

# The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)



## In This Issue:

- **Transit Accessibility for the Blind in B.C.**
- **NFB-Style Blindness Skills Training Needed**
- **Achievements by Blind Canadians**
- **Advocacy**



# CFB

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is not an organization speaking for the blind — it is the blind speaking for themselves.



# CFB

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is a non-profit, grassroots organization created by and for Blind Canadians. Its mandate is to improve the lives of blind people across the country through:

- blind people mentoring blind people;
- public education about the abilities of blind people;
- advocacy to create better opportunities and training for Blind Canadians.

The long white cane is a symbol of empowerment and a tool for independence.

With proper training, opportunity and a positive attitude, blindness is nothing more than a characteristic. Blind people can do almost everything sighted people can do; sometimes they just use alternative techniques to get the job done.

We are educated. We have skills. We are independent. We are parents. We are teachers. We have wisdom. We represent the same range of human diversity, strengths and weaknesses as any other sector of the population.

The CFB would like to realize a positive future for all people who are blind. A future where blind people can find employment; a future where blind people are valued for their contributions; a future where blind people are treated like anyone else.

This future involves you. No matter who you are, blind or sighted, you can work with us to realize this dream.

Together, we can create change in our social landscape, for the real barriers blind people face are erected by ignorance and misunderstanding. Help us achieve what we all want: to be treated with dignity and respect. Join us today and be a part of the solution.

## **Our Philosophy**

**We are not an organization speaking on behalf of blind people; rather we are an organization of blind people speaking for ourselves.**

**We believe it is respectable to be blind.**

**We believe that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can compete on terms of equality with their sighted peers.**

**We believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. The real problem is the lack of positive information about blindness and the achievements of blind people.**



**CFB**

*Committed to the  
equality of blind Canadians*

# The Blind Canadian

**A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind**

The **Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)** is a not-for-profit, entirely volunteer, grass roots organization, incorporated on June 2nd, 1999.

The Blind Canadian offers a positive philosophy of blindness; serves as a vehicle for advocacy and civil rights; addresses social concerns affecting the blind; discusses issues relating to employment, education, legislation and rehabilitation; and provides news of products and technology used by blind people.

We publish two issues annually of "The Blind Canadian" targeted at informing members of the general public about blindness and issues blind Canadians face. It is the leading publication of the CFB; it covers the events and activities of the CFB and addresses the issues and concerns of blind Canadians. Look for the magazine at **www.cfb.ca** in print, Braille, or audio downloadable form, or request a physical copy.

Thanks to an agreement with Public Sector Publications, businesses are offered the opportunity to advertise in the print edition; the print magazine is widely distributed.

To add individuals or community organizations to the mailing list, please email us at: [info@cfb.ca](mailto:info@cfb.ca).

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# The Rough and Bumpy Road to Transit Accessibility for the Blind in B.C.

By Doris Belusic (*April 2015*)

*West coast weather -- wet and windy,  
drizzly, damp, dark and dreary --  
Windshield wipers stroke and moan  
as the bus wheels shoosh through puddles.*

*I sit in the first seat, grip my white cane,  
hold my wet umbrella off my leg.  
I reminisce about my class today  
and hope the driver remembers my stop.*

I ride the transit bus home on a rainy February evening after my University of Victoria writing class. I anxiously grip my white cane and keep my mind focused on my destination, because bus drivers all too often forget to call out a blind person's requested stop. Often I'll stand near the driver for the entire trip, or at least sit close by, so I can communicate with him and know where the bus is travelling. This diligence helps, but even so, I don't always manage to notice my stop.

\*\*\*

On a snowy late afternoon in January this year, my friend, Dr. Paul Gabias, a blind psychology professor at the University of British Columbia Okanagan in Kelowna, was riding the bus home after work. He asked the driver to call out his stop, the one at the post office before the bus turns right onto the highway. The driver assured him he would.

"I can tell you from many experiences that a blind person can't rely on that promise," said Gabias, recounting his trip. "Then, sure enough, we turned the corner and then I knew that we had passed my stop. I yanked on the cord to ring the bell and he stopped the bus right there and said, 'Oh! I'm sorry!'"

The sidewalks were full of snow. Gabias uses a long white cane. He had arranged to meet his son with their car at the specific bus stop. Pieces don't always fall so nicely into place, but that day they did. "Luckily, I had my cell phone and so did my son, and we were able to communicate through my wife because I didn't remember his number," said Gabias.

But, what if he did not have his cell phone? What if his wife had not been at home? What if his son did not have his cell phone? It may be simple forgetfulness on a bus

driver's part, but it's not usually simple for a blind person who is let off at the wrong place.

Drivers missing requested stops are commonplace and has been a source of frustration for blind transit riders for decades. "Every blind person I've ever known can tell stories about how they missed an important appointment, took hours longer than planned to get to their destination. For years, blind people have 'owned' the consequences of driver forgetfulness. More precisely, we've 'owned' the consequences of being denied basic information readily available to sighted people looking out the bus window," says Mary Ellen Gabias, president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), a Victoria-based blindness advocacy organization.

This problem was supposed to end with the latest implementation of B.C. Transit's 'calling out all stops' policy. In 2014, CFB took B.C. Transit to the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal as a last-ditch measure to have the public transit system be made accessible to its blind riders too. Through the tribunal, CFB received a mediated settlement that came into effect September 2014. As of November 2014 in Victoria, and as of April 1, 2015 in Kelowna, bus drivers are required to call out all stops along a route.

CFB has been pushing accessibility with B.C. Transit since 2000, and so have blind individuals before then. The CFB/ B.C. Transit management merry-go-round has been going up and down and around for 15 years with correspondence, meetings, and two cases filed before the human rights tribunal. Interestingly, some years ago, CFB received a letter from B.C. Transit management agreeing that the inaccessibility problems are "known at B.C. Transit" and are "recurring". Back in May 2012, B.C. Transit spokesperson, Meribeth Burton, publicly announced that drivers will call out stops. This did not happen, even after a six-month driver training program. To date, blind transit riders are no further ahead. It's time to stop the merry-go-round and get off. We're getting queasy.

Ideally, what CFB wants, is not for drivers to verbally call out all stops, but for Transit to install GPS systems on buses that automatically speak stops. This is known as automated annunciation and it is used in many places in North America and worldwide. Ontario, and many places in Alberta and B.C., including Vancouver, have this system. If you've ever been on Sky Train in Vancouver or the C-trains in Calgary, you know how valuable automated annunciation is for riders. You hear your stop called in plenty of time, and every time. Even water taxis in Venice, Italy, use this technology.

In 2008, CFB received a letter from B.C. Transit stating that automated annunciation would be implemented within five years, but this didn't happen either. All along, B.C. Transit management has been unwilling to install automated annunciation systems, they say, due to cost. Instead, their drivers are required to do the job. But, most drivers are resisting. They say it's asking too much of them, that it's distracting and unsafe, even though WorkSafe B.C. investigations "show it's not an undue hazard," according to a *Victoria Times Colonist* article on April 2, 2015. Their union supports its drivers not

to call out all stops and is pushing for automated annunciation. Ben Williams, union leader of Unifor 333, said publicly that B.C. Transit has \$10-million for such projects. B.C. Transit has reprimanded some of its drivers for not calling out all stops.

B.C. Transit management has chosen to take the confrontational path with the union and the blind. Ultimately, it's management that needs to decide to install the automated annunciation systems; then both drivers and the blind will be happy. Even so, on occasions when the system is down, bus drivers will need to fill in the gaps. Everyone involved knows an automated system is the answer. And, we also know there are now inexpensive solutions, since some annunciation systems involve using advertisement on the buses, instead of a high price tag up front.

“Given the current state of GPS technology, surely B.C. Transit can implement a low-cost automated call-out system that not only relieves the drivers of the task but also meets the needs of visually-impaired passengers,” states a letter to the *Victoria Times Colonist* on January 16, 2015. “Both the drivers and the blind transit users are on the same side of this issue and have requested an automated system. They should not be pitted against each other by an ill-conceived and shortsighted management decision.”

Buses have been made accessible in many ways already. We have respected wheelchair users and bought buses with ramps and wheelchair space. We have respected the disabled and seniors using walkers and carts, and mothers with strollers and bought kneeling buses. We've respected cyclists and attached bike racks to bus fronts. Blind riders are still left behind, even though transit is the primary means of transportation for most blind people.

People often still suggest, “Why don't you just ask the driver to call your stop?” The simple answer is that drivers forget. And, even when blind riders are let off at a wrong stop, they often don't like to complain because the driver was nice or was helpful. But as Brent McBride, a blind Victoria transit user says, “Good intentions and helpful attitudes are nice, warm and fuzzy but do me no good when I am being let off at the wrong side of a highway and I have no idea where the next safe crosswalk is.”

CFB has filed with B.C. Transit results of three driver compliance surveys. The results aren't great. In November and December 2014, drivers who called out stops were 20 percent out of a total of 55 reported rides; and in January 2015, those who did were 10 percent out of 40 reported rides. If you take January's statistic as an example, it means only four drivers called out stops out of 40 reported rides, which is dismal service.

Mary Ellen Gabias says, “We've demonstrated that the 'please call out my stop' method isn't reliable. Are we just supposed to suck it up and hope the next driver remembers? If requesting drivers to let us off where we want and reminding them periodically had worked, the CFB would never have filed a human rights complaint in the first place.”

Imagine riding in a windowless bus. Sometimes, if you know a route well enough, you might be able to guess the location of the bus by the twists and turns and inclines and declines of the roads. But, that's a guessing game. "Do you think (sighted) passengers would be willing to ride (in a windowless bus) without some reliable system for knowing where the bus was travelling?" asks Mary Ellen Gabias. "I don't. An automated system would have been installed before a windowless bus ever made it to the streets. When the automated system broke down, you can bet that all drivers would call out stops without hesitation. There would be no talk about how calling stops is unsafe and distracting."

You'd think common sense would say, yes, automated annunciation is the way to make transit as accessible as possible for all transit users, even tourists. But, common sense sometimes seems to come with a fight. Although many communities in B.C., Alberta, Ontario and elsewhere have automated annunciation, it hasn't always come easy for them either.

