



BLENNZ



**Striding Confidently into the Future
A braille learner's
11-year technology journey
from the Mountbatten to Google Docs**

**Cathrine West and Diane Glynan
SPEVI January 2015**



In the beginning (2003) ...

- 👁️ Mountbatten at age 4
- 👁️ This became a tool for exploring
- 👁️ By age 5 she was writing simple sentences with correct punctuation, and simple contractions



The Mountbatten was funded by the NZ Ministry of Health as a crucial communication tool – a blind student’s method of “scribbling.”
Playing with the MB enabled her to learn the alphabet by herself and those contractions e.g. **ed, ing, the, etc.** spelt out by the MB. She also learnt the apostrophe and after a simple explanation of its use (to indicate possession) she was using it appropriately in her sentences. Obviously reading braille was a much slower process – misreading because of reversals, etc.

Two years later (2005)...

- 👁️ First BrailleNote
- 👁️ Braille Notetaker Immersion Course
- 👁️ Visual display used
- 👁️ Mountbatten still in use for maths



The decision to apply to the Ministry of Education's Assistive technology Committee was made because she was ready for the advanced wordprocessing facilities available on the BN. At the time she was the youngest in the world to have a BrailleNote. Within a fortnight she was completely comfortable using for her writing. She had great fun exploring it – going places where she shouldn't have been able to go resulting in phone calls to the manufacturers because she found her way into areas of the machine that should not have been accessible – the technicians in Christchurch got used to talking her through the problems by phone. They loved it because this helped them to fine-tune the machine a little more. Renee made the choice for herself to have the sound off whenever she used the BN. The only time she turned the sound on was if there was a problem she needed help with.

Screenreader introduced (2010) ...

- 👁️ Netbook with Jaws at age 11
- 👁️ Jaws Immersion Course 2010
- 👁️ Victor Reader Stream – won in a competition
- 👁️ Mountbatten used as an embosser and for maths – Brailnote calculator in use




BLENNZ Immersion courses bring together students with the same needs for intensive live-in courses, usually on the BLENNZ Homai campus in Auckland. Student not a fan of Jaws as she much prefers reading everything for herself – very resistant to being dependent on listening rather than reading.

Age 10-11 ...

- 👁 Apex BrailleNote – with Oxford dictionary and thesaurus
- 👁 Familiar with all functions of BrailleNote
- 👁 Braille display now favoured literacy medium
- 👁 Use of USB and electronic format
- 👁 Emailing teacher



Year 8 ...

 First cellphone – with Talks. Learning to text.

 Started using BrailleNote for maths.



Secondary school ... Year 9

- 👁️ Began mentoring younger students beginning on BrailleNote
- 👁️ Foreign languages – French and German. Issues with printing of accent marks.
- 👁️ Difficulties with accessibility – school intranet, on-line research
- 👁️ Using Perkins occasionally in maths



Secondary school ... Year 10

- 👁️ Now using iPhone 4S with Voiceover and Siri
- 👁️ Bluetooth link to BrailleNote
- 👁️ Digital learning accessibility issues
- 👁️ High user of electronic text for most subjects



**Thank you for attending this
presentation.**

The journey continues ...

cathy.west@blennz.school.nz

diane.glynan@blennz.school.nz



Next step is to refamiliarise herself with Jaws as she needs this for Braille Music Editor.

BLENNZ Online Spaces



www.blennz.school.nz



blindandlowvisioneducationnetworknz



@BLENNZOnline