

Generosity speaks volumes for Yale Junior

By Shahla Naimi

Roughly 860 million people in the world can't distinguish between The Publick Cup and Au Bon Pain, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Crime and Punishment*, and a book written in French and one in English. To them, these things blend into the same incomprehensible blur of letters, a confusion of lines and curves. Roughly two decades ago, we were these people. That is, until someone put a book in our hands and taught us to read. And that is exactly what Sam Silverman, SY '10, hopes to do with his non-profit organization Children's Books On Tape, Inc. (CBOT), a charity he established in 2000 with his 18-year-old sister, Faren.

Silverman realized that not every child is lucky enough to have someone to read with. Illiteracy may not seem like a pressing concern for America, which has a one percent illiteracy rate among adults. But that percent represents over two million people. Their children have no one to read to them at home, creating a vicious cycle of illiteracy in some disadvantaged families.

With his family's strong emphasis on community service, it was no surprise that

Many children have no one to read to them at home, creating a vicious cycle of illiteracy.

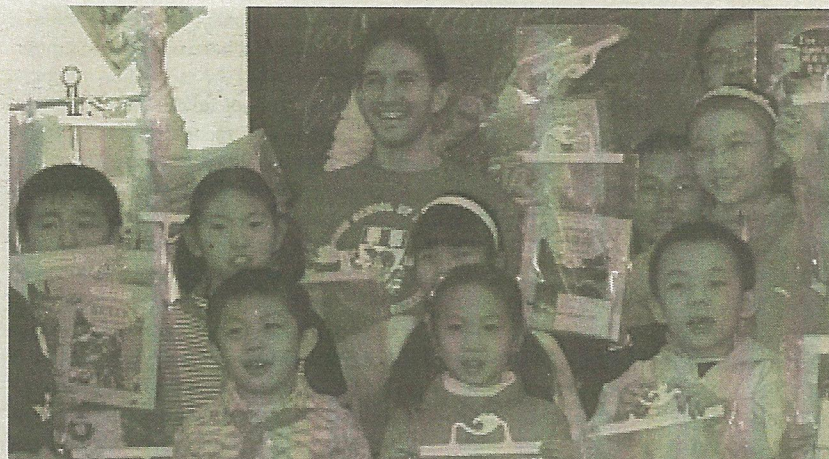
Sam decided to record himself reading a few books on tapes for those struggling to read at age 11. His mother, Nina, a substitute teacher in Jupiter, Florida, had seen many students at sub-par reading levels for their age, and she was surprised when her son discovered a solution. "I was presented

with a group of kids who had tremendous difficulty reading and I didn't know what to do," she said. "Sam and Faren just said 'why they couldn't take the books and record them for the kids to take home?'"

Silverman began his campaign by targeting local schools that already had English for Speakers of other Languages (ESL) programs for students who were receiving little English instruction in their homes. "We came up with the idea of providing students, especially a lot from Hispanic families, access to English outside of the classroom," Silverman said. "If you go inland farther, where the orange groves are, that's where the people doing that work live. They are usually only there for part of the year, and combined with the fact that they aren't practicing when they are home, it leads them to fall behind dramatically when they reach third or fourth grade."

Silverman's project was small at first. He gave schools packages consisting of books with their corresponding five-minute tape recordings in Ziploc bags that were packed in old milk cartons. But since CBOT's 2005 incorporation, the project has grown significantly. Sponsorships from Wachovia

Bank and Florida Atlantic University have helped him to donate 40 Listening Libraries to schools in Palm Beach and Martin Counties. These Listening Libraries are no longer the product of young children, but of experienced founders who ensure that each Library holds a professional package



COURTESY SAM SILVERMAN

Sam Silverman, SY '10, with children at an elementary school in China, which received dozens of books and tapes from his non-profit.

of 50 recorded books in library tote bags arranged in spinning racks.

The program's influence was extended to the international community when Silverman spent a semester in China studying with Yale's Peking University program. After a visit to a Chinese elementary school, he realized the possibility of expanding CBOT. "I thought this was perfect. The only problem was we didn't have any books," Silverman said. He managed to meet with a Yale affiliate to find the best places in the area to buy books. After doing so, they managed to donate about 70 books and 30 tape recorders. "The donation itself was fantastic. We went there and it was like a celebrity event. We went to the main room where they had a formal tea ceremony and they had calligraphy on the wall with like 'Welcome Sam from Yale from USA' on it

in fancy characters," Silverman said. "It was really humbling."

Silverman said he hopes to bring his program to Connecticut, more specifically to New Haven's Worthington Hooker Elementary School, a school with many Yale professors' children and a large population of international students with limited English. Silverman plans to meet with second grade teacher Kathy Lembo next week to discuss a possible donation. "Many are just learning to speak English for the first time," said Lembo, "So I think it would be really helpful for them. Listening to the tapes, repeatedly, can be very helpful." With plans for further expansion underway, Silverman hopes to continue bringing children a chance to have a reading partner, someone they can turn the pages with while embarking on a new adventure.