It took a blind lawyer, David Lepofsky, 12 years to win accessible bus transit with Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) in 2007. TTC was just as happy to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in two court appeal cases to get off the hook for calling out all stops, rather than make its transit fleet accessible to the blind. Lepofsky, in a 2007 *Toronto Star* article said, "I hope, given our city's budget problems, the TTC won't spend any more of the taxpayers' dollars fighting this or appealing, and that they put their effort instead into properly serving TTC patrons with disabilities like mine."

His article continues to say that the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal heard that drivers are already required to call all stops when their buses are extremely crowded or bad weather makes it difficult for everyone to see out the windows. "By giving these instructions it is clear that the TTC is prepared to accommodate sighted people who have 'some' difficulties but not blind people with 'severe' difficulties."

In the end, Lepofsky won and now rides the full Toronto transit system, including subway and buses, without constant worry of missing stops. Blind transit riders are advocating for this in Victoria and Kelowna. Accessibility is a human right. We all want independence.

There's a sidebar to this accessibility issue: some blind people are now saying that although automated annunciation systems are installed in their community, the drivers sometimes turn them off. Maria Kovacs, a blind transit user in Maple Ridge, B.C., says, "All our buses are equipped to announce the stops. Bus drivers 'never' have them on. Also, at times the volume is so low, one cannot hear what the stop is. I do confront the drivers who do not have the system on, and the reply is, 'the others riding the bus do not want it on'. Then I proceed to tell them I want the system on at level six, which is the level I was advised by Translink. This has been going on for the past two years."

Mary Ellen Gabias responds, "Why do drivers have the capacity to turn the system off? It shouldn't be possible for them to do so. How many of these complainers would be willing to ride blindfolded? If we were asking to be put at a greater advantage than



others, I could understand the push back. When all we're requesting is clear information presented respectfully, some individuals feel we're acting unduly demanding. How dare they!"

Even in the 'old days', drivers called out stops in some form. *Victoria News* on May 6, 2012 noted, "There hasn't been a policy in place to call out major stops on transit routes in Greater Victoria since electric streetcars trundled through Victoria, Esquimalt and Oak Bay, from the early 1890s to 1948."

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According to the April 2, 2015 *Victoria Times Colonist* article, the latest news is that B.C. Transit has posted an invitation for vendors to provide quotes on automated voice technology. B.C. Transit, the article states, is "now in favour of a technological solution" and is taking bids until May 5<sup>th</sup>. They will then determine "if there is a suitable technology, at a reasonable cost." In the article, Ben Williams of Unifor 333, said it seems like a positive step. But, he questions why B.C. Transit does not simply use the technology proven elsewhere, including Vancouver. And, he points out that the invitation to vendors is not a commitment to fund an automated system.

As a blind transit rider who has seen failed Transit promises, I am hopeful with this latest news, but I will believe it and rejoice when it happens.

It's challenging to be dispassionate about an issue you have fought over for 15 long years – while receiving the same shallow responses that come from the ever-changing faces of the 'current' transit staff. It's challenging to be dispassionate when your human rights are disrespected – when there are solutions available. And, it's challenging to be dispassionate when you're on the bus -- passing by your stop.

**Editor's Note:**

*Given this publication documents historical happenings over a six-month period or more, make sure to read all of the articles in the issue on a given topic for a full understanding of the current status.*

## **Automated Transit Call-Out Stops Needed**

*Letter to the Editor, Victoria Times Colonist, January 16, 2015, reprinted  
Re: "Stops not called, drivers disciplined" Jan 11, 2015*

By Daryl Jones

Following a human rights complaint by the Canadian Federation of the Blind, BC Transit agreed to provide a "call-out" system for visually impaired transit users. However, rather than implement an automated system, Transit's management issued a directive that its drivers should manually call out all of the bus stops.

This is an ill-conceived and failed policy response to a legitimate accommodation request from the blind community.

First, management's directive has upset many drivers, as they believe that calling out stops is an unnecessary distraction and could result in more accidents.

Second, it has led to additional labour problems at BC Transit as the union is challenging the legitimacy of the directive and will grieve disciplinary actions taken against drivers who fail to comply with it.

Third, it has failed to meet BC Transit's commitment to provide a reliable call-out system for visually impaired users. What is even worse is that it has put the blind in the unenviable position of having to police the system and report non-compliance.

Given the current state of GPS technology, surely BC Transit can implement a low cost automated call-out system that not only relieves the drivers of the task but also meets the needs of visually impaired passengers.

Both the drivers and the blind transit users are on the same side of this issue and have requested an automated system. They should not be pitted against each other by an ill-conceived and shortsighted management decision.

## Little Has Changed For Blind Transit Users

*Op-ed, Victoria Times Colonist, January 25, 2015, reprinted*

By Mary Ellen Gabias



*Mary Ellen Gabias  
President, CFB*

Recently, there has been a number of letters to the editor about bus drivers not calling out the stops. Numerous commentators expressed the opinion that this was a trivial issue and visually-impaired riders should simply ask the bus driver to let them off at their desired stop.

The blind have been using the “ask the driver” approach for decades. While most drivers are good at remembering such requests, a good number of them are not. Even when drivers have good intentions, blind passengers cannot count on them to have good memories. All the blind transit users I have ever met have had the unfortunate experience of having to backtrack after the bus driver forgot to let them off at their requested stop.

For blind persons who have a personal GPS device and good cane skills, missing their stop might only be an annoying inconvenience. However, for many others, being dropped off unexpectedly in unfamiliar surroundings can pose a significant concern.

The uncertainty and risk of the “ask the driver” approach means that many visually-impaired people do not see public transit as a viable transportation option. They are forced to rely on restrictive HandyDART service or costly taxis. Every HandyDART trip costs the public many times more than the same trip taken on regular public transit.

Another problem with the “ask the driver” approach is that it eliminates options and opportunities for the blind who have been driven off the buses because they cannot count on receiving reliable information. For example, a sighted transit user can accept a job that entails on-call work or can decide at the last minute to participate in a community activity across town. These opportunities do not exist for disabled people who rely on HandyDART.

When there are three buses at a multi-bus stop, sighted transit riders can easily determine which is the one they want to take. At any time, sighted transit riders can look out the window and determine where the bus is and the distance to their destination. They decide when it's time to ring the bell and exit the bus.

An automated call-out system gives visually-impaired transit users similar options, controls and independence. Numbers are announced outside of the bus, so blind transit riders do not need to ask for help to find the bus they want to take. An automated call-out means that they can determine where they are along the route and they don't need to ask the bus driver to remember their stop.

They also can have a much less anxiety-producing trip because they are in control and don't need to worry that the driver might forget.

Automated systems are being used in cities and towns throughout the world and low-cost options are available to B.C. Transit. In fact, some systems will pay for themselves through increased advertising revenue.

For more than 20 years, we have lobbied B.C. Transit to implement an automated call-out system to make public transit more accessible for the blind, but the corporation has deemed this to be a low priority. Blind transit users in Ottawa filed a human-rights complaint and the Ontario Transit Authority was directed to accommodate their needs by providing a call-out system.

Bolstered by the Ontario decision, the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) filed a similar human-rights complaint against B.C. Transit. In response, B.C. Transit agreed to provide a call-out system in Victoria. Unfortunately, rather than follow Ontario's lead and implement an automated system, B.C. Transit chose to direct its drivers to start calling out all of the stops.

Transit's directive upset many drivers who agree with CFB that blind passengers have an undeniable right to information, but believe it is the responsibility of B.C. Transit to provide an automated system, because that is the most consistent and reliable means of solving the problem. Transit and the union are wrangling while blind passengers continue to be poorly served.

The new requirements for drivers have been in place since last April (2014), but little has changed for the blind. An informal survey last December (2014) by CFB members found that about 80 per cent of drivers did not call out the stops, even when they knew there was a visually-impaired passenger on the bus.

The blind are not the only group who will benefit from an automated call-out system. Visitors, infrequent transit users and thousands of seniors with compromised vision will also find it easier to navigate the local bus system if the stops are announced.

## **Transit Resolution Seems to be on Track**

Excerpt from a CFB listserv email, July 6, 2015, by Frederick Driver

*From the editor: What Rick says is right on. B.C. Transit accepted bids up until May 5, 2015 from suppliers of automated annunciation systems. Transit says they'll choose and trial a system over this summer in Victoria, B.C. for implementation on buses this fall. We'll see. If all goes as it should, a celebration is soon in big order.*

The whole thing has been a long and bumpy road.

So the conclusion and resolution are bound to be bumpy too.

But let's remember, the main thing is, the resolution looks now to be on track and inevitable. There WILL be automated stop calling on B.C. buses. Soon! That is a huge achievement for the rights and equality of blind citizens. All thanks to the Canadian Federation of the Blind, and the years-long efforts and steadfast dedication of members like Oriano Belusic, Graeme McCreath, our president, Mary Ellen Gabias, and others.

Thanks and congratulations on a job well done.

### **B.C. Transit Will Trial New Call-Out System on Buses Helping Riders Locate Streets and Stops**

By Doris Belusic

*Editor's Note: This is the most recent B.C. Transit development at the time of this publication.*

*"Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal or ideal."  
~ Earl Nightingale*

On Friday, July 17, 2015, Victoria members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), a grass-roots advocacy organization of blind people, along with B.C. Transit personnel, rode around town on a bus equipped with the latest GPS Trekker Breeze. It is being trialled by B.C. Transit as an automated annunciation system. It will call out streets travelled, all cross streets and be modified to call out points of interest, such as Craigdarroch Castle or Mayfair and Hillside Malls. In August, B.C. Transit plans to

install it on 25 Victoria buses. If the trial period is successful, it will be rolled out onto the rest of Victoria's fleet in September; then later in B.C.'s smaller communities.

After more than 15 persistent years of advocacy by CFB members, including a recent human rights tribunal, to get an automated announcement system onto buses, this is a major accomplishment. Blind transit riders, tourists, seniors and others will now be able to know where the bus is along a route and when to exit independently. No more relying on drivers' memories and missing stops.

B.C. Transit sought bids until May 5 from companies for automated announcement systems. According to David Guthrie, B.C. Transit's General Manager of Operations, the bids were either too expensive or not in trial-ready working order. B.C. Transit decided to retry CFB's original suggestion of several years ago. They teamed up with Humanware, a Canadian company which makes Trekker Breeze, originally a blindness-specific GPS system. Today, the updated Trekker Breeze is much advanced and there are now 12 tracking satellites, so the system appears to work very well, even between taller buildings. Guthrie says this lower cost, simpler, more informative system is the first of its kind on buses anywhere.

