

## WHEN THE BOOKS DON'T TALK ANYMORE

When the voice is gone; what's next in the life of a "Talking Book"?

By way of the mail or a package delivery service repairable books find their way to the orderly basement in the small town of Little Falls Minnesota. This is the basement of a dedicated man, a man who hears of a need and finds a way to meet it. Al is a member of the largest industry based community service organization; the Telecom Pioneers. In Minnesota he is part of the Legacy West Pioneers which draws its members from active and past employees of the local communication companies, AT&T, Western Electric and, in these current times, their friends and families.

In recent years Al and other Pioneer volunteers carried on Talking Book repairs in space provided by Century Link Communications. The repair group found itself without a work space in a company garage when CenturyLink chose to end it's association with the Pioneer organization in mid 2017 and the group disbanded. But those well-used silent books still needed some tender loving care so Al moved the repair operation to his basement and continued the task alone. The books provide information to students at state academies for the blind in Minnesota and North Dakota primarily. They are entertainment for people who read for enjoyment. They are critical communication connections in a social world.

Every piece of a Talking Book is replaceable which leaves much opportunity for something to go wrong. Older style tape recorder books have 150 replaceable parts and digital books with their plug-in technology have just 36. When it finally becomes no longer feasible to repair the analog tape style book, a digital book replaces it.

Talking Books are provided to users through the National Library of Congress. The repairs Al does to the books, both analog and digital editions are free of charge. The repair need is there; thanks to the dedication of one man to the Pioneer ideal of service to others, the repair need is filled. According to Al, the digital talking books have improved clarity and have an audible diagnostic report-out feature that is helpful to the repair technician.

In 2017 Minnesota Pioneer volunteers spent 194 hours at their task and repaired 131 books and sent them back into circulation.

Sh-h-h, someone out there is listening to one right now!

*Talking Book Trivia...the book "War and Peace" takes  
60 hours of recording time!*