Providing support and information for families of children
with disabilities, chronic illness and other special health care needs

Learning to Read Can Change Your Life!

Don Rettberg, Jr., Austin, TX

It is hard to imagine what life would be for Don Rettberg Jr. if he hadn't developed the ability to read. He reads the sports pages every day at breakfast and is an authority on Longhorn athletics. He uses his reading and computer skills daily in his work as an administrative clerk at the Lower Colorado River Authority. He reads books and plays about the theater activities that are a big part of his life. Don follows the scripture readings every Sunday at church and he has read the Bible three times from cover to cover.

Now turn the clock back twenty-six years. Don at age five and before would pick up a book, look at the pictures and then in frustration exclaim, "I can't read." A caring and devoted mother along with a fine young teacher started down the path of teaching Don to read. It was less than six weeks before a supervising principal told the teacher to stop because "Reading skills were too high a level for Don—he had too many other deficits." That did not stop his determined mother who researched and then implemented her own reading program. At first it was just a few large, hand-printed flash cards; then came more and more smaller flash cards; and it wasn't too much longer before an ever increasing vocabulary was large enough to start forming simple sentences. His mother would form sentences with cards on the floor; and Don would point word-for-word with a yardstick—The—dog—is—brown"; The—table—is—big"; "I love Sandy"; etc., etc. Soon Don wanted to start forming his own sentences—and then it happened. On a most beautiful and memorable day Don selected the cards that he wanted and then pointed with his yardstick to his own sentence—"I can read." That was the beginning; and now, twenty-six years later, Don Jr. is a certified "competent toastmaster". Much of his success in and love for life goes back to his own simple three word sentence—"I can read."