"It could be revolutionary," says Oriano Belusic, CFB's first vice president. "This system is B.C. Transit's answer to provide blind people with necessary information so they can use public transit independently until such time they install the much more complex and costly smart bus AVL technology."

The Trekker Breeze will be hardwired to the PA system, which includes at least six speakers from front to back inside each bus. Guthrie says the Trekker Breeze will be encased in plastic and will automatically turn on when the bus is started. The driver needs little or no training and only has to adjust volume. Call-outs should easily be able to be heard (they must be heard) over ambient noise of air conditioners and people's voices.

"There will undoubtedly be wrinkles to iron out," says Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB president. "One thing is completely clear to everyone: Blind people have a right to information. We are no longer relegated to the fringes of transit planning."

"Members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind are very pleased that B.C. Transit is taking concrete steps to equip our buses with automated GPS stop announcement devices," says Belusic. "Five of us had an opportunity to test drive a demonstration bus that worked very well and with some fine tuning the new system will definitely make public transit more accessible for blind riders and many others."

CFB will certainly keep a check on progress, but if the system works well in day-to-day general transit use, as it appears it should, CFB would like to commend B.C. Transit for stepping up to the plate and doing the right thing. Soon blind and visually impaired people will also be able to travel with dignity and confidence.

# Visually Impaired Nancy Gill Organizes Fundraiser for Program That Would Help Her Be Employed Once Again

By Rattan Mall

*The Indo.Canadian Voice, voiceonline.com, April 17, 2015*

*Excerpt reprinted with permission*

*From the editor: CFB has been working hard to publicize the need for government funded and accountable blindness skills training for blind British Columbians. Presently, there is no adequate training for blind adults who want it. Nancy Gill asked; the government told her “no”. Here's what she's been doing to help herself. Perhaps some who read the following article will be outraged that a woman has to beg in the newspaper for funds that should be available to any blind person who needs them.*

*We all hope Nancy succeeds in raising funds to go to the Louisiana Center for the Blind, one of three world-renowned blindness skills intensive training centres in the U.S. We're all determined that other blind individuals will not have to go through this process.*



*Nancy Gill  
Credit: Rattan Mall*

Nancy Gill is vivacious and positive with a great sense of humour.

And the Burnaby resident is determined not to let anything in life get her down.

But she needs your help.

That's because Nancy is legally blind due to a condition known as Usher's Syndrome that causes gradual, but inevitable, loss of eyesight which frequently results in near total blindness. In addition, the condition includes hearing loss. And the multiple effect of dual sensory loss can be devastating.

“Even so, there are people with the same medical problem as myself working, raising families, and contributing to our communities due to specialized training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind (LCB),” says Nancy.

Nancy actually had to give up her job at a grocery store because of her worsening eyesight.

The Louisiana Center for the Blind is one of three premier programs in the world operated in conjunction with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the United States. Louisiana Center graduates have gone on to excel in a wide variety of professions. Between 60 and 85 per cent of LCB graduates go on to find competitive employment.

“Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) has evaluated me and they firmly believe that the Louisiana Center for the Blind program offers me significant potential for retaining my independence. Unfortunately, the training is not available in Canada and is not funded by government,” says Nancy.

For this reason, Nancy hopes to raise the \$40,000 needed to access this program. The amount includes costs for tuition and personal living expenses.

At the end of the intensive nine-month training program, she would have been trained in Braille, independent travel with the long white cane, home management, industrial arts and home repair.

“Most importantly, by the end of the training, I expect to be fully equipped to go on to various kinds of further education and / or job training or to seek employment,” says Nancy.

(Nancy held a fundraiser April 25th at Village Pub in Vancouver, B.C., with a live band, door prizes and a silent auction.)

“I am asking for donations...to help me raise the money I need to learn how to be blind successfully. Any assistance you can provide will greatly enhance my opportunity for independent living, productive participation in my community and an opportunity for a quality of life,” says Nancy.

If you require additional information, feel free to contact Nancy at (604) 431-5095 or by email at [burnabyblindconnections@gmail.com](mailto:burnabyblindconnections@gmail.com).

You can donate to “Nancy Gill Blind Event” account 00320-5192356 at Royal Bank.

Or you can go to <http://dm2.gofund.me/Blind-Nancy-Gill>

*The full article can be read at:*

<http://www.voiceonline.com/visually-impaired-nancy-gill-organizes-fundraiser-for-program-that-would-help-her-be-employed-once-again/>



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**More information on intensive blindness skills rehab training may be read in previous issues of *The Blind Canadian* (also found at [www.cfb.ca](http://www.cfb.ca) under publications):**

***July 2014 issue:***

- Blind Woman Fights for a Chance at an Independent Life
- In Canada: The Blind Left Behind
- Blind Turned Away by B.C. MLAs
- National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Training Centers
- Ode to a Philanthropic Investor

***October 2013 issue:***

- An Absence of Intensive Blindness Skills Training and Rehabilitation for Blind People in Canada
- A Blind Woman's Letter to Government Requesting Intensive Blindness Skills Rehabilitation Training
- Rehabilitation Re-Affirmation Resolution 2013-2
- The Official Position Statement of the CFB Concerning the Rehabilitation of Blind Canadians

***April 2013 issue:***

- It's Been Two Years Since Rally
- The Link Between Proper Blindness Skills Training and Opportunity
- British Columbians Demand Publicly Funded and Publicly Accountable Training at Budget Consultation Hearing

***July 2012 issue:***

- The Sorry State of Blindness Training in Canada
- The Official CFB Position Statement Concerning the Rehabilitation of Blind Canadians
- Rally for Change and Choice
- My Journey at the Louisiana Center for the Blind
- My Experiences at the Colorado Center for the Blind

***May 2008 issue:***

- Being an Informed Rehabilitation Customer – Making Wise Choices
- What is Good Rehabilitation?
- NFB-Style Rehabilitation for the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. has extensive information and personal testimonials about intensive rehabilitation. Please visit [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org) to learn more.

## National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Training Centers

*Presently, intensive blindness skills rehabilitation training is only available at these three centres:*

### **BLIND, Incorporated (Blindness: Learning in New Dimensions, Incorporated)**

Shawn Mayo, Director  
100 East 22nd Street South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404  
Phone: 612-872-0100  
Toll-Free: 800-597-9558  
Fax: 612-872-9358  
E-mail: [info@blindinc.org](mailto:info@blindinc.org)  
Web site: <http://www.blindinc.org>

### **Colorado Center for the Blind**

Julie Deden, Director  
2233 West Shepperd Avenue  
Littleton, Colorado 80120  
Phone: 303-778-1130  
Toll-Free: 800-401-4632  
Fax: 303-778-1598  
E-mail: [jdeden@cocenter.org](mailto:jdeden@cocenter.org)  
Web site: <http://www.cocenter.org/>

### **Louisiana Center for the Blind**

Pam Allen, Director  
101 South Trenton Street  
Ruston, Louisiana 71270  
Phone: 318-251-2891  
Toll-Free: 800-234-4166  
E-mail: [pallen@lcb-ruston.com](mailto:pallen@lcb-ruston.com)  
Web site: <http://www.lcb-ruston.com>

***Thank you to supporters of CFB!***



## Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Members Elect New Executive Board 2015 - 16

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) elected a new executive board at its annual general meeting on June 27, 2015. All members of the executive are blind and serve without compensation.

Thank you to Heidi Propp for her service in the position of Secretary for the past year. And, a huge thank you to Dr. Paul Gabias for his many years of dedicated service on the CFB executive board, the most recent position having been Second Vice President.

Members re-elected:

Oriano Belusic, First Vice President  
Donna Hudon, Member at Large

Members elected:

Elizabeth Lalonde, Secretary

Members are grateful to Mary Ellen Gabias, President and Graeme McCreath, Treasurer, for their continued hard work and service.

The position of Second Vice President at present is vacant.

Congratulations and thank you to the new executive board.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is an organization of blind people committed to the equality and empowerment of blind Canadians. Through advocacy, public education and mentoring, members work for change, promote a positive perspective on blindness and together gain confidence and skills.

### **Congratulations are in Order**

Some of our CFB members have accomplished significant milestones this year. Congratulations to you all.

Dr. Paul Gabias, PhD, LLD, a psychology professor at the University of British Columbia Okanagan was honoured this April at a long service dinner for his 25 years of dedicated service to post-secondary education at UBC Okanagan. Dr. Gabias is CFB's founder.



*Dr. Paul Gabias (far right) at long service ceremony along with fellow honourees.*

*Credit: UBC Okanagan*

Oriano Belusic, CFB's first vice president, has been a member of the Victoria Imperial Lions Club for over 25 years and this February received the Lions Clubs International Melvin Jones Fellowship Award for his dedicated service.

Erin Lacharity, a participant in the Blind People in Charge program at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) graduated from the program this March.



*Oriano Belusic (left) receives Lions Clubs International Melvin Jones Fellowship Award from Lions District Governor Georgia Medwedrich.*

*Credit: Don Jones*



Graeme McCreath, CFB's treasurer, received his amateur (ham) radio operator's licence this April. His call sign is VA7 AGM. Graeme, who is 68, also ran in the Victoria Times Colonist TC10K run this April. He ran it in 56 minutes.

*Graeme McCreath (left) with running guide, Carlos Castillo, at TC10K.*

*Credit: Sarah Tiffin, Saanich News, 2013*

## **Boston From My Perspective**

by Gaston Bedard

*From the Running Room e-magazine, July/August 2015.  
Reprinted with permission*

*From the editor: Gaston Bedard, 62, is a competitive runner and ran this year's Boston Marathon. It is his 16<sup>th</sup> full marathon, his first was in 1979. A retired elementary school teacher, Gaston is deafblind from Usher's syndrome with retinitis pigmentosa, which he's had since childhood. He removes his two hearing aids before each run.*

*Gaston caught the running bug during the excitement of the 1976 Montreal Olympics and started with a pair of \$4 running shoes. The Boston marathon is 42.2 km (26.2*

miles) and Gaston, with his guides, ran it in 5.26 hours, despite bad weather and a sore knee.

*Congratulations Gaston! A super accomplishment.*

I am a deaf, blind runner from Aylmer, Quebec. I ran and completed the Boston Marathon on April 20th.

