

My March Morning Madness. . .

Tuesday, March 26, 2013

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Little boys of seven and eight years old are super active. Whether they have perfect eyesight or are legally blind. I know, because I just spent the morning working with four of the latter, at the Miami Lighthouse For The Blind, and I am in awe, not to mention exhausted, at how smart and active they are.

It's Spring Break time here in Miami, and the kids are out of their regular school sessions so the Lighthouse is even busier than usual. My friend, Virginia Jacko, the CEO of the Lighthouse, asked me to help out Osias, the regular teacher. Osias, by the way, is also blind, so in our classroom I was the only sighted person, with the four boys, one little girl, and two other volunteers. I came in handy to locate lost backpacks, find paper for the brailers, and take Luana, the little girl, to the ladies room.

I am most in awe of Silvio, a self possessed eight year old with complete mastery of the computer with its remarkable JAWS program designed to "speak" to blind users. Silvio informed me that he had a workbook in his backpack that he wanted me to look at because he was committed to completing 5 work projects during his Spring Break.

Project #1 had to do with the 50 United States and their contractional or non-contractional abbreviations. Who knew that Florida's FL is non-contractional and Kentucky's KY is contractional??? Sylvio understood better than I did. Working at his brailer, he first inserted a sheet of special paper, then waited impatiently for me to start calling out the states in alphabetical order. I'm a touch typist but this kid, working on his brailer, was really fast! To check what he had just typed he would run his finger over the raised braille dots on the paper and, when satisfied it was correct, nod to me to continue.

We finished off the 50 states in record time and then it was time for lunch. Although the kids all have canes that fold up and fit into a holder on their belts, they don't always use them, so Osias asked me to escort Silvio, Rey and Victor to the cafeteria on the first floor. Getting three kids, each going in a different direction, into the elevator, was an interesting experience. As was lunch.

I caught on quickly that "the chicken and rice is at 12:30 on your plate, and the brownies are at 2 o'clock. . .but please don't eat them first". The last plea to absolutely no avail.

The kids knew the best part was coming. . .lunch over, it was music time. An upright piano stood in a far corner of the lunchroom and they couldn't get there fast enough. Silvio had already informed me that he had been taking piano lessons for two years, but I wasn't prepared to hear him sit down at the keyboard and pull off an arpeggio that caused everyone in the room to stop what they were doing and turn their attention to this remarkable little boy.

In fairness, Osias insisted that everyone got their turn at the keyboard, from little Luana who knocked out "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star", to never-still Rey who quieted long enough to play a creditable "Eensy Weensy Spider". Even shy D'Vante, the youngest of the boys, played

Chop Sticks Only Victor, legally blind but with enough remaining sight to play his beloved video games on his little GameBoy, refused to make music. He was happy, however, to explain in detail to me the game he was playing and to let me know he had just beaten his own record. I was suitably impressed.

I arrived at the Lighthouse at 9:30 in the morning and said goodbye at 12:30, after promising the kids that I would return and giving each a hug and a kiss goodbye. Osias thanked me for helping. I thanked him for an incredible morning.



Osias works with Luana at the piano.



Silvio shows his musical skills. Rey left and Victor in background.



Our classroom. Victor on his Gameboy in foreground.