot-headed nature eventually got him into trouble with the Massachusetts Assembly. One of the articles he printed in the newspaper angered the members of the Assembly, and James was hauled off to jail for a month, to cool his head and his heels.

Ben, who had been angry at his brother for years, now transferred his anger to the Assembly. He thought that newspapers ought to be allowed to say what they thought. While James was in jail, Ben edited the *New England Courant,* and every time he had a chance, he made a few slighting remarks about the Assembly of Massachusetts.

Because of this loyalty, James felt more kindly toward Ben. Of course, this change in feeling may also have been due to the fact that James was in prison and didn't see much of Benjamin! At any rate, when the older brother had served his sentence and came home with an order from the Assembly that he, James Franklin, was no longer allowed to print the *New England Courant,* he decided to print the paper in Ben's name.

In order to make this transfer, James returned to Ben his apprentice papers, with a full discharge written on the back of them. This was necessary to show that Ben was a free man, and able to publish a newspaper. But privately, James presented his brother with a new set of papers for the

remainder of his apprenticeship period. These papers were exactly like the old ones. James wanted to have his cake and eat it too.

Ben signed the new papers and went on publishing the *Courant,* but James, without realizing it, had left Ben a loophole. Nobody else knew anything about the second set of apprentice papers, and the situation with the *Courant* made it impossible for James to admit he held them.

The next time James struck Ben in a quarrel, Ben resisted him and pointed out that he was a free man.

James was in a rage. However, he could not make public his secret agreement with his brother without serious consequences to himself. If the Massachusetts Assembly discovered what had happened, he might find himself back in jail.

"This is fine payment for all I have done for you," James shouted.

"I suppose being beaten around the head is good training for the printing business," Ben returned.

"I do not think you will long be in the printing business," James said coldly. "I will see to that."

"It would be a pity to waste so many years of my affectionate brother's instruction," Ben said. "There is very little about a print shop I have not learned in this unhappy place."

"I would be ashamed to have any other master know how little discipline you have learned," said James.

He then made it his business to call on every printer in Boston and tell them the story, so that nobody would give Ben a job.

Ben did not know which way to turn. His personal attacks on the Massachusetts Assembly had not made him popular in Boston. His failure to go to church and some of the things he had said about religion had resulted in people looking at him with horror and calling him an infidel. His father was hurt and disgusted with him.

Ben knew that he would have to run away from Boston if he was ever to get started, and that's what he did next.

End of Sampler 2

What have you learned about NUBS?

1. Again you have been exposed to lower digits. (Digits that reside in the lower part of the braille cell).
2. A few new cases of the punctuation indicator needed before opening or closing parentheses.
3. A lot of exposure to the two-cell quotation marks.
4. A few encounters with the NUBS dash.
5. One use of the capitalized phrase (on the title page).
6. Several instances of the use of italic words.
7. Ellipses.

END OF SAMPLER NUMBER 2

Here are some of the NUBS symbols
that you encountered in this article.

The following symbols were encountered in Sampler 1 and are also found in this sampler.

Dropped digits
Capitalized phrase
Quotation marks
Parentheses
Short dash and ellipsis
Italic word and italic phrase

Here are some additional NUBS features introduced in Sampler 2.

1 The notational treatment of the abbreviation St. where it is treated as notational and is not contracted.
2 Table of Contents
3 Numbering of transcriber-generated pages and preliminary pages, for example, Braille page t-1. Notice that no numeric symbol is required before the digit 1 since the notational mode has already been established.