It was a super team effort led by Team With a Vision, a group of blind and sighted athletes who run the Boston Marathon every year to raise funds and awareness for the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Running Boston is everything they say it is. I'm told there were a lot of very fit-looking runners in and around our hotel. You could feel the energy, the excitement in the air everywhere.

At the start in Hopkinton, it took nine minutes just to cross the start line.

It was wet, cold, and windy most of the way. My two guides, Christopher Yule and Melany Gauvin, did a great job and kept me going. I feel we ran quite well through the Newton hills. When things got really tough in the last 12 kilometres, the knowledge that my son Marc would be at the finish line kept me focussed. We crossed the finish line as a team, holding hands, with arms raised.

Marc was super helpful the whole weekend. He took photos of us around Boston. This was a special father-son adventure, and we pulled it off really well. I like to say, "When you have good people around you, it is amazing what you can do."

This was my 16th marathon. I would love to run Boston again. I am now looking for sighted guides to train with and to run the next Boston in 2016.

<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/37f5d06c#/37f5d06c/58>



*Gaston Bedard (centre) with running guides, Christopher Yule (left) and Melany Gauvin (right) at finish line of 2015 Boston Marathon.*

*Credit: Marc Bedard*

# Back to Notre Dame 28 Years Later

By Dr. Paul Gabias, PhD, LLD

*Editor's note: The excerpts used below are from the banquet address, 'Back to Notre Dame', delivered 28 years ago at the 1987 National Federation of the Blind (NFB) convention, held in Phoenix, Arizona. It was the first banquet speech delivered by the then new president of the NFB, Dr. Marc Maurer. Last year, in 2014, after 28 years of dedicated service as NFB president, Dr. Maurer retired from the position.*

*Dr. Paul Gabias casually reflects back to that 1987 speech and notes that, although many things for the blind have improved over the past 28 years, in part due to technological advances, certain problems seem like they are inherent and will always be with us.*

*In 1987, Dr. Maurer said, "Despite the progress we have made (and we have made a great deal of it), regressive attitudes about blindness are unfortunately still the norm." In 2015, it seems we can still say the exact same thing.*

'Back to Notre Dame' tells us what Marc Maurer considered important back in 1987. Has much changed since then?

The speech asks us to look at our lives organizationally, but even more importantly, personally. After all, we don't have a Federation just for the sake of having a Federation. We have a Federation so that it can help us lead our lives as blind people more effectively.

In 1987, at the time that speech was delivered, I was interviewing for the job of visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology, with a specialty in Perception, at the University of Nevada-Reno (UNR). I went to Reno for the job interview during the convention in Phoenix, and I returned to the convention afterwards.

At that time, we were in the middle of dealing with the airlines and their exit row discrimination against blind people, which had reached, it seemed, a crisis proportion, and naturally, I had problems with the airline on my way back to the convention. The airline treated me with condescension, right in front of a member of the Psychology Department of UNR, my potential employer. "Does 'he' need help going down the stairs?" the desk agent wanted to know, not directing the question to me. Despite this, I did obtain the job. At that time, I was also finishing my PhD thesis with the help of my mother.

In July 1987, my beautiful golden retriever guide dog, Viva, was one-and-a-half years old. I had trained her from a puppy and she had attended the Kansas City NFB convention the previous year with me at seven months old. She worked beautifully at that convention. Diane McGeorge, a well-known leader in the NFB, will always remember Viva's impeccable work and behaviour.

In July 1987, I had just finished a one year position as a lecturer in Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It was my first year of teaching Intro Psych to 300 students per class, and Graduate Statistics. My graduation ceremony from New York University had not happened yet. It would happen in the summer of 1988. That ceremony was also a first date for Mary Ellen and I.

At Reno, I taught Intro and Research Methods in the first semester. In the second semester, I taught Intro, Perception and a graduate course in Form and Representation, a course I devised myself based on my graduate work. I was also finishing up my thesis.

In 1988, I took a new position at the University of Southern Colorado, again as a visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology. There, I had a very high teaching load with Intro, Research Methods, Perception, and Psychology and Life - four courses per semester.

With respect to my involvement in the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), at that time, the airline exit row crisis was raging strong and it seemed that blind people were being pulled off planes left and right for all kinds of reasons: for not wanting to move from exit row seats to which they had been assigned by the airline; for not wanting to move from exit row seats that had been designated as open seating for the public; for not wanting to hear individualized imposed special debriefing instructions for the blind before takeoff; for not wanting to give up their long rigid white canes; for not wanting to sit on special urinating blankets in case they could not get to the bathroom; or for not wanting to agree to comply with special pre-boarding and deplaning instructions. In short, for not wanting to be treated like morons and for just wanting to be treated like everybody else. For guide dog users, there was also the bulk head seat issue, where the airlines would try to force guide dog users to sit in bulk head seats. The bulk head seats can be inconvenient because the dog takes up room in front of passengers' feet, leaving no room for luggage. Most adept guide dog handlers can get the dog to back under most airline seats, with the dog lying comfortably under the seat, facing forward. This still leaves room for luggage to go under the front seat ahead. So, having been pulled off planes myself, I was motivated to help how I could.

I attended my first leadership seminar at the NFB National Center for the Blind in Baltimore, MD, in March 1988, where I was impressed with Mary Ellen, who was working there. We were married in January 1989. We moved to St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in August 1989, and Viva died unexpectedly during the move. She developed a spinal embolism which prevented her from moving her hind quarters and she had to be euthanized.

Male golden retriever puppy, Schubert, arrived in Fredericton from Long Island, New York, in September 1989. His breeders aptly named him the Rambo puppy, which he absolutely was. He had the same mother as Viva, and he was the last one, so I took him. I set about training him that year, and he was my guide dog for about 12 years.

In Fredericton, I was teaching Intro Psych, Research Methods and Perception. I think the courses lasted all year there, each two semesters long. Right away, in Fredericton, Mary Ellen and I got busy planning to start the Federation in Canada.

Why? For many reasons, but the basic reason is easiest to understand if we go back to Notre Dame, as it were, with Dr. Maurer's 1987 banquet speech. He writes: "On Saturday, May 23rd of this year, I did not physically leave Baltimore—but on that day (as I have so often done) I went back to Notre Dame. I was in a clothing store, trying on the very suit I am wearing tonight. At a critical juncture in the fitting, the salesman said to the sighted person who was with me: 'Can you take off his shoes?' I suppose I don't need to tell you that I did not walk barefooted to Notre Dame. I removed my own shoes."

So, from the airport, to the airplane, to the department store - when will it ever stop? How many blind people go through this degrading situation on a daily basis? I am sure this kind of dehumanizing situation happens to every blind person thousands of times over a lifetime. This is why we need the Federation, not so much to help the sighted understand, but to help the blind understand! We, the blind, can be the best support for each other in these kinds of frustrating situations.

As blind people, how are we to react to being continuously belittled for inane reasons, sometimes on more than one occasion during the day, day after day? My own experience is that it takes very high self-esteem, understanding, patience, and dogged determination to try to stamp it out.

Certainly, collective action on the part of the organized blind, the cooperation of sighted people who are willing to learn, and an invincible belief that blindness is part of the normalcy of people. There is really nothing particularly special about it. Give a person Braille, a white cane, and adaptive technology, and things will be made easier for blind people, but my experience of blindness, and that of countless others, suggests that blindness has been a normal characteristic of people since the beginning of time, regardless of what has been thought about it through the millennia. What I am saying is that blindness need not affect the normal function and feeling of a person any more than any other superficial characteristic.

All of our members in the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) are also members of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) because, as it says on the NFB website ([www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)):

*"The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back."*

In keeping with this dictum, I finally took up a tenure track position in 1990 at Okanagan College in Kelowna, B.C., where I taught two sections of Intro and Perception. Joanne, our daughter, was born in February of 1990. We now have four children, the youngest is 16 years old.

I would now like to deal with a very important statement that President Maurer made in his first presidential banquet speech, 'Back To Notre Dame':

"Discrimination is not necessarily confined to the job interview or the entry level. It can also happen after employment is permanent and safe."



Let's look at his employment experience, from his speech, to see what he means:

“After college I did graduate work, and in 1977 I finished law school. In 1978, with the help of Federation members, I got a job in the office of the General Counsel at the Civil Aeronautics Board. With my philosophy and idealism in hand, I went to that job willing and anxious to work. I wanted to give of my time, my effort, and my energy. I wanted to advance myself and the cause of the blind. The Civil Aeronautics Board made United States civil aviation policy. Here, I thought, is an opportunity for me to do something really useful. However, I soon discovered that a pattern existed--a pattern which reminded me of the professor who told me that I was courageous, and promised me a good grade. I felt right at home. It was just like being back at Notre Dame.

“My assignments were almost always routine. If there was a trip to London for an international negotiation, somebody else was asked to go. If a hearing officer needed to take testimony in a small town to determine the feasibility of air service, I was never sent. These assignments (calculated to vary the routine) were highly prized and much sought after. Others went while I stayed home—and was courageous. Sometimes there was not enough routine work to fill my day. So I was left to occupy my time as I chose. My superiors would have been content if I had spent my time listening to the radio or reading. They would have been content—but I would not have been content. I did not want the rest of my life to be a sham and a deception, a guaranteed succession of endless raises and lack of meaningful work. Discrimination is not necessarily confined to the job interview or the entry level. It can also happen after employment is permanent and safe.

“My job with the federal government was absolutely secure. It would have lasted until retirement through a long and rustful life. There was something else: we all tend to be conditioned by our environment. I knew that if I stayed long enough and my salary became high enough, I might begin to succumb to temptation and rationalize. I might become accustomed to the lack of useful activity and gradually lose my initiative, my sense of values, my perspective, my willingness to leave, and my soul.

“Not only had the Federation taught me about blindness but also about self-examination, objectivity, and perspective. In 1981 I left the Civil Aeronautics Board to start my own law practice. I knew that I might starve, but I also knew that if I starved, it would be a starvation of the body and not of the soul. I knew that I would be free, and not a token or a cipher. Slavery does not have to be a matter of chains and whips. It can also be a captivity of the mind and a shackling of the spirit. Every person in this room can give testimony to that. We in the Federation have cut our teeth on it, and we never stop learning it. On a daily basis we continue to teach it to ourselves and each other, and we give it in strong doses to new recruits. This is why some, who do not understand our philosophy, call us militant.

“In the practice of law, my dream that I might do something worthwhile and useful came true. Again, Federation members and leaders helped and encouraged me. As part of my practice I frequently found myself representing blind persons. The textbooks tell us that American law is based on fairness and justice regardless of who is involved or what the circumstances may be. My job was to help make this principle applicable to the blind as well as the sighted.

“When I represented blind people, my opponents were often major employers, airlines, departments of government, or agencies doing work with the blind. Although the approaches of these different entities might vary, their opinions about blindness usually did not. Whether it was an airline, an employer, a department of government, or a service agency for the blind, what they said about blindness was always just about the same. I felt right at home. It was exactly like being back at Notre Dame. The blind are courageous; they will get a good grade; no need to work; and plenty of meaningless assignments. Of course, when I insisted on equal treatment for my clients, attitudes hardened. Those across the table now thought the blind (and that included me) were ungrateful, unreasonable, and unrealistic—not courageous at all but just plain radical and militant.

“If (after my experiences at Notre Dame and the Civil Aeronautics Board) anything else was needed to confirm me in my opinion that the National Federation of the Blind was not only needed but necessary, I found it in the practice of law. It is not that people mean to be unreasonable or that they are deliberately cruel. Rather, it is that they have the ancient fear of the dark and that they equate blindness with darkness, and darkness with evil and lack of ability to perform. Despite the progress we have made (and we have made a great deal of it), regressive attitudes about blindness are unfortunately still the norm.”

So, today, in 2015, are regressive attitudes about blindness unfortunately still the norm? My opinion is that this answer still has to be a qualified yes. This kind of a statement is best examined in terms of our own lives, and our experience of them on a daily basis. Just yesterday, a student from my latest Intro class at UBC-Okanagan, where I have worked since its inception, said that he had seen me around campus but that he had thought that I was also a student. I said that students don't usually dress the way I do, with a suit and tie. He said that he thought that I had just wanted to look respectable. He said that he was totally surprised to see me take my position at the head of the class on the first day of class. He now wants to look at the kind of research I do, for potential collaboration.

I am sure that this realization, that blind people can be in positions of authority and power has occurred to thousands of students by now, after my 28<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. I don't think that it has occurred yet to university personnel, in terms of the hierarchy of power at the University. I have not been asked to be Department Head, for example, or Associate Dean, or Dean. I had, once upon a time, looked admiringly at those positions for myself. But that time is no more. I now want to be a Royal Ambassador with Nikken. That goal is in my control, attainable, and nobody can stop me.

Some people might argue: “But what about the people who wonder if we can take off our shoes? They're not likely to want to have anything to do with us in business.” My answer is: “As a blind person, I have reached the level of Gold in Nikken, and I am not stopping until I reach my goal, and help others reach their goals too. When I was looking for jobs, each year, I applied to 100 places, just to get a few job interviews. I am used to prospecting for what I want until I succeed. I believe there will always be people who think I am worth following in business and who are looking for what network marketing and the products have to offer.”

Living and working and raising a family in Kelowna, B.C., Mary Ellen and I as a blind couple, have dealt with our four children's teachers and school administrators, at one time

or another for 22 years. We have dealt with all manner of stores and businesses, service providers, and government and religious organizations. Plus, our children have countless friends, and they have held or hold positions of employment with their own required contact with the public. People talk, and blindness does come up, in positive terms.

Also, my Nikken business requires me to make contacts with new people and their people, and their people, all of the time. So, in terms of people's attitudes about blindness, I have experienced great improvements in my own lifetime. Yes, there are still people who wonder how I take off my shoes, but they do seem to be fewer.

To continue to focus on the employment issue, let us go back to Dr. Maurer's work experience again. Remember, he had just graduated with a law degree and some graduate school. As a consequence of the negative attitudes about blindness, embodied in the 'shoe' problem that we all have experienced with varying frequency over the years, Dr. Maurer wrote:

“My assignments were almost always routine. If there was a trip to London for an international negotiation, somebody else was asked to go. If a hearing officer needed to take testimony in a small town to determine the feasibility of air service, I was never sent. These assignments (calculated to vary the routine) were highly prized and much sought after. Others went while I stayed home—and was courageous. Sometimes there was not enough routine work to fill my day. So I was left to occupy my time as I chose. My superiors would have been content if I had spent my time listening to the radio or reading.....My job with the federal government was absolutely secure. It would have lasted until retirement through a long and rustful life.”

As Dr. Maurer said in his speech, negative attitudes about blindness is one of the reasons why he left his job in the office of the General Counsel at the Civil Aeronautics Board to start his own law practice, before becoming President of the National Federation of the Blind.

At my job as an Associate Professor, I am never left with nothing to do. The discrimination for me is much more subtle. Our job as Professors at UBC comprises three components: teaching, research and service. Ideally, Professors' workloads should be balanced in these three areas for them to excel. Discrimination has to be examined in terms of opportunities for promotion and recognition. The 'shoe' problem for University Professors, University Administrators and students is never very far away if you look beneath the surface.

Right now, my job is just the way I want it, in terms of the balance of these three areas, but along the way, I was and still am very conscious of potential pitfalls for discrimination. It would be completely naïve to think otherwise.

In 1987, at work, I thought I hadn't had direct experience in dealing with this kind of discrimination on the job. Now, I feel differently. In 1987, I wasn't accessing the computer screen on my own. Now, I can. In 1987, we didn't have talking smart phones. Now, we do. In 1987, we couldn't put 20 or more books on a memory stick. Now, we can. In 1987, I hadn't owned a home. Now, we have owned two homes, sequentially. In 1987, I hadn't

bought and owned cars or boats, or had to teach children how to drive them. Now, there are two cars and a boat in our family, and three children can drive them.

In 2015, the economic prospects of blind people have to be examined in the light of the economic prospects for sighted people. And, of course, there is still and there will always be, for blind people, the 'shoe' problem.

And where does the 'shoe' problem come from? Dr. Maurer writes in his speech:

“It is not that people mean to be unreasonable or that they are deliberately cruel. Rather, it is that they have the ancient fear of the dark and that they equate blindness with darkness, and darkness with evil and lack of ability to perform.”

My belief is that these beliefs are innate, and each generation of blind people will have to tackle them, no matter what technologies we have to help blind people compete on terms of equality.

My family, my friends, my job, my work in the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), and my work with Nikken all give me great joy and fulfilment! Fulfilment! Isn't that what life is supposed to be about? That's what we, in the Canadian Federation of the Blind, work to help each other achieve.

*To read or listen to Dr. Maurer's speech 'Back To Notre Dame', please go to the links below:*

- *Back to Notre Dame (Phoenix, 1987)*
- *Back to Notre Dame (Audio)*
- <https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/convent/banque87.htm>

## **Judging From Some Reviews, the Film 'Blind' Is Way Off Base**

By Frederick Driver

When I learned of the 2014 Norwegian film about a blind woman, entitled "Blind", which was receiving some attention, I wanted to know more. After looking at a number of reviews, I was dismayed by what I found.

Numbered below are seven reasons for my dismay, each followed by quotes from the reviews. Sources are referenced in brackets after each, with links at the end.

1. Deliberate association of blindness with fear.

*[quote:] Her alone time already allows her mind to wander, but it also comes with ... the distinct sound of breathing in the apartment when she should be alone. (1)*

*[quote:] Ingrid retreats to her apartment, but cannot escape her fear. "Blind" reflects this fear. (2)*

*[quote:] We first meet her in darkness with only her voice to guide us ... as light begins to fill the screen we see only her hands moving over objects and textures. Soon the breathing starts behind her, someone's eyes take her in, and while she suspects it's Morten, there's no answer when she calls out his name. (3)*

2. The bogus idea that, in order to be able to continue to perceive the world, she must desperately try to retain her memory of vision--the underlying assumption being that perceiving the world WITHOUT vision is neither valid nor possible.

The truth is quite the opposite of course. Perceiving the world without vision is perfectly possible and valid. And hanging on to vision, residual or the memory of it, is an impediment to perception and adaptation to blindness. Hence the effectiveness of sleepshades in blindness skills training for those with some residual vision.

*[quote:] She says she has to constantly picture her memories and surroundings as otherwise they'll fade without the benefit of new visual stimuli and triggers. (4)*

*[quote, from the blind character in the film:] It's not important what's real as long as I can visualize it. (5)*

*[quote, apparently the filmmaker's own words from an interview:] She has to create a new reality for herself based on the memories she has of seeing. (6)*

3. The filmmaker's so-called research consisted of: visiting doctors; and taking the views and feelings of ONE blind woman he got to know and applying them to blind people generally.

Isn't that called prejudice?

He may or may not be representing the views of that one blind woman accurately. But even if he is, he talked to ONE blind person, and some doctors, and now he knows what it's like to be blind? Fear, and sadness at not being able to see loved ones or children's smiles?

As if the absence of vision meant the inability to give and receive love, the inability to perceive your children's happiness. That is complete nonsense of course.

*[quote, apparently the filmmaker's own words from an interview:] I visited doctors for research, but my main source was a blind woman that I got to know and who opened herself up to me. Thanks to her, I began to understand issues such as not being able to see your loved ones with your own eyes or your children smiling. (7)*

4. Prurient, titillating, invasive. And for some reason the blind person is supposed to be embarrassed and ashamed. But isn't even aware enough to be so.

*[quote:] The movie presents an intimate look into a life, the likes of which most of us will never know first-hand. It's as if we're peeking behind the curtain of someone's unaware mind, and they don't know enough to be embarrassed, ashamed, or upset. (8)*

5. Many have complained about the negative and unrealistic effect of blindness simulations/ blindfolding for supposed awareness-building for sighted people; that is, leaving the uninformed with the impression that blindness is hard, and blind people can't really do much.

Well, here it is again:

*[quote:] Being blind is hard, seems to be the message here. Also, a blind person's apartment is no place for pasta. (9)*

6. The blind woman is vicious and paranoid, and everyone's lives become entangled in lies and shame. And it's the blind woman who has created this world. Shades of Saramago's movie "Blindness"?

*[quote:] She can be vicious and obsessively paranoid in the world she's created, where everyone's lives become entangled in lies and shame. (10)*

7. So the archetypal blind person is supposed to be: sitting in a chair, by a window, thinking, doing nothing, with nothing happening. And this is assumed to be when it gets closest to what being blind must actually be like?

This is obviously an ignorant and pernicious fabrication by someone who knows nothing about blindness but stereotypes and misconceptions, and who is unfortunately disseminating them.

*[quote:] Ingrid's daily routine is to sit in a chair by the window and think. (11)*

*[quote:] The film is at its best with Ingrid just alone, in her flat, with nothing happening. At these moments, the film shows an interest in what living with blindness might actually be like. (12)*

This film may be subtler, less over-the-top than the one based on Saramago's "Blindness". But perhaps that makes it even more treacherous. From what I've read in these reviews, it strikes me as just as false, perverse, and outrageous in its misrepresentation of blindness.

## **SOURCES:**

- (1) <http://filmschoolrejects.com/reviews/blind-norway.php>
- (2) <http://www.na-weekly.com/arts/haugesund-honors-the-years-top-films/>
- (3) <http://filmschoolrejects.com/reviews/blind-norway.php>
- (4) <http://filmschoolrejects.com/reviews/blind-norway.php>
- (5) <http://www.variety.com/2014/film/reviews/sundance-film-review-blind-1201063430/#>
- (6) <http://grapevine.is/culture/movies-theatre/2015/02/26/norway-after-breivik-eskilvogt-and-his-movie-blind/> (via Google cache)
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## **Bill 17 Barking Up the Wrong Tree**

By Mary Ellen Gabias, President

*Editor's Note: This is a CFB press release of March 2015. It is in response to B.C. government's newly amended Guide Dog and Service Dog Act. The final reading is still pending. The act is set to take effect later this year.*

Bill 17 as currently written would shift the focus from protecting access rights for people using guide dogs to catching impostors at the expense of law-abiding blind individuals, according to the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

"Taxis often won't take us," says Graeme McCreath of Victoria, who has frequently been refused service because he is accompanied by his guide dog Adrienne. "We wanted the province to clarify and strengthen enforcement of our access rights. Instead, they're forcing us to jump through more bureaucratic hoops and creating the false presumption that we are perpetrating fraud until we prove otherwise.

Oriano Belusic, first vice-president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind and a guide dog user for more than 30 years, is waiting to see what the legislature does before deciding whether to replace his dog, Hillie, who recently died. "I love the speed and ease of movement I have always had with my dogs, but it's not worth it if every shopkeeper, restaurateur and cab driver can demand to see my credentials. Current law presumes I have a right to go about my business. Bill 17 will force me to prove, over and over again, that I have rights. Proponents say certification is like a driver's

license, but it's not; the police only ask to see a license when a driver appears to be doing something illegal. This bill would mean that anybody could demand to see my certification before they even let me in the door.”

The Federation estimates there are approximately 80 guide dogs in the province. “We haven't encountered problems with people pretending to be blind in order to bring phony guide dogs into public places,” Belusic states. “For guide dog users, this proposal is a draconian solution to a nonexistent problem.”

Dr. Paul Gabias, a blind university professor in Kelowna who has trained six guide dogs, knows certification offers no protection for the public against badly behaved dogs. “Certification only proves that a team worked correctly on the day the certification was issued. I've seen people from fully accredited schools who have ruined dogs. I've seen dogs whose work has deteriorated because of trauma. I've also seen privately trained dogs that have worked beautifully. The law already requires that dogs be kept under control at all times and permits any business to remove a badly behaved guide dog.”

“Why is the province punishing us for the behaviour of impostors without disabilities?” asks McCreath. “Why not make it an offense to misrepresent a pet as a service dog, require community service for violators, and leave our access rights intact? That's simpler, much cheaper, and far more just than creating a new bureaucracy.”

Gabias agrees. “People determined to commit fraud will find ways to fake certification documents,” he says. “I would much rather tolerate a few bad actors than impinge upon access rights.”

“There are some very fine access improvements in Bill 17,” says Belusic. “Even so, if the focus isn't changed from catching phonies to protecting blind people, we'll be better off if it does not pass.”



# A Letter to B.C. Government Regarding Proposed Bill 17

April 1, 2015

Honourable Suzanne Anton  
Attorney General and Minister of Justice  
P.O. Box 944 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, B.C., V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Anton:

Re: Proposed new Bill 17: Guide Dog & Service Dog Act

I am writing you to bring some extremely worrisome issues presently in the proposed Act to your attention. I have had three very faithful, long-serving guide dogs over the last 30 years and have firsthand experience in the failings of the old Act. Unfortunately, the new Act fails to resolve two major deficits of the old Act and creates a serious new problem.

The new serious problem that this Bill 17 creates is that it's very likely unconstitutional, as it requires a blind British Columbian to get his or her guide dog through a "certified organization" which in all instances are charities. Blind people must have the right to acquire and train their own guide dogs, if they wish, whether that involves the training of one's own guide dog or having someone else train the dog for their use. The right of blind people to use a dog as a guide is ancient, and independent of any bureaucratic regulation. Any new legislation must not interfere with that right. For legislation to require that one only get a guide dog through a charity is contrary to everything this country should stand for. In the event that these certified charitable organizations cease to exist, due to poor business practices or any possible other reasons, one must always have the right of self-reliance and be able to look after one's own mobility needs. Whatever else it seeks to accomplish, the new Act must do two things:

1. Entrench and protect the equal access and freedom of movement of blind citizens in any and all public places and conveyances; and
2. Entrench and protect the long-established, independent, and ancient right of blind people to use a dog as a guide. That private charities or any other entities are seeking to interfere with these long-established rights and freedoms of blind citizens is unacceptable.

As to the old problems that the Act fails to resolve:

1. Over my 30 years, I experienced numerous, very unpleasant, humiliating, and demeaning taxi discrimination incidents, and there was no functional and just way to deal with such frequent violations. If the new Bill is to be of any measurable improvement to blind guide dog users, language needs to be inserted in the Act that specifically prohibits taxi discrimination for any reason. Additionally, enabling the local taxi bylaw police officer to levy an immediate fine would work wonders by sending a message to the taxi industry that discrimination will not be tolerated in B.C. The old way of requiring blind guide dog users to file a human rights complaint simply did not work, as most blind individuals chose to mediate their cases, rather than proceed to a lengthy, onerous public tribunal hearing in order to do some public good, through a favourable ruling.
2. Guide dogs deserve protection from serious injury resulting from ignorant or deliberate negligence of other dog owners. My last guide dog was seriously injured by two pitbulls and there were no consequences for the negligent dog owner. At the very least, our guide dogs should receive the same protection as do police dogs in our province.

I offer my input with the sincere hope that the government truly desires to improve access rights of blind British Columbians that use a guide dog. Thank you in advance for addressing and updating the Guide Dog & Service Dog Act.

Sincerely,

Oriano Belusic

cc:

Lana Popham, MLA, Saanich South

Leonard Krog, MLA, Nanaimo

Linda Reid, MLA, Richmond East

Scott Hamilton, MLA, Delta North

Toby Louie, Executive Director, Corporate Policy and Planning Office, Ministry of

## **Help Blind Canadians by Donating Aeroplan Miles**

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) will use donated miles to fly blind Canadians to the upcoming NFB Blindness Convention. This unique week-long gathering of over 3,000 blind people from around the world is an exceptional educational and mentoring experience. There is no comparable opportunity that offers the blind so much in such an intensive and compact session. Those who have had a chance to attend in the past consider it life-changing.

Many blind Canadians are isolated and do not come in contact with other blind people in their daily lives. What's more, many blind people lack confidence, blindness-specific skills and information. To meet and be mentored by blind people who are positive, capable and successful is the best way for any blind person to learn about blindness and one's own potential.

In addition, numerous blindness-related supports are offered, including hands-on demonstrations of the latest blindness technologies, resources and aids. Blind speakers hold talks on topics of accomplishments, education and rehabilitation, Braille, employment, cane travel, independence, advocacy and inspiration.

The convention is held annually in a large North American city. The most favorable accommodation rates are provided, along with good transportation links to enable as many blind participants as possible to attend.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is truly trying to change what it means to be blind. We feel strongly that enabling blind people to participate in this extraordinarily positive and inspirational convention is the best way to maximize their chance for a better life.

Please help us raise the miles necessary so that more blind Canadians may benefit. Also, if you know of anyone who may be interested in contributing to this cause, please let them know about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support!

<http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/partners/546>



# CFB.ca

*Committed to the equality of blind Canadians*

## **Canadian Federation of the Blind**

### **Gifts to the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)**

Thank you for your interest and your support of the Canadian Federation of the Blind. By donating to the Canadian Federation of the Blind, you can help make a significant difference in the lives of blind people across the country.

***Donate Today and Help Change What it Means to be Blind! Together We Can Create a Positive Future for All Blind People.***

#### **General Donations:**

General donations are a great way to contribute to CFB programs and support on-going efforts to improve equality and opportunity for the blind. Donations can be made online or by mail.

##### 1) Online:

The CFB accepts online donations through Canada Helps, enabling you to contribute by credit card, Interac, or Paypal. Please go to: <https://www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020>

##### 2) By Mail:

Please make cheque payable to Canadian Federation of the Blind, and send to:

Canadian Federation of the Blind  
P.O. Box 8007  
Victoria, BC, V8W 3R7

#### **Bequests and Planned Giving Programs:**

Please write or email us at [info@cfb.ca](mailto:info@cfb.ca) to receive tax-saving information.

Your donations are tax-deductable.

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#### **Aeroplane Miles**

Please see information on page 33 in this issue for details, or go to:

[Http://beyondmiles.aeroplane.com/eng/partners/546](http://beyondmiles.aeroplane.com/eng/partners/546)

*We thank you for your consideration and generosity.*

## All Praise to the Humble Slate and Stylus!

By Rebecca Blaevoet

*Posted June 25, 2014, National Braille Press blog.*

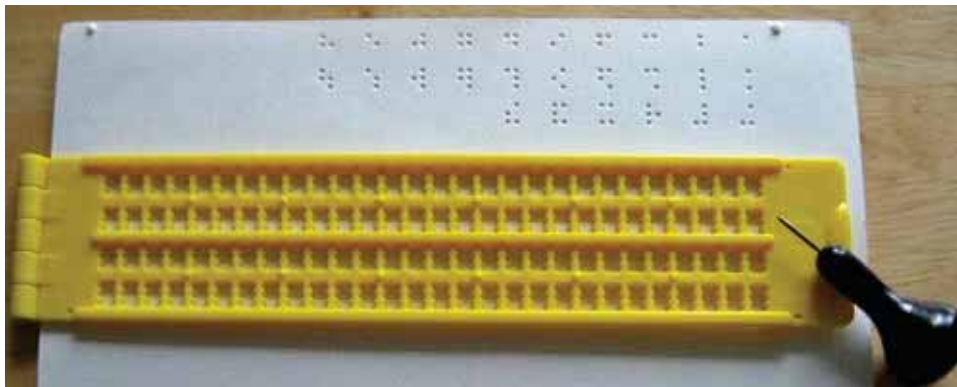
*Reprinted with permission.*

*Editor's note: National Braille Press, located in Boston, MA, has a blog on all things Braille. Their website is [www.nbp.org](http://www.nbp.org). It's a valuable company and website to get to know.*

*A little information from the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) website [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org):*

*The slate and stylus have long been and continue to be valuable tools for writing Braille.*

*The slate and stylus is the only Braille-writing device that has the same portability, flexibility and affordability as a pen and pencil. From labelling your can goods to jotting down a phone number, the uses and advantages of the slate and stylus to the blind are as varied as those of the pencil or pen to the sighted.*



Thirty years ago when computer technology came to the fore, the thinking was that it would liberate the heretofore Braille-bound reader from the shackles of outmoded, bulky, and pedestrian forms of reading and writing — especially that lowly-of-low slate and stylus. What? Learn to write Braille BACKWARDS?

Well, I'm as computer-literate as the next person, but I still keep my secret stash of slates. Indeed, I keep adding to it, covertly, clandestinely, cryptically. As a co-owner of Tactile Vision Graphics, my slate and stylus remain essential business tools. It's no lower than a pen and paper, which I notice people still carry around, and for the same purposes:

- It identifies business cards
- Labels file folders
- Jots down phone numbers and addresses on the run
- Makes an excellent signature guide
- Brailles Welsh flash cards for my evening classes
- Takes notes when the Braille Note Apex isn't handy
- Marks a conference leaflet for future reference
- Sends Braille notes to vision-impaired customers.

So, I say: All praise to the lowly metal or plastic “pencil and paper for the blind”! No technology has yet come close to matching its versatility or universality—and it never requires beta-testers or a software update!

*Rebecca Blaevoet and her husband, Emmanuel, co-own Tactile Vision Graphics in Ontario, Canada.*

*Jen Goulden, of Ottawa, comments on CFB's listserv about this post:*

I couldn't agree with Rebecca more.

When I first learned Braille I was taught to use a Perkins Braille. Then I was introduced to the slate and stylus. I resisted it passionately and stubbornly. No amount of pressure from my parents and teachers could convince me of the value of this “pen and paper for the blind”.

Then I started high school. I was used to carrying a Braille around, but one day I simply decided boys might think I was geeky if I had it with me all the time at school. Bear with me, I was fourteen at the time! I thought I would seem less “different” from my peers if I had a slate and stylus instead. To be honest, my notes from my first semester were atrocious, but I used a slate and stylus all through high school and university. I started using regular paper instead of Braille paper, as it's much easier on the wrist.

Like Rebecca, I have a collection of slates and styluses, and still use them regularly.

*Mary Ellen Gabias, of Kelowna, B.C., comments on CFB's listserv about this post:*

My history is so similar to Jen's that it's almost scary! I learned the slate in grade 1, a little later than I learned the Perkins Braille. Like Jen, I resisted it ferociously until I was forced to use it in grade 6 for spelling tests.

I went to an all girls school, so I didn't have social reasons not to carry the Braille around with me. It was just too noisy and got heavy at the end of a long day. It stayed in my locker unless I had a long assignment.

Four or five years ago we were cleaning out the clutter in our garage. In one box I found several spiral notebooks with university notes. Even thirty years after the fact, I could feel the dots. Reading my shorthand after so long was quite another story!

I love my Braille Edge, particularly because it makes editing easy and is quieter than either the Perkins Braille or the slate. I never buy a purse that's too small to hold my slate because I take one with me wherever I go.

Far too many people still believe it's obsolete.

## **Thinking Over 'People First' Language**

By Mary Ellen Gabias

In English, adjectives generally precede the nouns they modify: "I have a red book." In French, it's the opposite: "I have a book, red."

If you're going to twist the normal flow of English, you pay the price of sounding awkward. If I say I'm a "blind person," I'm following generally accepted English language conventions. If I say I'm a "person who is blind," I sound a bit stilted, thereby bringing attention to the very adjective I'm trying to place in a less important light.

If I win the lottery, I don't object to being called "a wealthy woman." I do not insist on being called "a woman who has acquired wealth." Why the difference? Because being wealthy is generally perceived to be a positive thing. Being blind is not generally perceived as positively.

If I go out of my way to distance myself from the word "blind," I'm subtly agreeing with the notion that "blind" isn't a very good thing. But I'm somehow not like those stereotypes. It's harder, but I believe better in the long run, to face down the stereotyped thinking directly: "Yes, I am blind. No, I don't fit the stereotype (whatever that may be in an individual's thinking.) Rather than thinking of distancing me from that stereotyping, maybe it's time to rethink the stereotype."

I don't object to other people using "people first" language. It's all about what's comfortable for the person I'm talking to. Unfortunately, all the fuss about language has

increased the general level of discomfort. If someone wants to call me blind, or sightless, or vision impaired, or optically defunct, that's their choice because I know we'll eventually get to the point where they call me Mary Ellen. I feel sorry for people who are so afraid of getting the words wrong that they become tongue-tied. They generally get over it when I smile and say, "It's okay; say whatever makes you most comfortable. I use 'blind' because my eyesight doesn't improve with each additional syllable."

I wholeheartedly approve of part of the underlying concept behind 'people first' language. The more individuals can begin to perceive one another as complex and interesting people rather than caricatures of the first trait we notice about them, the more positive and effective the interaction. Making my blindness just one of my characteristics is fine; attempting to verbally separate me from it, as if it is somehow undesirable, is not.



# Revisiting the 'Blindness: Concepts and Misconceptions' Speech

By Dr. Paul Gabias

*Editor's note: This article is reprinted from CFB's listserv. The speech referred to in this article was by Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, a past longtime president of the U.S. National Federation of the Blind (NFB). He dedicated his life's work to blindness advocacy.*

A conversation I was having with somebody gave me the idea to go back to the earliest speech of Dr. Jernigan that I could find. I scrolled up the list of speeches on the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) website ([www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)) until I came to this one. "Ah!" I said to myself. "This is the one!"

When we consider how we feel about how we are being treated by others, on any given day, we must always keep in mind the possible attitudes about blindness that might be swimming around in people's heads and the effects that these attitudes may have on their particular behaviors and beliefs in their interactions toward us. Armed with this knowledge, it is easier not to take their treatment personally. We can say to ourselves: "They are acting negatively toward blindness, pure and simple."

Of course, blindness is part of us, but it is comforting to know that other blind people have successfully dealt with the exact same negative attitudes that we are confronting. It is much easier for us to say to ourselves: "I am not the problem. They are the problem." Once a problem becomes external to ourselves, it is much easier to deal with it dispassionately and objectively.

In 2015, concepts and misconceptions about blindness still very much run deep in our society, because they are so deep rooted. The comforting thing is that more blind people are functioning today, in our present-day society, than ever before, despite these very negative and pervasive deep-rooted concepts that still operate in our time. I believe that we, as individuals, can take credit for that. Collectively, it is also certainly fair to say that our participation in the NFB and the CFB is the most important single social force specifically addressing negative attitudes about blindness today.

To hear about the pervasiveness and the deep-rootedness of these negative attitudes in our society, even in our times, where talking about them seems to have been pushed underground with political correctness and blindness euphemisms, I refer you to a speech delivered by Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, in 1965:

**[Blindness: Concepts and Misconceptions \(Washington, 1965\)](#)**

**[Blindness: Concepts and Misconceptions \(Audio\)](#)**

**<https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/convent/blndnesc.htm>**

# Confidence and Trust: My Training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind

By Kayleigh Joiner

*Reprinted from 'Future Reflections', Volume 30, Number 2. 'Future Reflections' is a magazine for parents and teachers of blind children published by the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults in partnership with the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC), a division of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). To learn more about NOPBC, please visit <https://nfb.org/parents-and-teachers>*

*Editor's note: Here is another testimonial as to the value of intensive blindness skills rehabilitation training at a NFB training centre, this one about the Louisiana Center for the Blind (LCB). This is the quality training we need in Canada.*

As I approached the Louisiana Center for the Blind, housed in a square, two-story, French colonial building, I felt a rush of anticipation. This was the place where I would spend the next six months. I could hear traffic whizzing past on the nearby street, and every few hours the loud whistle of a train.

Every student attended five classes: Braille, computer, cane travel, industrial arts (shop), and kitchen/home management. Classes were held Monday through Friday from eight to five. People who had some residual vision were required to wear sleep shades in order to learn how to do things without relying on their vision. The idea was that when the student removed the sleep shade, he or she would be able to use a combination of vision and alternative techniques to accomplish tasks.

During the first few days at the center we were assessed on our knowledge so the instructors would know where to begin. Each of us had our own individual schedule. My day began with Braille from eight to nine. Then I went to a computer class from nine to ten. Following computer I had cane travel from ten to noon. We had an hour lunch break. From one to three I had industrial arts class, and I ended the day with kitchen/home management from three to five.

## **Walking Alone**

All of us students lived in apartments. The apartment complex was about a mile away from the center. This was my first experience living in an apartment and having to buy and cook my own food. It took some getting used to, but eventually I got into a routine. Students usually walked to and from the center every morning and evening.

My cane travel instructor was Mrs. Arlene. She was about five feet tall, had long white hair and talked with a northern accent. The first thing she went over with me was how to use my cane properly. We worked on my cane technique for about a week. Then I moved on to learn the route back and forth to my apartment. For several weeks I worked with Mrs. Arlene out in the hot sun. At first I walked very slowly and cautiously when I traveled outside with my cane. As we walked the route I explained to Mrs. Arlene what street came next and when I needed to turn.

Soon enough Mrs. Arlene announced that today I would be doing the route independently. I was quite nervous and frightened. I recall tearing up because I was so afraid. My previous cane instructor, who taught me in grade school and high school, had always followed behind me when I did assignments for her. She had me rely on my residual vision when I crossed streets or found house addresses. I had never done anything completely on my own before, and the idea was very frightening. I didn't have the confidence to believe that I could complete the route successfully on my own.

With the route mapped out in my mind, I set off on the journey. At first I got a little bit off track, but I listened to the traffic around me and was able to get back to where I needed to be. When I returned to Mrs. Arlene, I felt accomplished and proud. I had really done it. This was my first step toward gaining confidence in myself.

## **Getting up to Speed**

Mr. Whittle, my Braille instructor, talked with a southern accent. He had a round stomach and short gray hair. During my assessment he timed my Braille reading at forty words per minute. Since I had not grown up reading Braille and was largely self-taught, this wasn't too bad. However, I knew there was room for improvement. After timing my reading speed, Mr. Whittle had me write with a slate and stylus so he could get an idea how well I wrote in Braille. For a Braille user, a slate and stylus is equivalent to writing with a pencil and paper.

As my Braille classes continued, I read aloud every morning. Mr. Whittle occasionally timed me to check my speed.

Josh Boudreaux, my computer instructor, talked with a Cajun accent. During the first few months he had me practice navigating the Internet using a screen reader (a program that spoke aloud the information on the screen). In kitchen class I worked on preparing simple foods such as muffins, pizza, and cookies from scratch.

## **A Leap off the Platform**

In September all of the students and staff at the center took a trip to Tennessee. On the first day of the trip we had the opportunity to go on a zip line. I was quite nervous about zip lining. I had done this kind of activity before and am normally not afraid of heights. However, this time I felt different, as I would be under sleep shades. With the encouragement of my peers and instructors, I took the leap off the platform and enjoyed the ride down. I felt the wind blowing as I sped down the cable.

The following day we took a trip to Rock City. There we walked along a trail where we could touch and smell a variety of flowers and plants. We also walked through various caves. One in particular was very narrow. In one section crystals had formed on the rocks, and we examined them by touch. There was a long, narrow suspension bridge that squeaked when people walked on it. If someone was jumping on it I felt it swaying from side to side.

On the last day of our trip we went whitewater rafting. When we were on the river I could hear the roar of the rapids. Occasionally I received the paddle splashes of a water fight being conducted by another rafting group.

In October we went to Arkansas. For the next three days we rotated between hiking, rock-climbing, and horseback riding. With the exception of the whitewater rafting, we did all of these activities under sleep shades to help us build confidence.

When we went hiking I used my cane in one hand and a trekking pole in the other. Occasionally I had to climb over wobbly rocks. I found that I could easily feel the loose rocks beneath my feet.

At the rock-climbing site we all suited up into our harnesses and helmets. Some of the rocks felt rough and others felt smooth. The rocks in general were about fifty feet high. When I was about halfway up the first rock, my legs began to tremble. I wanted to go back down, but my peers and instructors kept giving me words of encouragement that helped me make it to the top.

When it was time to go horseback riding, I was quite anxious. I am not much of an animal person, and I didn't know what to expect. Luckily I got a horse that was very gentle. As I rode I heard the clapping of the horse's hooves on the trail. I also heard the guides giving us verbal directions on which way to turn.

### **Measure Twice, Cut Once!**

The Monday after we returned from Arkansas, I was in shop class about to cut another piece of stock using the table saw. Shop class was not intended to teach woodworking as a trade but as a confidence builder. I had prepared the machine and started to cut my piece of stock when I realized that something was wrong.

"What did you forget?" asked JD, the shop instructor.

"My measurement must be off," I mumbled.

"You haven't measured anything yet," JD reminded me.

I began to mutter about other things I might have done wrong.

"What did you forget to do?" JD pressed.

"My fence isn't over far enough," I replied.

I started the table saw again and cut my stock. I then measured it to see if it was 44/16ths inches, as it was supposed to be.

"It's too wide," I said.

"What's one step that you forgot?" JD asked again, waiting for me to realize my mistake.

I was silent as I adjusted my click ruler, thinking that I had it set incorrectly. A click ruler is a measuring device for the blind made out of a long metal rod. It has raised indentations every half inch and smaller ridges measuring sixteenth-inches.

"You had your click ruler set correctly," JD informed me.

I went through the steps out loud. "I never measured," I said with sudden realization.

"You never set the saw up to cut 44/16ths," Said JD in a matter-of-fact tone.

After I set up my saw to cut 44/16ths of an inch, I prepared to make the cut.

"How do you find your right hand safety?" JD asked.

I was silent as I moved my hands to what I thought was the correct position.

"Where are your reference points? How do you know that you are safe?" JD urged.

I was silent once more.

"There is no law out there that prevents you from saying you don't know. Not everybody knows everything," JD said. I thought he sounded pretty knowledgeable himself.

"I don't remember," I said meekly.

JD proceeded to show me where the reference points are, and I began to cut my board. Then I measured and found that I had cut my board to exactly 44/16ths. I learned a very important lesson that day. It is okay to admit that you don't know or remember something.

## **Drop-off**

In mid-November I was a month away from graduating from the adult program at the Louisiana Center. One day in Braille class Mr. Whittle timed me at sixty words per minute. I felt frustrated that I wasn't getting any faster. I had been in the sixties for at least a month. I was reading the number of pages he wished me to read, and I couldn't understand why I wasn't progressing more quickly. I didn't feel like it was very respectable to be reading at

that rate. Mr. Whittle assured me that in fact it was very respectable, especially since I had learned Braille as an adult and not as a young child.

Near the end of our time at the Louisiana Center, all of us in the Adult Program were expected to do a "drop-off." The drop-off was one of the greatest challenges in the program. Under sleep shades, each of us was driven to an unknown location and dropped off, with no information about where we were. We were expected to use the techniques we had learned in order to figure out how to get back.

As I listened to the van drive away I drew a deep breath. This was the final test of all the knowledge I had gained from my cane travel instruction. I listened carefully, and when I heard the sound of traffic I headed in that direction. I felt the sun's rays on my left cheek, and I knew that because of the time of day the sun was to the southeast. I heard a lot of cars traveling in one direction--south. Based on this information I deduced that I was more than likely on Trenton Street.

If I had followed my instincts I would have returned to the center a lot sooner than I did. Because I didn't listen to my instincts and trust what my environment was telling me, I ended up taking four hours to return. That day I learned that my instincts are usually right and that I should trust more than doubt.

## **Graduation Day**

At last it was December 17, 2010, my graduation day. Pam Allen, the director of the center, began the ceremony by talking about some of my accomplishments. When she finished she opened the floor for my instructors, family, and friends to speak. I was deeply touched as I listened to the things everyone was saying about my achievements. I realized how far I had come in the past six months. I was more confident and had a new belief in myself. I had managed to double my Braille reading speed to eighty words a minute, and I had learned that I could trust myself. Confidence and trust are the biggest things that I gained at the center. Wherever I am, I am able to put them into place.

At the end of the ceremony, each graduate received a silver bell with an eagle on top. The eagle represented the graduate's freedom to go out into the world with the skills that he or she had gained. The bell was inscribed with the graduate's name, the date, and the motto of the Louisiana Center for the Blind: "Together we are changing what it means to be blind."

My months at the Louisiana Center for the Blind changed my life forever. The Braille and computer skills I learned are a tremendous help now that I have entered college. Using my long white cane, I travel wherever I want to go. Because of my training, I now go out with my friends at night, something I never would have done in the past. I know that with confidence and a positive philosophy about blindness, blind people can accomplish anything.

## RECIPES!

### Shepherd's Pie

*This recipe is from CFB supporting member, Thelma Fayle, Victoria, B.C. It is her favourite thing to eat.*

Chop one onion and fry in a frying pan.  
Add some ground beef or turkey and cook.  
When meat is done, drain off the excess grease.  
Then, add a little water and a spoonful of Bisto gravy powder.

Place the meat mixture into a pyrex casserole dish.

On top, add a layer of canned cream corn.

Then, add a layer of mashed potatoes.

Place a few dabs of butter on top.

Bake for about 45 minutes at 350 degrees.

### Dairy-free Shortcrust Pastry and Fresh Mango Pie

*This delicious recipe is also from Thelma Fayle, Victoria, B.C. This crust recipe is a healthy choice, but you can use your own favourite recipe as well.*

Crust (single layer; for a double crust, double the recipe):

3/4 cup all-purpose flour  
3/4 cup whole wheat flour  
1/4 cup sesame seeds

2 1/4 fluid ounces of olive oil  
2 fluid ounces of cold water

Mix flours and seeds.

Add olive oil and mix with a butter knife till crumbly.

Add water and form into a ball. The pastry is ready to use.

Line a 9 inch pie plate with the pastry. (It may be easier to just press the pastry into the pan, rather than roll it.) If you'd like to ensure a crispy bottom crust, prebake it for 10 minutes at 400 degrees, then let it cool before adding the filling.

## **Mango Filling:**

Peel and chop 3 large mangoes and put in a bowl. Squeeze half a lemon over the fruit. Mix 3 tablespoons flour and 1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon and sprinkle over fruit.. Pour mixture into pie shell. If desired, place top crust or lattice on top of the filling.

Bake in a preheated oven at 400 degrees for 40 minutes. Eat warm or cold with whip cream.

## **Nanaimo Bars**

*This recipe comes from Doris Belusic, Victoria, B.C. It is a recipe she learned in high school many years ago and is sooo delicious.*

### **First Layer:**

1/2 c. butter  
1/4 c. sugar  
1 tsp. vanilla  
1 egg  
1 3/4 or 2 c. Graham wafer crumbs  
1 c. unsweetened shredded coconut  
1/2 c. chopped walnuts  
4 or 5 Tbsp. powdered cocoa

Put butter, sugar, vanilla and egg into the top of a double boiler pot. Stir until ingredients are melted.

Mix dry ingredients together in a bowl and add to the ingredients in the double boiler pot. Stir together, then mix with hands. Pat into an 8 x 8 inch pan.

### **2nd Layer:**

1/4 c. butter  
3 Tbsp. milk  
2 Tbsp. vanilla custard powder or 1 tsp. vanilla extract  
2 c. powdered icing sugar

Cream butter and stir in the vanilla. Add icing sugar and milk alternately, mixing until smooth. Spread over 1st layer in pan.

### **3rd Layer:**

2 or 3 chunky squares (1 oz or 28 gr. each); or 8 or 12 flat squares - (new-style box)  
Baker's unsweetened chocolate  
1 1/2 or 2 tsp. butter

Melt chocolate and butter together and spread over 2nd layer in pan.

Place into refrigerator and chill until chocolate topping sets. Cut into bars and enjoy.